

Politicization of Commemorative Events of Atomic Bomb Victims

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Introduction

- Atomic bombs were dropped in Hiroshima and Nagasaki in August 1945. The number of deaths due to the bombings by the end of 1945 reached to 200,000 in Hiroshima and 90,000 in Nagasaki. Besides, many of those who survived the bombings suffered from illness caused by radiation exposure.
- The first nation-wide and international conference to commemorate the traumatic destruction of the two cities and to call for banning nuclear weapons was held in Hiroshima in 1955. Since then, “annual world conferences” (*sekai taikai*) have been held in August in Hiroshima, Nagasaki or Tokyo until the present.
- This presentation examines how these commemorative events became politicized in the first ten years (1955-1964) in the context of domestic and international Cold War politics.

Gensuikyo Collections of the Ohara Institute

- Ohara Institute for Social Research is one of the largest archives of historical materials of labor and social movements in Japan.
- As the Japanese labor movement rapidly developed in the early postwar period, the Ohara Institute extensively collected materials related to labor unions. It also collected social movements which had close connections with the labor movement, such as peace, environment, and cultural movements.
- The Ohara Institute has an extensive (but not complete) archives of Gensuikyo (Japan Council Against Atomic and Hydrogen Bombs). In addition to the Ohara Institute's own collection, a professor of Hosei University who had been involved in Gensuikyo donated his own collections of materials of the council.



