1.8: Kawai’s Shrewd Plan- “Either Not Guilty or a Heavy Sentence”

In which the author focuses on economist Kawai Eijirō. Arrested in 1939 and purged from Tōdai, Kawai died in 1944. The author traces Kawai and his “gargantuan” appetite and energies from his teens through his years at Tōdai; only very late in life did Kawai learn that his thyroid was to blame for the appetite (he had Graves disease). The author describes Kawai’s ambition to be a man of action, not merely an intellectual, praises him for his outspoken criticism of Japan in the war years, and speculates on the counter-factual question: what if Kawai had survived the war?

**Intellect, Emotion, Will: The Works**

To return once more to the great strife in the Faculty of Economics of 1938-39: this time I’ll write about another major actor: Kawai Eijirō. Up till now I’ve touched any number of times on Kawai, but there is much still to write. I don’t have the space to deal with it all, but I’ll pick the important things. What I’ll discuss now is Kawai the man. In the history of Tōdai in those years, he’s not only an important figure, but a fascinating one. His life is fascinating in that it is dramatic, but more than that, for his character—intellect, emotion, will: the works. Especially now, when more than sixty years have passed since his death, the meaning of his life has become clearer than ever.

First let me compress the flow of time before 1939:

1920 (twenty-nine years old). Becomes assistant professor, Faculty of Economics. In 1926, after three years of study in Europe (England, Germany), becomes full professor at the age of thirty-five.

1932-33 (forty-one to forty-two years old). Second European stay (in many countries including the Soviet Union, but mainly Germany). Studies mainly Marxism. On the scene when in Germany the Nazis become the lead party and Hitler seizes power. Holds strong misgivings about world conditions as fascism raises its head.

1933 Immediately after returning home, develops lively career speaking and writing. Quickly becomes darling of the...
press. Then for six years until 1939, when he is indicted in the publication ban incident, Kawai’s writings command attention.

1936 (forty-five years old). Dean of the Faculty of Economics. From here on, the Faculty of Economics strife continues, involving Kawai, Hijikata, and Ōuchi factions, right up to the Hiraga Purge of 1939. In that purge Kawai is fired.

The later data I’ll list chronologically:


1940 (forty-nine). February-March: writes the 500-page *For Students* in less than a month, publication rushed in June.[1] Astonishing sales (22,000 copies in two months). Publishes four books. This year’s income breaks previous high, up to about 30,000 yen (in terms of today’s cost of living, about $750,000). Able to pay for both heavy court costs and daughter’s wedding. October: first judgment—not guilty. Even Kawai himself, resigned to being convicted, shocked. Prosecution immediately appeals.

1941 (fifty). March: appeal begins. April: *Appeal to the Nation*, completed all the way to the bound-copy stage before publication is stopped. This year publishes three other books, but this is last year publication is possible. What he writes hereafter gets no paper ration and can’t be published (reissue of earlier books also not possible). What he writes remains in manuscript form and is published only after the war. May: diagnosed with diabetes, hospitalized briefly. October: guilty verdict at appeal trial. Immediate appeal.


1943 (fifty-two). June: appeal rejected (Supreme Court). From here on health fails rapidly. Income cut off, he begins to have trouble making ends meet; disciples raise funds, plan research institute. First heart attack.

1944 (fifty-three). January: research institute established. February: death from heart attack brought on by Graves’ disease.

This chronology shows that Kawai died astonishingly young. His youth—Kawai was in his energetic forties—enabled him to surmount the tempestuous era after 1933.

