

## Bibliographic Essay on Archives of the Ohara Institute for Social Research

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From Appendix of [\*Labor and Imperial Democracy in Prewar Japan\*](#) (University of California Press, 1991, pp.350-351), shown on the website with a permission of the author and publisher (click the book title for more information about this book).

This [the Ohara Institute for Social Research] is certainly the single most important repository of materials on prewar labor history, as well as on the history of proletarian parties and tenant farmer unions. In recent years it has added massive holdings from unions of the post-World War II decades, particularly the documents of the Japan National Railway union. The prewar collection was only fully cataloged in the 1970s and 1980s, and scholars have yet to exploit its full potential. Three portions of the collection were of particular importance for this study [ *Labor and Imperial Democracy in Prewar Japan*].

### **The Former Kyochokai (Kyu-kyochokai) Collection.\***

Acquired by the institute in the late 1940s after the Kyochokai was disbanded, this collection includes the Kyochokai's own massive library of Western-language and Japanese books in the social sciences, as well as roughly one hundred bound volumes of Kyochokai staff reports on various labor disputes, unions, and political parties of the left. These volumes are a particularly rich source of analysis and information from a variety of perspectives. First, Kyochokai staff members occasionally wrote reports of their firsthand observations of strikes, demonstrations, or rallies. Second, and most numerous, the volumes contain police reports of labor disputes, political party activities, union conventions, rallies, and so forth, prepared by the local police in mimeographed form and sent to the home minister, the governor of the prefecture where the event took place, and the Kyochokai. In the case of a lengthy dispute, one might find ten or fifteen police reports, written every other day or so. The structure and concerns of these reports offer valuable insights into the perspective of the government, and they occasionally supply relatively unmediated access to worker voices in the form of verbatim transcripts of speeches or negotiation sessions. Finally, the volumes also include copies of leaflets prepared by unions or strike groups, as well as company announcements issued in the

course of disputes.

**\*Kyochokai (Harmonization Society, established in 1919 and disbanded in 1946) was "an officially supported think tank charged with studying and solving social problems, in particular labor-capital conflict" (Labor and Imperial Democracy in Prewar Japan, p.127)**

#### **Documents of Prewar Labor Unions.**

In the 1930s the Ohara Institute purchased the office records of a number of financially strapped labor unions. The institute has only recently cataloged these and collected them in loose-leaf note files. Included are records of Sodomei unions and some from the Hyogikai, but documents of the centrist groups, especially Kumiai domei and, among its constituent unions, Kanto Amalgamated, are particularly numerous. As Kanto Amalgamated was quite active in Nankatsu, these records were invaluable for the analysis of Nankatsu unions and disputes from 1924 through the mid 1930s. The documents include records of union conventions, minutes of union executive committee meetings, reports on disputes and organizing efforts, and records of educational activities.

#### **Documents of Proletarian Parties.**

In similar fashion, the institute acquired documents from political parties, especially the Social Masses Party and its predecessors, Nihon taishuto and Zenkoku rono taishuto. Included are reports prepared for annual party conventions and analyses of election campaigns, as well as rare copies of leaflets, posters, and newsletters issued in the course of both national and local campaigns.