A Part of the Ohara Institute's own collection of Gensuikyo

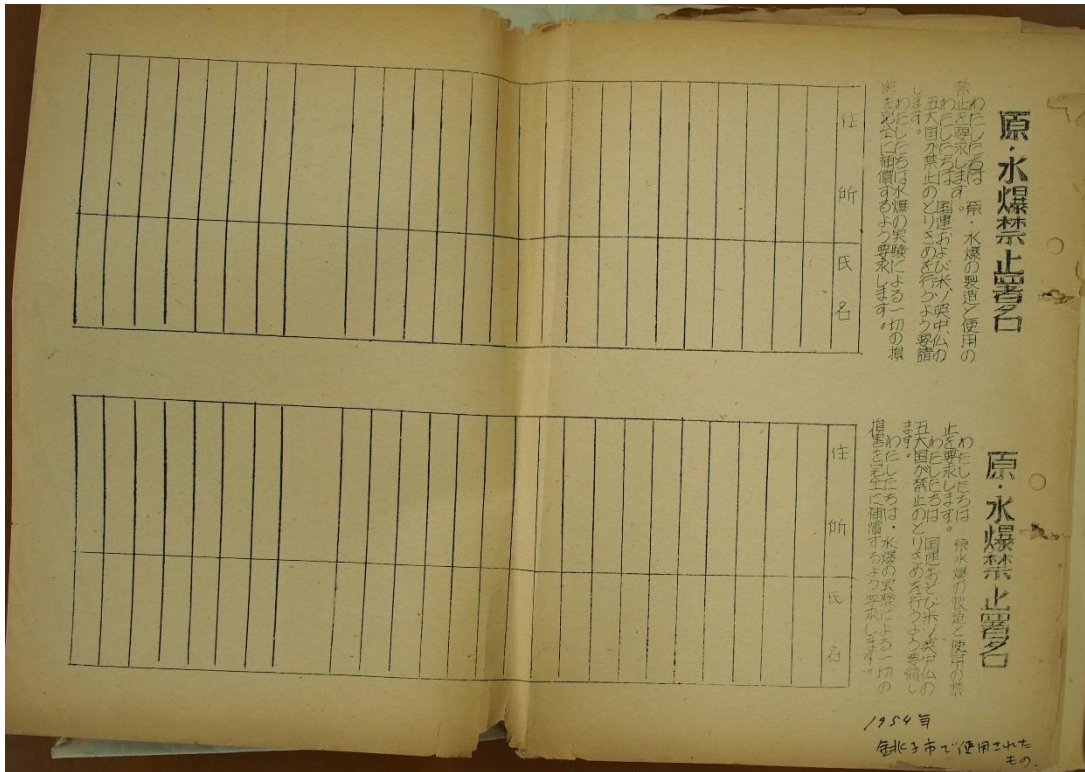


A Collection donated by Professor Tanuma

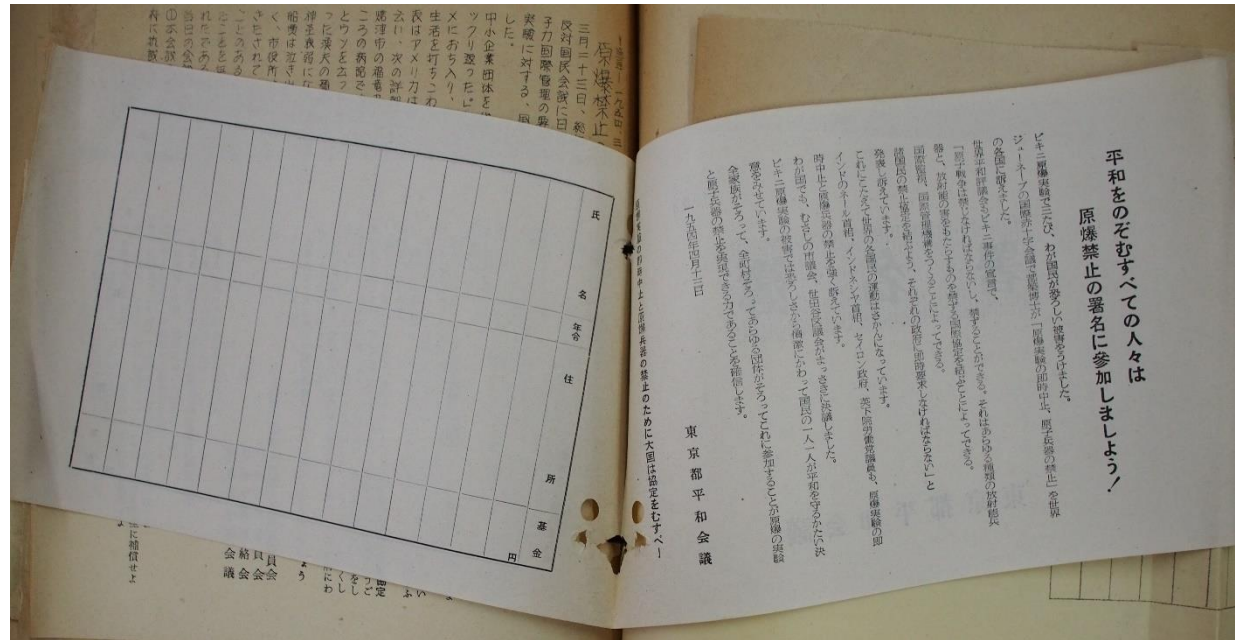
Why Did Annual Commemoration of the Atomic Bombings Start in 1955?

- A nation-wide development of a popular movement against atomic and hydrogen bombs was triggered by the Lucky Dragon Incident in March 1954. 23 crew members of a Japanese fishing boat operating near the hydrogen bomb test site at Bikini Atoll were exposed to nuclear fallout, and one of them died of radiation sickness later.
- The news of the incident shocked Japanese people, because nuclear fallout from the testing of hydrogen bomb contaminated not only tuna fish caught by other fishing boats, but also agricultural products produced in Japan.
- The widespread fear of radioactive contamination of foods and soil gave rise to a grass-roots petition campaign for banning nuclear bombs. People across a wide range of political spectrum participated in the petition campaign. The campaign collected 20 million signatures by the end of 1954 (it eventually collected 33 million signatures).