**Gargantuan Appetite**

Among the disciples of Kawai’s very late years were two women, Akiyama Kiyoko and Doi Michiko. They have left a record of Kawai’s last years. Popular with women, Kawai established a monthly “Day for Meeting Women” and met with all the women who wanted to see him. Akiyama and Doi write: “The members of the group were mainly from the teacher-training schools of the day—Girls’ Higher School,[2] Japan Women’s University, the women’s section of Meiji University; in addition, some women Kawai knew. The topics…first the news of the war and criticism of it, next each person’s reflection on books Kawai had written, then the problems of life, employment, love, reading, education, trips, and the like—all sorts of problems. Issues were raised, such as ‘What makes a person distinguished?’ and each person had to respond.”
Akiyama and Doi, who were then students at Girls’ Higher School, joined the group at Kawai’s home beginning about 1938 and were favorites of his. For two months in the last year of his life, he even tutored them in Kant’s philosophy. Their diary-style account became Record of the Words and Deeds of Kawai Eijirō. [3] Here is one passage quoting Kawai: “If something like this is going to happen, I think now’s the very best time. A few years from now I’ll be over fifty; you’ve begun to decline and don’t have the energy to start something new. In your forties, you’re still strong. And in your thirties, after all, you still aren’t your own person. They say you come into your own at thirty, but at thirty you’re still not ready. Yes, the latter part of your forties is the very best time.”

How robust was Kawai in his forties? In “Kawai Eijirō’s Life and Thought,”[4] Kimura Takeyasu writes the following:

In his youth Kawai was robustness incarnate. He was on the short side—5’2”, but he was congenitally sturdy. From his thirties on, he gradually gained weight—not fat but muscle; he appeared hard, rocklike. His complexion was ruddy, his eyebrows bushy; from behind large thick glasses for nearsightedness, his eyes gave off a penetrating gleam; his nose was high, his thin lips always set, determined. From his thirties into his forties, he and others all acknowledged his good health: he almost never had to see a doctor; he didn’t even catch colds. In his thirties and forties, he led a very busy life—it defied description. He himself considered the daily life of a professor utterly irregular and normally worked through the night once or twice a week. Even on the other days, he normally went to bed at two or three in the morning. As a tradeoff, he was late getting up—nearly noon. Despite this extreme irregularity, he was never tired, and when he went to bed—even at dawn—he fell immediately into a deep sleep; even after two all-nighters in a row, his voracious appetite—he ate enough breakfast for two people—never suffered at all. So he had the utmost confidence in his own health, and although those around him urged him to take care of himself, he never listened.

Indeed, the young Kawai was filled with astonishing vigor. His disciple Inoki Masamichi says that if you don’t understand that, you simply don’t understand Kawai: “If you overlook Kawai’s robust physicality and the explosive vitality behind it, you absolutely can’t understand Kawai’s militant liberalism. On this point Kawai is much closer to Fichte than to Kant or Hegel. ‘If the righteous is scarcely saved, what will become of the ungodly and the sinner?’[5]—that was Kawai’s stubborn belief. That’s why he scorned and despised timid people, those who won’t say clearly yes or no. Kawai never was serene, perfect; the fact that he was an active, imperfect, daimonic fighter rests first of all on this. Indeed, his appetite was daimonic; he ate two and a half pounds of beef in less than no time, virtually without chewing. Tangerines and the like—without even peeling them, he threw them down his throat the way a frog devours mosquitoes or flies.” Kawai’s daimonic appetite did not weaken even in later years after his health had broken down; in his diary for May 1942, he writes: “Took a walk; returned after an hour. Cutlet and rice, two bowls of noodles, two bowls of rice—even for me, a stomach-full.”

Journal of an Agonizing Struggle with Illness

Kawai was once the very picture of health, but beginning in the latter half of his forties, he suffered from diarrhea and other physical problems; it may have been brought on by the stress of the strife in the Faculty of Economics, which began at that time. From Kimura Takeyasu’s account: “After 1939, when he was chased out of the university, his physical problems began to be obvious even from the outside. The body that until then had been fatter than normal now was extremely thin; his suits hung on his frame. His cheeks sank, and the circles under his eyes grew dark; his hair turned white and thinned. Only his penetrating gaze reminded one, barely, of the old Kawai. After he appeared in court
in his first trial, the press described him as 'the haggard Professor Kawai,' and he was displeased; but even if in spirit he was not at all haggard, in the flesh everyone could see he was indeed haggard. Because he appeared very languid in the trial of the appeal, Defense Counsel Unno finally had him admitted, half by force, to Keiō Hospital." He was hospitalized for about ten days (May 1941), and in addition to diabetes, he was told his digestive track had been damaged. They said that was the cause of his lengthy bouts of diarrhea.

