

Campus News

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PROFILE ON STUDENT ACTIVISM

Mr. Kazuto Yokokawa: KU Grad Student Focuses on Political Protest

By Honoka Yoshioka

Though it may seem like few Japanese students are interested in the political problems of our own country, there is a student group called PEDAL which acts to oppose the Japanese government's security-related bills. Mr. Kazuto Yokokawa, who is a second-year Humanities Graduate School student, is a founding member of PEDAL. This story profiles Mr. Yokokawa's activism and introduces an important political issue to our readers.



Mr. Yokokawa humbly describes himself as just a guy who liked music and played the guitar. However, one day while listening to British punk rock, he wondered about why they sang about politics. Also, he realized that Japanese music hardly made any reference to politics. About this time, he also became interested in Japanese politics and he started to study and discuss political problems with his friends. Last year in 2015, the Security-related bill was passed in the Japanese

Diet. Mr. Yokokawa and his friends who strongly think the bill is wrong, then created PEDAL as an opposition movement. PEDAL is composed of about 20 students from Kochi University, Kochi Prefectural University, Kochi University of Technology, and some two-year colleges.

The Security-related bill allows the Self-Defense Forces to use weapons in a foreign country. If, for example, the U.S. was attacked by another country, the Japanese Self-Defense Forces might have to go there to help them. This means there is a much greater risk that Japan would be drawn into a war. The problem is that Japan's constitution has Article 9 which ensures that Japan is a nation dedicated to peace. So, many law specialists say that the bill is unconstitutional. "Though the use of armed forces is banned in Article 9, it is strange that we make a new bill against our Constitution," said Mr. Yokokawa. He also pointed out that the Japanese Self-Defense Forces mainly act for saving someone's life and support disaster revival efforts. This means people have a lot of trust in the SDF. Mr. Yokokawa is very much worried that if the Self-Defense Forces start to use weapons, they may lose this trust. In the U.S., there are many problems involving high rates of suicide among military servicemen and veterans who cannot fit into society and commit crimes or domestic violence after returning from severe military experiences in foreign countries. Their military service gives them a very heavy burden. For these reasons, the members of PEDAL think that Japanese should not get involved in such situations.

Mr. Yokokawa thinks the biggest problem is that people, including students, don't discuss the problem at all. Far from it, some Japanese people don't even know about it, or if they do know, they don't think deeply about it. His main goal is to make people aware about the need to consider this issue carefully, and to discuss it openly.



PEDAL started to send messages to people by Twitter. When the Security-related bill was covered by the media, so many replies which approved PEDAL's Tweets came through on Twitter. PEDAL also held a demonstration against the bill, but Mr. Yokokawa noted that "young people and students didn't attend their activity so much when they rallied to make a speech in the street." So they incorporated music! They play music to attract the young people's attention, and then they make speeches about they want to protest. The money they need for the event was covered by a fund-raising campaign.

"Through these activities, the number of young people who find the problem about the bill, or who are interested in politics, is increasing. Still, it's hard to spread the message through our activities," said Mr. Yokokawa.

Mr. Yokokawa will continue to act as a vital PEDAL member to let us know about political problems. We have to listen to their voice, and act together. He sharply pointed out that, "Mainstream media does not always tell us the truth. We need to listen, think, and research on our own. It is important to always look for information with critical eyes. PEDAL will be helpful for that."

Mr. Yokokawa concluded his talk by encouraging us to vote. It may become a chance to act for a good future. If you ever find the PEDAL group doing their thing, please turn your attention to them. You will certainly get something from their message. It is time to think and act!

Ms. Nao Fujiwara: KU Student Activist Tackling Social Problems

By Risa Nishiokada

This story features the student activism of Ms. Nao Fujiwara, a third-year student in International Studies. I met with her in November to discuss her activities and to learn about what inspires her to work for a better society. Ms. Fujiwara has been mainly involved in two kinds of activism. One is her efforts on behalf of the Kochi-no Yama-to-umi, Chiiki-no Mirai-wo Kangaeru Symposium. Her other passion is related to her home prefecture in Okinawa – Hashinchu.

Her work with the former organization came as the result of an encounter with local people who were involved in an anti-mega solar construction plan in Okinohama, near Tosashimizu in Kochi. She became friendly with the owner of a local restaurant who was a former surfer and familiar with the sea. Her interest in the anti-mega solar movement started from a simple conversation with him.

To learn more about this issue, she visited Okinohama to hear about the story from the leader of the anti-mega solar project. The construction place was planned for a location where trees grew thick, using about 25 hectares (five times the size of Tokyo Dome) to build the mega-solar site very near to Okinohama beach. Ms. Fujiwara heard that the sea might become dirty because of gravel flowing into the ocean due to the large-scale construction. She began to think about what she can do to help solve this problem.

Ms. Fujiwara was quite firm in saying that, "In fact, mega solar doesn't help local electric power." She realized that the precious natural environment would be threatened by this project, and that the plan was proceeding in the wrong way. Thanks in great part to her contribution, the anti-mega solar project won their fight. One of the main leaders expressed his gratitude for her passionate volunteer effort.

Ms. Fujiwara is, in fact, very particular about nature, and the reason is deeply related to her upbringing and childhood. Actually, she is from Okinawa and grew up surrounded by nature so she feels a strong attachment to nature, perhaps more than others. What sparked her activism in Okinohama came from her love of Oki beach that she felt at first glance. She simply could not ignore that this beach was threatened.

Her current activism work involves club activities related to the American military presence in Okinawa. She set up an organization called Hashinchu by herself this past March. During her high school days, Ms. Fujiwara began to think seriously about the Okinawa problem as an important issue. Her hometown does not have an American military base but she went to high school in Naha where she started to see the obvious gap between herself and local friends who had a strong resistance for airplanes and the way of thinking about the U.S. military base.



But it was as a Kochi University student that she began to be active in earnest. When she just arrived in Kochi as a first-year student, that was about when the military base began planning to build in Nago City Henoko ward under the pretext of "transfer". The plan required filling in the sea, and local people would have to hold the burden for having the military base longer. That's why Okinawa people basically want the military presence reduced. They objected strongly to the

transfer conditions of the base.

However, Ms. Fujiwara found that she had much less access to information about Okinawa because she was in Kochi, and she realized the situation was advancing steadily in the wrong direction. So she often goes to Henoko when she returns to Okinawa during vacation, and she took her friends from outside Okinawa there once or twice. This experience gave her notice that the "Okinawa problem" is not only an Okinawa issues but also an issue for the whole of Japan because a friend said, "It is we Japanese that make such a serious situation in Okinawa. I'm embarrassed I don't know Okinawa's history and real military base problem." Then, she thought that if more Japanese have access to better information and sympathize with Okinawa people, we can find solutions to this big issue together.

This led her establish club activities called "Hashinchu". Now she tries to spread information about the Okinawa problem and she is organizing a study tour to go to Okinawa with six club members. Again, it was her love of the beautiful nature of Okinawa that influenced her efforts. She was very worried about the environmental impact the military base construction would have on her home prefecture.

Finally, while Ms. Fujiwara recognizes that it is difficult for many students to get involved in such social problems, she hopes that more young people will grab opportunities to participate actively by themselves. She strongly notes that volunteer activism represents a great contribution to society, and actually it is something required by society. Ms. Fujiwara thinks that more students getting involved will make them feel more fulfilled.

Nature positively influenced her activity. How about you?