Examples of Petition Papers Used During the Petition Campaign



Petition Paper used in Choshi City in Chiba Prefecture

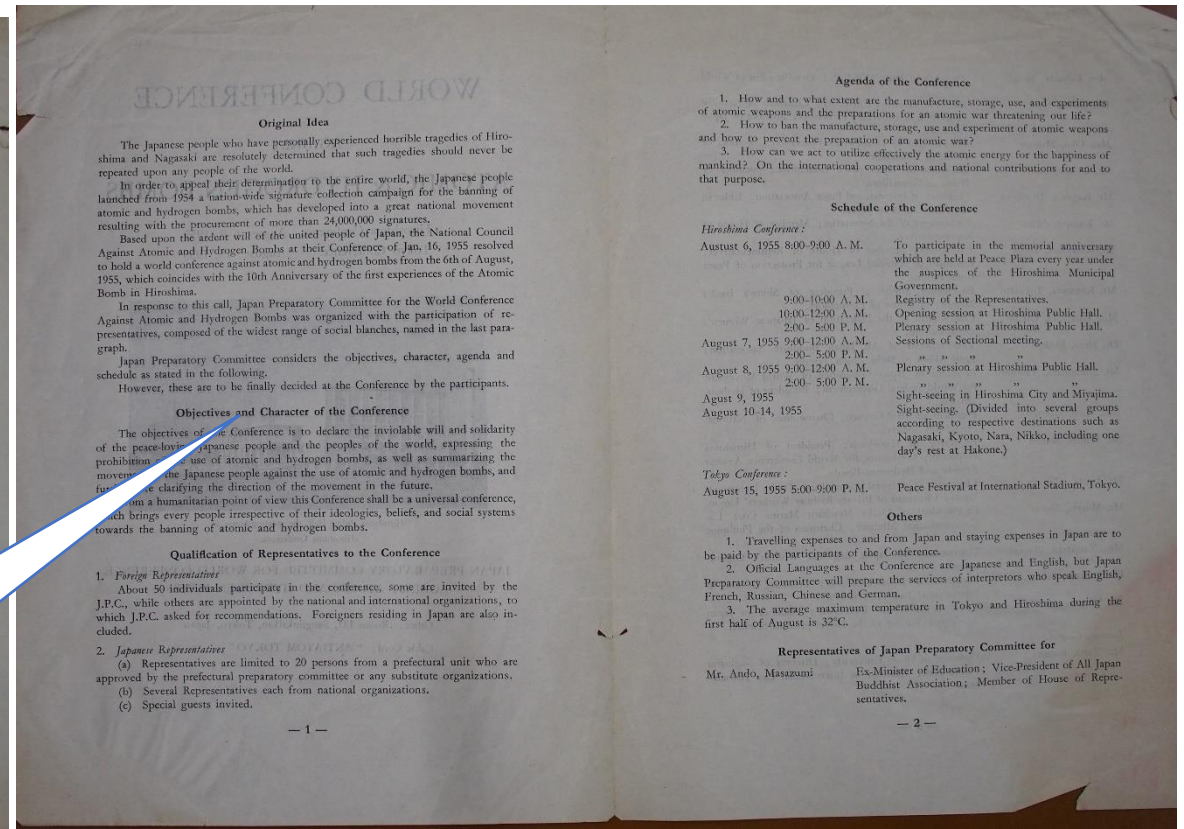
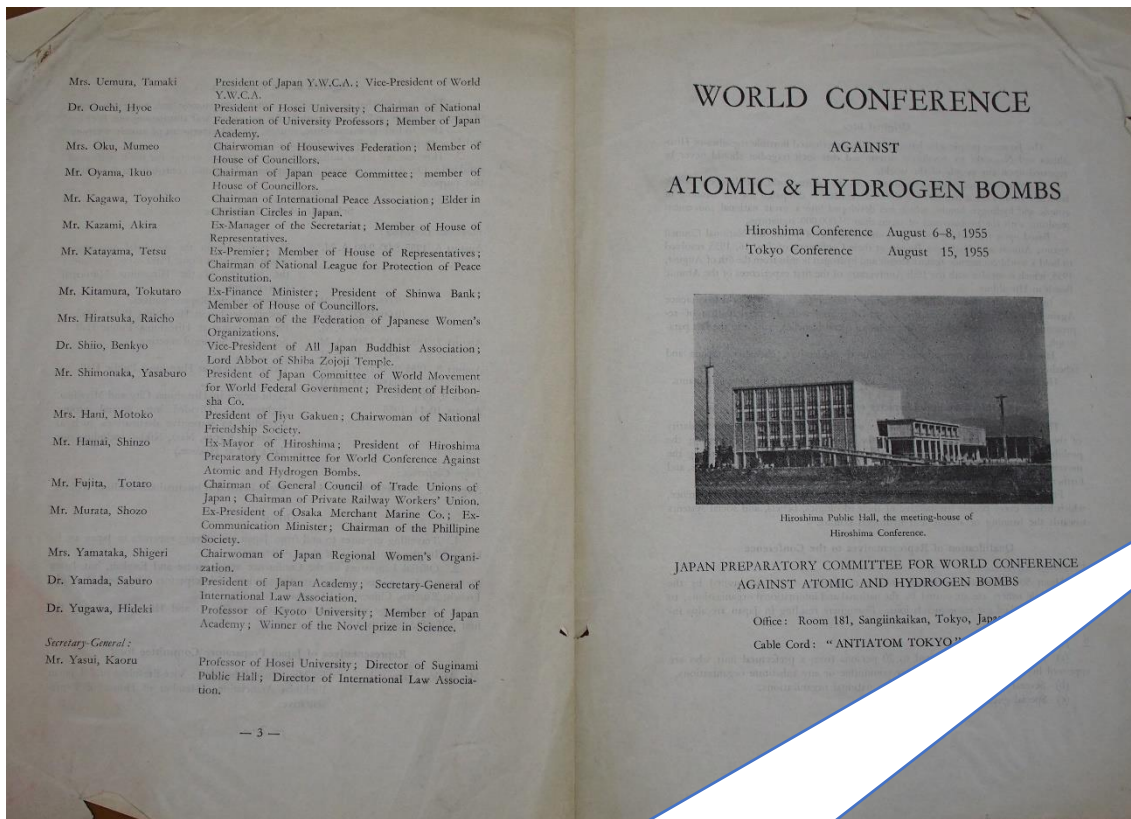