In the hospital they stopped the diarrhea and the rest, and for the time being he regained his health, but in early 1942 various physical ailments surfaced; he even had heart trouble. Notations that he wasn't feeling well appear frequently in his diary:

May 5: Tried to take an afternoon nap but couldn’t sleep; perhaps because my stomach’s a bit off, I can’t be upbeat…I’d really like to be healthy.

May 31: Was supposed to leave for Ōmi today, but I didn’t feel well this morning, so I stayed in bed. Felt like not going out but decided to get up.

June 3: Felt very bad this morning; pulse racing. Utterly wretched.

June 4: This morning felt fine. If I’m like this, I’m back to normal. But when I weighed myself at the bath, I was astonished: 105 pounds! I once weighed 156!

June 8: This morning heart racing.

June 10: Supper long in coming, and I was very hungry…. Well, for the present, have to put health first. Before I entered the bath, my heart was racing.

June 12: I’ll note what I’ve noticed about my health. My digestion’s very good. But my torso is thinner, and my ribs show; when I sit, I get tired—is it because the bones of my seat are bare of flesh?

June 18: Last night pulse very high; this morning, too; so didn’t go to St. Luke’s Hospital this morning and spent the morning in bed.

Feeling that his pulse was abnormal, he had himself checked at St. Luke’s, but they said there was nothing wrong with his heart. His lungs, too, were okay, and there wasn’t any protein or sugar in his urine, so they said they thought it was nervous exhaustion. So he stopped worrying. But in fact it wasn’t normal.

In his year-end “Recollections of 1942,” he wrote: “Tsurumi Yūsuke was concerned, so I had Dr. Takemi Tarō check me out and learned I have Graves’ disease. Now that I think about it, it probably started seven or eight years ago. Once I knew and was being treated for it, I improved gradually, and after Karuizawa I was almost better. I am thin, and my face is gaunt, but my life is no longer in danger.”

“I’ll Become a Doer,” Not a Pundit

Tsurumi Yūsuke, famous author and politician, was five years older than Kawai, and he and Kawai were both on the Debate Team at the old First Higher School. The Debate Team had particularly strong ties across classes, and from student days on, Kawai was very close to Tsurumi; the friendship had deepened during Kawai’s time in New York for the
Ministry of Agriculture and in his Tōdai professorial days in Europe, and they were close all their lives. Because of this close friendship, Tsurumi knows best how energetic Kawai was. For example, in New York in 1918:[6]

Kawai’s *modus operandi* after he got to New York was a wonder to behold. He had made preparations in Baltimore, so he had made up his mind, scientifically as always, who he would meet and just what he would see in New York. As always, he had importuned Americans quite brazenly for interviews.

Day after day he met people, had appointments with them and ate with them, exchanged opinions, collected material. His productivity back in Japan was the fruit of this hectic activity in New York.

But at the time I was its victim. Kawai had unbounded energy and absolutely never took into account that his companion might be sleepy. On the way back after finishing the day’s activities, he often dropped by my hotel to talk. This was after his evening appointments, so it was at least eleven p.m. and sometimes twelve; for a couple hours thereafter he’d report on the day’s activities, then leave.

