

Newspapers Shape the Age
By HO GOKU
SGI President Ikeda's pen name

Newspapers shape the age.
Newspapers crush evil.
Newspapers rouse courage.

Napoleon declared that it was not Voltaire or Rousseau who brought an end to the old regime; newspapers did it. Victor Hugo said that without newspapers, the French Revolution would never have occurred. In any age where people come to the fore, you will find newspapers providing the impetus.

“Let’s start a newspaper, a Soka Gakkai organ. We are entering an age of mass media.”

Mr. Toda said this to me with great determination in December 1950, a time when his business was in serious financial circumstances. We were sitting in a little restaurant near Shimbashi Station in Tokyo. Despite the personal troubles that beset him, he was always thinking of the future of kosen-rufu.

Then, one cold night in February 1951, he said to me: “Let’s get started on the newspaper now. I’ll be the president, and you be the vice president. Let’s give this our all!”

I will never forget his brave countenance as he asked me to accept this new challenge.

The first issue of *Seikyo Shimbun* came out two months later, on April 20, 1951. Initially a single sheet of newsprint printed on both sides, it was published once every 10 days with a run of 5,000 copies. Today, of course, it is a daily paper with a circulation of 5.5 million. When I think of this phenomenal growth, those early days seem like another lifetime.

Starting the newspaper may have been a small step, but Mr. Toda’s vision for it was grand. When we were discussing what to call the paper, there were several candidates: the *Bunka Shimbun* (Culture Newspaper), the *Soka Shimbun* and the *Sekai Shimbun* (World Newspaper). Mr. Toda suggested with a laugh, “Let’s think of its future potential and call it the *Uchu Shimbun* (Universe Newspaper)!”

Eventually we decided on the *Seikyo Shimbun* (Sacred Teachings Newspaper), after the term that is used to describe Nichiren Daishonin’s teachings. It was Mr. Toda’s wish to create a newspaper that communicated the essence of the Daishonin’s Buddhism — the fundamental Law underlying all things in the universe — to people throughout the world.



The first issue started with an article by Mr. Toda titled “What Is Faith?” It also contained an installment of his serialized novel *The Human Revolution*, and his column “Epigrams.” In issue after issue, he continued to make many contributions to the paper.

I later wrote a column introducing great figures from history, including Lord Byron, the English poet of revolution and passion; Beethoven, the great musician who struggled with destiny; and Napoleon, the hero of youthful advance.

I also remember with nostalgia how, as the head of the Public Relations Department, I wrote many hard-hitting articles, full of youthful passion, to correct the mistaken reporting on the Soka Gakkai by other newspapers. We were all determined that the *Seikyo Shimbun* would always report the truth.

Mr. Toda poured his life into writing articles for the paper, regarding them as personal letters to his beloved fellow members. I have always felt exactly the same way.



Mr. Toda used to say that he wanted the people of Japan and the world to read our paper. From the beginning of 1956 — the year in which the paper would celebrate its fifth anniversary — he began to present the paper to Asian leaders, 10 in all, including: Jawaharlal Nehru, the prime minister of India; Ramon Magsaysay, the president of the Philippines; Mao Zedong, the chairman of the People's Republic of China; and Zhou Enlai, China's premier. In an accompanying letter, he wrote, "It is my hope that this newspaper may prove useful in deepening your understanding of Buddhism in some small way and thereby contributing to your even greater endeavors for the development of Asian civilization."

Mr. Toda regarded the *Seikyo Shimbun* as a means of making a first step toward friendship and peace in Asia. Many laughed at his efforts. But I have devoted myself to realizing those ideals, never hesitating to fulfill his wishes.



Mahatma Gandhi, the great human rights champion of the East, continued to publish his newspaper even when he was incarcerated. The autobiography that he began to write while in jail was published in the newspaper, and tens of millions of Indian readers hungrily devoured every installment. It was through the newspaper that he articulated his belief in nonviolent protest, that he roused the people's support.

We have likewise used the *Seikyo Shimbun* to speak out, in spite of all obstacles, for justice and truth, and to spread our movement throughout the world for a new humanism based on the Daishonin's Buddhism.



One of the women's division members received a phone call out of the blue from an old friend saying that she wished to subscribe to the *Seikyo Shimbun*. This friend received a complimentary copy from this member many years ago — and used it to wrap something for storage. Recently, she came across that old newspaper, now somewhat yellowed with age, and an article caught her eye. She read it and was deeply moved, hence prompting the phone call.

Many thinking people in Japan assert that the Soka Gakkai and the *Seikyo Shimbun* are today the conscience of Japan.

This is due solely to our members' noble efforts.



On April 20, the *Seikyo Shimbun* celebrated its 47th anniversary. The 50th anniversary will fall, auspiciously, in 2001 — the first year of the new century. Today our world is dark and clouded by the travails of the century's close. Lies and misinformation run rampant. Our society seems lost in a maze, without any guiding philosophy.

Against that background, it is the mission of the *Seikyo Shimbun*, a paper dedicated to speaking out for truth and justice, to rise like a sun of hope and illuminate the 21st century.

I will write. I am determined to continue writing.

Let us all join forces to nurture this magnificent bastion of free speech.

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