Petition Paper of Tokyo Peace Conference (April 13, 1954)

The First World Conference Against A- and H-Bombs was held in Hiroshima

- As a next step of the movement against nuclear weapons, organizing an international conference in Hiroshima on August 6 to commemorate the tenth anniversary of the first atomic bombing of Hiroshima was proposed. The proposal was supported, and a preparatory committee for the conference was established in May 1955 (Moritaki et al, 1985).
- The first World Conference Against Atomic and Hydrogen Bombs was held in Hiroshima from August 6 to August 8, 1955. About 2500 Japanese representatives and 52 foreign representatives from 14 countries attended the conference.
- The World Conference provided representatives with an opportunity to meet survivors of the atomic bomb in Hiroshima and to know the reality of their suffering (Moritaki et al, 1985, Michiba 2005). Giving medical and other support to atomic bomb survivors in Hiroshima and Nagasaki became an important agenda of world conferences held afterward.

English Pamphlet of the First Conference published by the Preparatory Committee



Objectives and Character of the Conference (see next panel)

Objectives and Character of the Conference

(From the English Pamphlet of the First World Conference)

- The objectives of the Conference is to declare the inviolable will and solidarity of the peace-loving Japanese people and the peoples of the world, expressing the prohibition of the use of atomic and hydrogen bomb, as well as summarizing the movement of the Japanese people against the use of atomic and hydrogen bombs, and furthermore clarifying the direction of the movement in the future.
- From a humanitarian point of view this Conference shall be a universal conference, which brings every people irrespective of their ideologies, beliefs, and social systems toward the banning of atomic and hydrogen bombs.

The Establishment of Gensuikyo

- Japan Council Against Atomic and Hydrogen Bombs (Gensuikyo) was established on September 19, 1955, as an organization to hold annual world conferences and other meetings and events of the movement opposing the armament and testing of nuclear bombs.
- The establishment of Gensuikyo indicated a move toward institutionalization of the anti-nuclear weapon movement. However, the movement led by Gensuikyo maintained its grass-roots orientation and non-partisan nature until the fourth world conference in 1958.
- Gensuikyo organized “the 1000km peace march” between Hiroshima and Tokyo prior to the fourth world conference in Tokyo. The peace march contributed to the popularization of the anti-nuclear weapon movement among people living in cities and villages where the march went through, including conservative people in rural areas (Arakawa 2008).

昭和三十年八月広島において第一回原水爆禁止世界大会が開かれた。五千人を超える人達が国内外から参加し、
 大国及び国連軍縮委員会が国際緊張緩和のため努力するよう要請した。

「右 第一回大会風景」

The First world Conference Against A & H Bombs was held in Hiroshima in August, 1955. More than 5,000 people in and out of Japan took part in it, and urged Big Powers and the United Nations to do their very best to ease international tension.

Right: A scene of the First World Conference.



The First World Conference Against A & H Bombs caused a big repercussion in a variety of circles. The Second World Conference Against A & H Bombs ended by emphasizing the necessity of concluding an agreement on the abolition of atomic and hydrogen bombs and on disarmament.

Left: A scene of the Second World Conference.