Or in Berlin in 1932:

I had lost my seat in the election of 1931 and was traveling abroad, so the next year but one I went to Berlin, and Kawai came to visit. And the upshot was that he insisted on teaching me social policy, and he barged in on me every day, like a tutor, and lectured me completely and eloquently on everything in his 1931 book *Principles of Social Policy*. He taught me a year’s university course in barely one week. One time it lasted from eleven in the morning to eleven at night…

And when the lecture ended, he’d say, “Let’s take a walk,” and urging me on, he’d set out for a cafe. Drinking coffee late into the night, Kawai would carry on a cheerful conversation. When that ended and we left the café, he’d say, “It’s still early, so how about a walk?” and we’d walk up and down Berlin’s Kurfürstendamm. The summer dawn came at three or four, and when the sky began to brighten, he’d say, “Well, let’s go home and turn in,” and we’d come to the road on which he lived, and he’d go.

I too was pretty strong and self-confident, but those nights with Kawai about did me in. His ability to do all-nighters was astonishing. When he wrote manuscripts, he had the energy to write all night and produce 20,000 words. That resulted in an over-confidence in his own constitution and finally, I think, led that healthy person to an early death.

Kawai was a person of unlimited energies, but these episodes indicate that he was also astonishingly egotistical. Indeed, once he made up his mind, he took absolutely no account of the convenience of others and would push and push and push. In “The Latter Days of Professor Kawai,”[7] Ishigami Ryōhei writes of the following episode: “One evening I got a phone call from Professor Kawai, so I went to see him right away, and he immediately broached the subject of marriage. ‘Please marry Miss X. If you agree, I’ll send a telegram tonight, and I’ll set off tomorrow to make the arrangements.’ The woman was a complete stranger to me, and there were only two hours left until he’d send the telegram; astonished at Kawai’s proposal, or aghast, I was in a bind. So I spoke of my current situation and argued heart and soul that I absolutely couldn’t accede to his proposal; but Kawai set forth ardently the benefits of marrying this woman and urged me to agree. I got angry and argued back.”

Marriage isn’t something to be decided on so simply. In the end, Ishigami held firm, and he learned later that at precisely that time the woman in question had agreed to marry someone else. Had Ishigami said yes, Kawai would have been in a real fix. After introducing this episode, Ishigami says, “It was both Kawai’s strength and his weakness that once he got
an idea, he pushed it to the limit and couldn’t rest until he had convinced the other person.” Indeed, Kawai’s life was studded with tragicomedies that stemmed from this fierceness of conviction.

To return to my story, Tsurumi, who knew Kawai well at the peak of his energies, met Kawai again in 1942 after a long interval and was shocked at how he had changed: “A scant year before his death, I received a visit from Kawai, the first in a long while, and I was stunned by how his appearance had changed. I thought: this isn’t normal. And I urged him, then accompanied him, to see a doctor I trusted. That exam was quite different from the examinations the other doctors had made. Before, they’d told him it was nervous exhaustion. But from Dr. Takemi’s examination, Kawai learned he had Graves’ disease, without doubt. As a result of that treatment, his appetite increased, he slept better, and he gained weight. I thought he’d soon be completely well.”

Indeed, the fact that Kawai had Graves’ disease explains it all: his limitless energy, his fearsome ability to get things done, his stunning intellectual productivity, the fierceness of his convictions, his extraordinary appetite. In Graves' disease the body produces too much thyroid hormone (which governs one’s level of mental and physical activity), causing both body and mind to become hyperactive. So the person is able to be several times more active than normal people, but at the cost of metabolism several times higher than normal. Hence he eats several times more than the normal person.

According to the doctor’s explanation, this condition is as if a steam locomotive’s firebox always got several times the normal amount of coal and ran continually at top speed: at some point, something inside will break down. When that breakdown hits the heart, the result is a fatal heart attack induced by Graves’ disease. Dr. Takemi, who was an expert on the circulatory system, would have encountered many patients of that type, so he was able to diagnose it on the spot. But the average internist of the time didn’t know much about Graves’ disease. In addition, today’s exam techniques hadn’t been developed (doctors today can tell immediately from blood and urine tests). And if there was any doubt, it was hard to add tests to confirm the diagnosis. And if there were symptoms of other diseases, there was a strong likelihood of incorrect diagnosis, as had happened with the doctors at St. Luke’s.

