

On the social crisis in Japan

25 September 1998

The following letter was sent by a Japanese language teacher in Kumamoto, Japan.

To the *World Socialist Web Site*,

I read the article entitled 'Japan: deepening crisis underlines political turmoil,' which was really interesting and exact. I think the official unemployment rate of 4.1 percent is completely different from the reality facing Japanese people. Your article is the first one I found which mentioned it.

The recession is not far from me. Less and less people can afford Japanese lessons. The YWCA, where I teach Japanese, had more than 50 students before, but now has only 7! My big concern is how to cope with this fact. Most of us are housewives and fortunately our husbands have stable jobs so far. We are not counted as jobless. But this is a very serious problem for us.

The Japanese government doesn't understand how important language is for immigrants to settle down in a foreign country. The opportunity to learn the language should be guaranteed. But the government and ordinary people think when they are in Japan, immigrants automatically learn the language. But this is not true. They need formal instruction, especially to learn a language that has a complicated writing system. Otherwise they just get only 3K work (Kitsui-hard, Kitanai-dirty, Kiken-dangerous) and stay at the bottom of the society.

In Japan, immigrants were left without any help with language learning until some 'volunteer' Japanese women take care of it. The government and employers who benefit from migrants are now exploiting both migrants and the volunteer Japanese women. The word 'volunteer' is now a beautiful magic term for the government to be able to cut its budget.

Even though Japan is suffering from a bad recession, foreigners are still coming to find jobs without knowing how bad it is. So 'Komusuta-ka', the Non-Government Organisation (NGO), which I work for on voluntary basis, is always busy. The other day two Polish dancers

came to us, asking for help. They had been kicked out of their job without being paid. The negotiation with the promoter and the employer took us two whole weeks. But this was an incredibly quick settlement. It seems there are a lot of dancers coming from East Europe. Their contracts say they dance. But actually they don't dance but attend men at tables where prostitution is often implied. Most of the dancers seem to accept the reality and earn money usually less than the contract.

One thing the article mentioned was Japanese suicide. I know how Harakiri shocked people in other countries. But I think in Japan there is no such thing as Harakiri suicide anymore after Mishima Yukio, a famous novelist, performed one. Suicide committed in Japan now is, I think, nothing different from that committed in any other countries I know. It is a miserable, dishonorable tragedy and causes a great pain among those who are left behind.

Harakiri is different from ordinary suicide. It was kind of punishment. Ordinary people were killed by others when punished. But to be killed by others was a dishonor to Samurai people so, high rank samurais were allowed to perform Harakiri, which was highly formalized. Samurai even made a poem when they performed this practice. I'm not sure but this may have come from the practice in the battlefield in Sengoku periods, the age of warring states, where high rank warriors chose killing themselves instead of being killed by the enemy.

TM

Kumamoto, Japan



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