第一回原水爆禁止世界大会は各方面に大きな共感をまき起した。そして昭和三十一年八月長崎における第二回大会では、各国政府が原水爆禁止と軍縮の協定を結ばなければならないことが強調された。「左 第二回大会風景」

Photos of the first world conference in 1955

Poster of the third world conference in 1957



A News Report of the Peace March



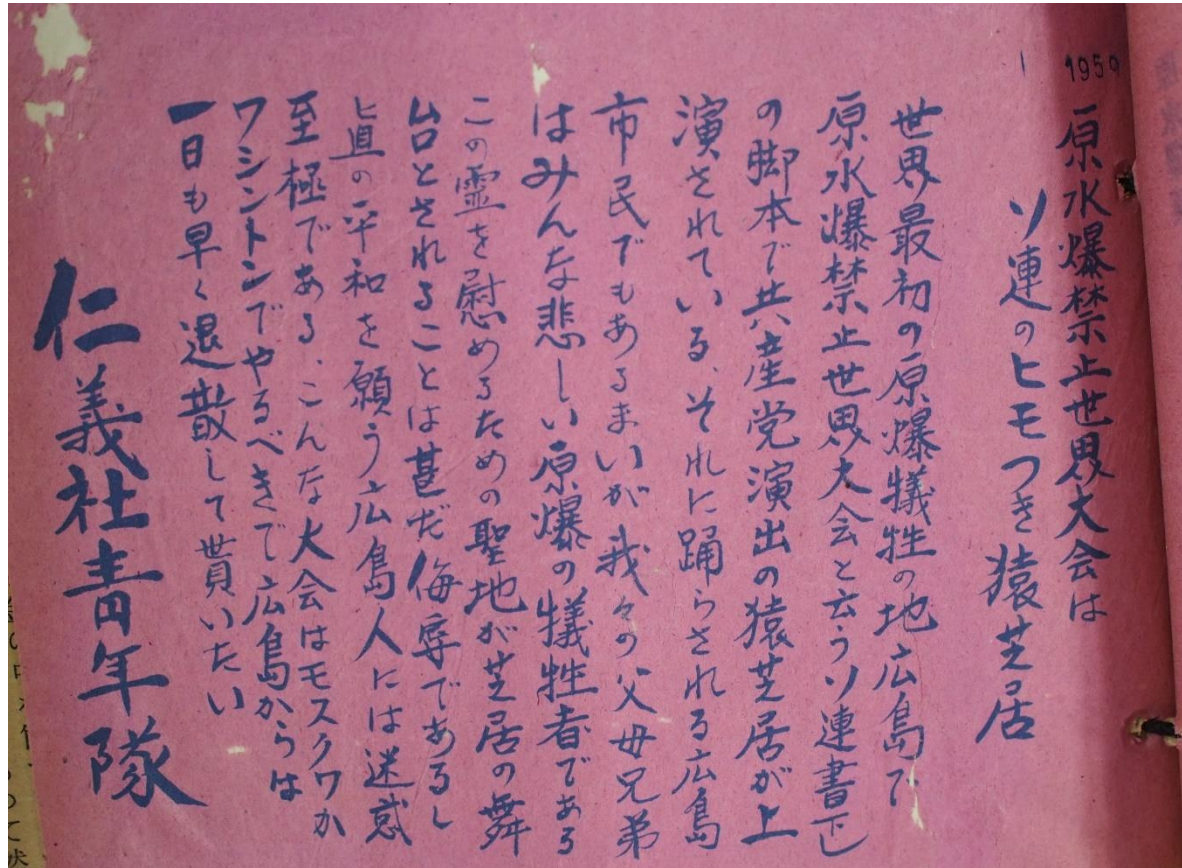
- Marchers have walked about a half of the route. They keep walking on to Tokyo.
- Participants of the march reached more than 10,000 people.
- Voices against the nuclear armament grew even stronger.

July 15, 1958 issue of *Gensuibaku Kinshi News*

Contentious Politics Influenced Gensuikyo

- Toward the end of the 1950s, politics in Japan became contentious, as the tension between the ruling conservative party (the LDP) and the leftist parties (the Socialist and Communist Parties) became intense over domestic and foreign policy issues, esp. whether Japan should remain a strong ally of the United States in the Cold War politics.
- Gensuikyo expressed its opposition to the revision of the US-Japan Security Treaty (its fifth world conference in 1959 stopped short of openly stating opposition to the security treaty revision in its resolution, though).
- The LDP criticized Gensuikyo for its left-leaning political stance, and organizations close to the LDP withdrew from Gensuikyo.
- Ultra-right groups besieged the convention hall in Hiroshima in an attempt to obstruct the fifth world conference