Be that as it may, once Dr. Takemi diagnosed Graves’ disease, he likely prescribed rest (both physical and mental), but that is what Kawai was least able to stick to. Tsurumi writes: “In February 1944, hearing suddenly of his death, I simply didn’t believe my ears. I couldn’t grasp it. But later I learned that secretly he went against his doctor’s admonition and neglected his health. Dr. Takemi had warned him not to work too hard, yet spurred on by his burning love of learning, he continued down the earlier path of monastic diligence and finally collapsed amid his books.”

“Monastic diligence”? Kimura writes of his habits: “After the pace of the trial slowed, rather than relax, he began to study even more fiercely, shutting himself up in his study at least ten hours a day, reading and thinking and writing, absorbed, not taking a moment’s rest. His mind was so absorbed in scholarship that quiet times with his family stopped, too; even at mealtime he was elsewhere, and if his wife or son spoke to him, he responded off the point. It was above all the attitude of one utterly in thrall to the scholarly muse. When those around him, concerned, advised rest, he responded that of course he’d take care from then on; but if the admonition became persistent, Kawai, who normally didn’t exhibit strong emotions at home, would burst out in unexpectedly harsh language: he knew full well how bad overwork had been for his health, but in his own present life, scholarship was his sole raison d’être, and if scholarship were forbidden him, he’d rather die.”

Kawai’s death, a heart attack brought on by Graves’ disease, was truly sudden. At the time, those disciples who looked
up to Kawai as their life-long teacher gathered twice a month in the Kawai home for a study group, the Blue Sky Club. The participants were a core group of those in Tokyo whose names have already come up many times—Kimura, Tsuchiya, Inoki, Seki Yoshihiko, Ishigami Ryōhei, Shiojiri Kōmei—plus disciples from outside Tokyo who appeared periodically: dozens of people in all. “The meetings began with one person giving a paper, and then discussion focused on the paper; Kawai himself read papers on such topics as Kant, the philosophy of Nishida, and idealism. He was always at the center of the discussion, and in the company of his young disciples, he usually spoke in a loud voice and discussed vigorously. When the discussion was over, the topic moved to genial chatter. Tsuchida Kiyoshi, who as a reporter for the Asahi was up on the news of the day—the war and politics and economics, joined in and presented the latest news, and so the whole group learned in concrete detail about war advances and retreats and the urgency of Japan’s crisis, and they grew more deeply anxious. Based on Tsuchiya’s reports, Professor Kawai knew what was going on, added his harsh criticism of the crisis, and often let slip insightful opinions. But no matter how worth hearing Professor Kawai’s opinions were, he couldn’t carry them one step outside his study, the meeting place of the Blue Sky Club.” (At the time Kawai’s movements were under surveillance by the Special Police.)

The meetings of Kawai and his disciples, centering on the Blue Sky Club, continued without interruption all through the trial and through the war, but because his death came so suddenly, none of his chief disciples was present when he died.

“Turn the Radio Off!”

Those present when Kawai died were his family and Yoshida Shōgo, a Tōdai graduate who happened to be visiting at the time. A paymaster captain on short-term duty with the Navy, Yoshida was about to get married and had invited Kawai to be guest of honor at his wedding. That night they were consulting on the arrangements. Yoshida writes of his memory of that day:

As always, Kawai had a calm face and smiled and asked this and that about my recent doings. Immediately I noticed that he had become gaunt, cheeks sunken, somehow lifeless, so when I asked, anxiously, he replied, “I’ve not been well since returning from Hakone.” … It seemed he had not recovered entirely from Graves’ disease.

Kawai said he was listless but thought it was beriberi; then we talked of the shortage of food, the war, and the air raids…. Eventually we turned to the issue of my wedding, the main subject of the day, and I answered Kawai’s shrewd questions. …

Suddenly: “Ah, I feel ill.” Then: “Excuse me a moment.” He stood up and left the room. Shocked at the unexpected development, I could hear his voice from the other room: “Spread out my bedding! Turn off the radio!” Then a long silence and a period of uneasiness!