A Handbill Distributed by a Ultra-right Group

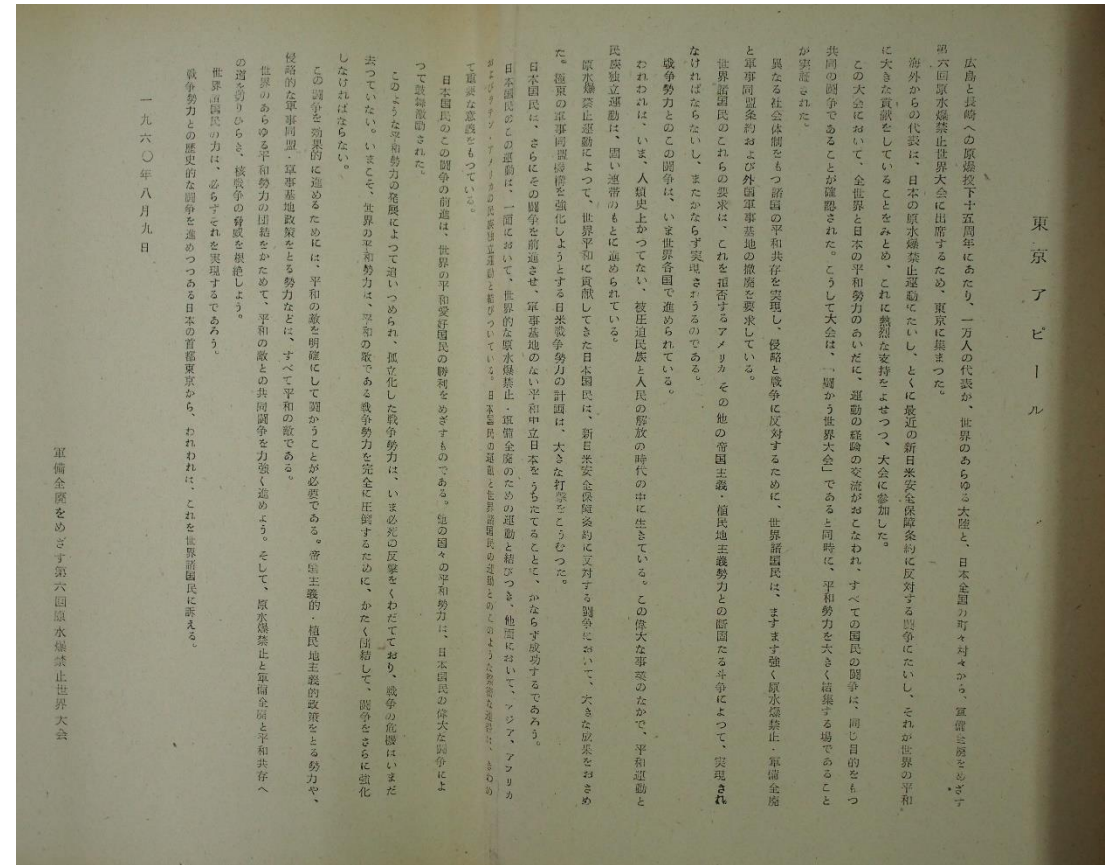


Handbill of Youth Troops of *Jingisha*

- In Hiroshima which suffered the first atomic bomb attack, a farce play called the Gensuikyo World Conference is being performed. The play was scripted by the Soviet Union and directed by the Japan Communist Party.
- It is insulting that a sacred ground for the spirits of atomic bomb victims has become the stage of the farce play.

Further Politicization of the World Conference in 1960

- Gensuikyo's sixth world conference (held in Tokyo in August 1960) openly expressed opposition to the security treaty revision.
- The world conference for the first time used "the enemy of peace" and "American imperialism" in its declaration and resolutions, as seen in its "Tokyo Appeal."