Some time later I heard his wife’s voice phoning urgently. Right after that, suddenly, impossibly, Kawai’s screams struck my ear. I jumped up, in a rush, and ran out to find a doctor. … When I returned from seeking a doctor, it was only to confirm futilely that there was no need for a doctor.

Tsurumi continues the earlier passage about learning of Kawai’s death this way: “It was a great regret for me. Because if he had been a bit more prudent, had shown more restraint with his scholarship, today [1948] he could have been enormously active as one of the great leaders of a Japan in disarray.” Tsurumi says this because he knows well that Kawai’s secret ambition lay in that direction. In May 1919, on Kawai’s return to Japan, Tsurumi spoke these words to Kawai: “You can become a Bentham or an Edmund Burke. Coming back to Japan, please work hard and achieve
greatness." Tsurumi meant a first-rate scholar or critic, but his words didn’t sit well with Kawai. Tsurumi writes:

Kawai looked greatly displeased: "I will become a man of action." He wouldn’t become a critic like Edmund Burke. I think he meant an actual politician like Gladstone or Wilson."

That was Kawai’s mindset at the time. After returning to Japan, he created Japan’s first labor law bureau and took over its operation himself, and in the future as a politician who held that progressive stance, he’d fight for the welfare of the Japanese masses. He burned with such sky-high ambition. So when he finally set sail from Seattle, he sent me a letter and spat out this fierce fighting spirit: "I have the feeling Japan is waiting for me." Those were brave and tragic words.

“Japan Will Lose Taiwan and the Ryūkyūs, Too”

At the time, Kawai burned with ambition. But things didn’t work out the way he expected. Returning to Japan, Kawai immediately clashed with his superior at the Ministry of Agriculture and, after publishing his letter of resignation in the press, left government employ and sought his next arena of activity in the academic world. His first attempt to become a man of action foundered, but after his time as university professor, Kawai dreamed once again of becoming a doer. He was chased from the university in the Hiraga Purge, hauled before the court in the publication ban incident, and even barred from publishing his ideas. Yet despite all this, Kawai’s spirits were high. Why? Because Kawai clearly anticipated Japan’s defeat in the war and foresaw that his own debut would come in the great social unrest that would occur after the defeat.

In “Militant Liberal,” Inoki Masamichi’s memoir of Kawai, there’s the following: “At the time the China-Japan War broke out in July 1937, Kawai intuited that the worst had come and foresaw long ahead of time the situation we face today [1948]. In the very midst of the North China operation, for reasons of his own, he inspected the battlefield. I think the militant spirit inside him wouldn’t let him rest. At the Industrial Club in January 1938, right after returning from North China, he gave a speech on the crisis. In it, he alarmed the roomful of entrepreneurs by saying, ‘As a result of this war Japan will lose Manchuria and Korea, of course, but also Taiwan and the Ryūkyūs.’ I still remember how shocked I was on hearing this from my uncle, who was in the audience. My uncle said, ‘Those in the audience thought, “Kawai really goes to extremes. Most university professors don’t go to extremes but generally wind up just about right. Kawai’s liberalism is dangerous thought—it preaches extremes and confuses people.” So much for ‘winding up just about right’! Seven and a half years later, everyone knew that Japan had tumbled into the pit of hell, just as Kawai had predicted.” It was a shock that at that time in the Industrial Club, the very summit of Japanese capitalism, anyone said openly anything so bold.