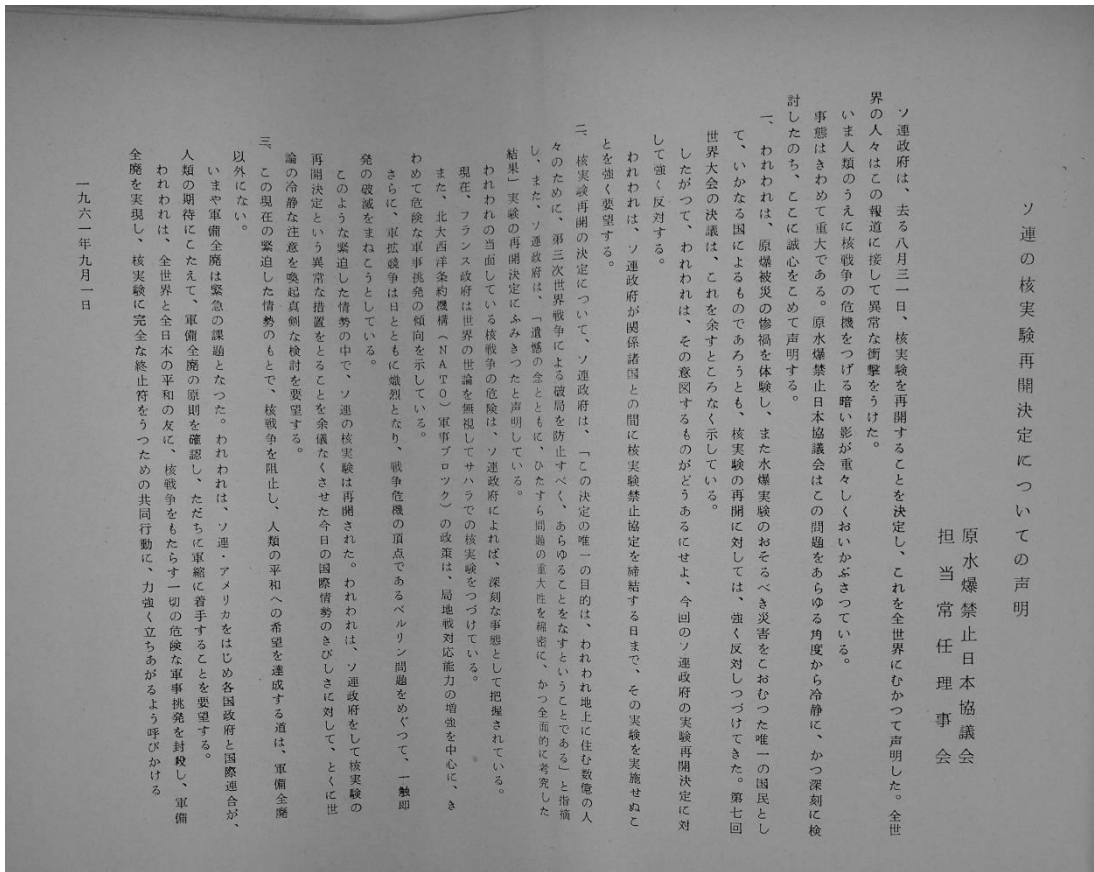
Tokyo Appeal, August 9, 1960

Tension within Gensuikyo over the Soviet Nuclear Testing

- The seventh world congress in 1961 adopted a resolution stating that “the country that resumes a testing of nuclear weapons (violating the suspension of nuclear tests observed by the Soviet Union, the US and Britain since 1958) should be accused as an enemy of peace and human race.”
- This resolution was adopted by delegates allied with the Communist Party (the JCP) despite the opposition of delegates allied with the Socialist Party (the JSP) (Michiba 2005).
- Although the resolution assumed that the US would resume a nuclear testing and thus become “an enemy of peace,” it was the Soviet Union that resumed a nuclear testing. It started a nuclear testing from September in 1961.

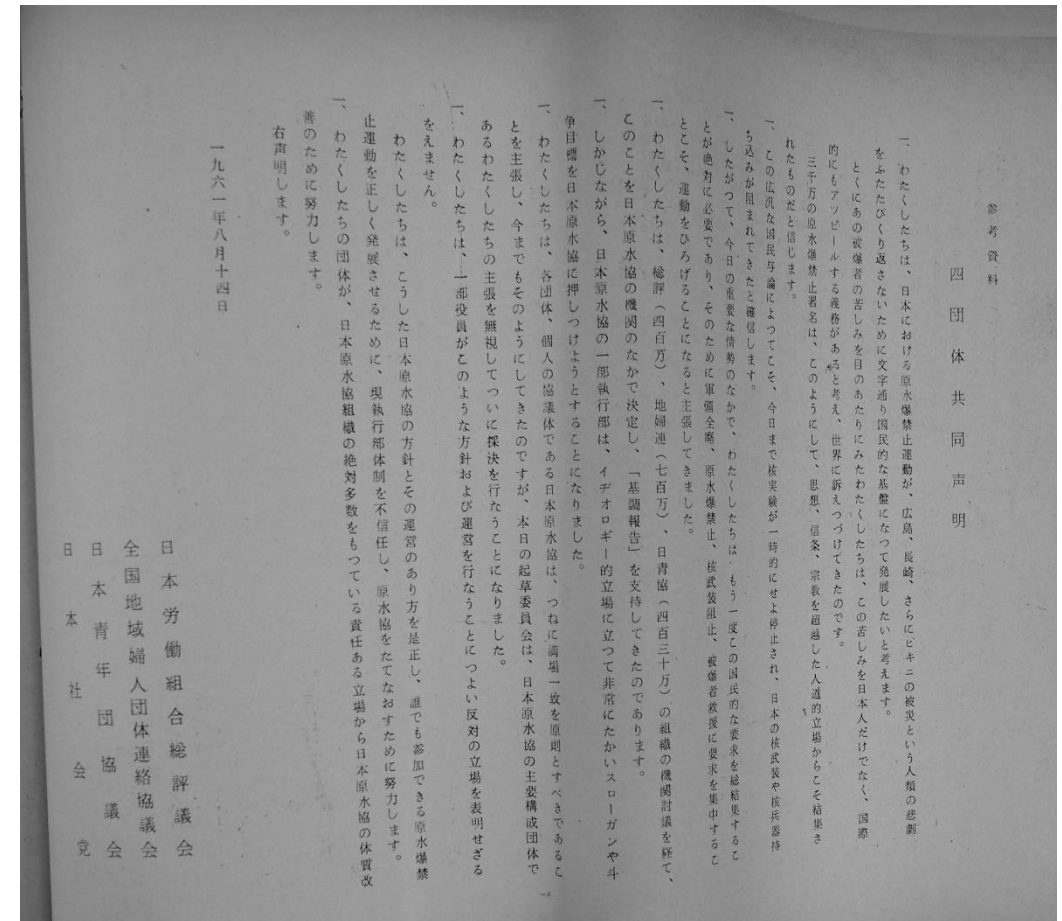
A Statement of Gensuikyo on the Decision of the Soviets to Resume Testing of Nuclear Weapons

- The board meeting of Gensuikyo issued a statement on the Soviets' resumption of nuclear testing on September 1, 1961.
- Gensuikyo expressed its strong opposition to the resumption of nuclear testing, but at the same time argued that the Soviets were forced to make this decision by an increasing tension of the Cold War provoked by the Western nations.



A Joint Statement of Four Organizations

- After the seventh conference in 1961, an open dissent to the domination of Gensuikyo leadership by communists was voiced for the first time.
- The JSP, Sohyo (the largest national confederation of labor unions), and two other organizations (federations of housewives' and youth groups) issued “a joint statement of four organizations,” criticizing a part of the Gensuikyo leadership for taking a highly ideological position and for imposing on the world conference resolutions based on that position.



The Joint Statement (August 14, 1961)

The Escalation of the Schism within Gensuikyo

- The differences between the Communists and Socialists boiled down to whether Gensuikyo “should oppose nuclear armament and testing ‘by any nation’”(the Socialists) or make a distinction between nuclear testing of “the ‘peace forces’ and that of the ‘imperialists’”(the Communists) (Totten and Kawakami 1964).
- The schism within Gensuikyo escalated during the eighth world conference in August 1962. The Soviets conducted a nuclear test during this world conference, and the Socialists submitted an urgent motion protesting the Soviets’ nuclear testing. This motion was rejected by Communist-dominated delegates, and 11 organizations (including the JSP and Sohyo) walked out of the conference hall.

The Formal Split of the Anti-Nuclear Weapon Movement

- The Socialists and its allies boycotted the ninth world conference in 1963 and held separate meetings in Hiroshima and Nagasaki in 1964.
- The Socialist Party, Sohyo and other allies founded the Japan Congress against Atomic and Hydrogen Bombs (Gensuikin) in February 1965.
- Since 1965, with the exception of a few years in the 1970s when “unified” world conferences were held, two separate annual world conference have been held in Hiroshima and Nagasaki by Gensuikyo and Gensuikin until the present.

Conclusion

- Commemoration of the atomic bombings of Hiroshima and Nagasaki was not necessarily the main feature of Gensuikyo's world conferences, but giving support to atomic bomb survivors was one of the important agendas of the conferences.
- The collective memory of the destruction of the two cities and the suffering of victims of the bombing can be seen as one of the important reasons for the broad support of Japanese people for the movement against atomic and hydrogen bombs, especially from the mid to the late 1950s.
- In the case of the world conferences organized by Gensuikyo, the sensitive side of commemoration was not about what had happened in the past (i.e., the atomic bombings of Hiroshima and Nagasaki), but about how people with different ideological perspectives interpreted the outgrowth of the past (i.e., the cold war politics of nuclear armament and testing).

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