This speech’s lead was that “As a result of this China-Japan War, Japan will plunge into war with Great Britain and the United States;” it made clear his view that war with Great Britain and the United States was inevitable. Kawai’s Appeal to the Nation was printed and bound before being banned by pre-publication censorship. In the page proofs included in the Collected Works, there is the following clear statement: “The fate that is impelling us onward a step at a time is a danger truly unprecedented in Japanese history. … The world conditions surrounding Japan, I feel, have already driven Japan into an inescapable dilemma. … In today’s Japan, there are two roads ahead, and only two. What are they? The first is the fate of Germany in the fall of 1918.” Kawai explains in detail the result after World War I, when Germany accepted defeat and signed the Versailles Treaty: “Its territory was lopped off on all sides,” and it was also made to pay astronomical reparations. Even if all the German people sweated for decades, they could not pay the reparations, and Germany fell into a state from which it couldn’t recover. Kawai writes: “We must not think of the fate of
Germany after the last Great War as if, like a fire on a distant shore, it bears no relation to us. … Japan took the first step in the Manchurian Incident of 1931, the second step in the China Incident [1937], and the third step with the German-Italian-Japanese military alliance [1940].” If you conclude an alliance such as this with one side in Europe in the midst of a hot war already under way, “in the eyes of England and the United States, Japan is no different from Germany in the last Great War, and they clearly see Japan as a disturber of world peace. … From the point of view of the Japanese people, we are not yet fighting Great Britain and the United States as enemies, but Great Britain and the United States already consider Japan an enemy country and psychologically are at war with Japan.”

Asking what it means “to be at war with Great Britain and the United States,” he writes of the time in 1918 when he himself visited the United States and remembers witnessing with his own eyes as President Wilson on a large stage addressed a great crowd: “All of the several thousand in the audience wept and sobbed. … He was a leader not only politically but also morally. As I watched that scene, I thought, ‘There may come a time when this country and my native Japan go to war, and at such a time it will not be easy to have this leader and this crowd as enemy.’”

Kawai wrote the same thing he’d said in his talk at the Industrial Club: in the end, launching the China Incident had set Japan on the fateful path to unavoidable war with Great Britain and the United States. If you start war with a country like the United States, it’s wholly unwinnable. Ultimately, Japan will lose all its overseas territories and be driven into national bankruptcy. When we think of what actually happened thereafter, we needn’t explain that it all happened as Kawai predicted. Kawai had a shockingly acute eye.

**Looking Ahead to Post-war Activity**

The speech before the Industrial Club was bold, but he said even bolder things in private. For example, his widow Kuniko writes,[15] “He never said anything hopeful about the trial; only once—I can’t remember when—he said, ‘I hope the verdict is innocent; if not, I hope for a jail sentence, the longer the better.’ When I asked him why, he answered, ‘After the war Japan will be in major disarray, so the longer my sentence now, the greater my voice then.’”

In fact, he said the same sort of thing more clearly to his disciples. For example, Seki Yoshihiko writes:[16] “When I was about to leave for active duty on Borneo, thinking I might not see him again, I went to Professor Kawai’s house to take my leave, and he said something to the effect that I shouldn’t worry about Japan after the war because he would work to the best of his ability…. He foresaw the end of the war. He told of his thought after the verdict at the court of appeals: ‘I believe I’m innocent, but if I’m found guilty, I hope for imprisonment, not a fine. The harsher the sentence, the more weight my words will have after the war when I speak to foreign countries.’ Because I kept these words in mind, I wasn’t worried when I went off.

“There hasn’t been a day since I was demobilized that I haven’t thought, ‘If Kawai were alive today….’ If he were alive today, we can imagine from the above comment, he wouldn’t simply have returned to the university but would have been active politically. But at the same time I have the feeling that today too he’d have had bad things said about him and might be surprisingly unwelcome in Japanese society.”

It’s fascinating to speculate: what if Kawai had lived into the postwar years? People have given various answers to that question. Many think he’d surely have gone into politics. Fundamentally, Kawai’s political ideology was socialism of the non-Marxist stripe—in other words, European-style socialism. So in terms of the existing political parties that arose in postwar Japan, he’d be right Socialist or close to the Democratic Socialist Party (perhaps today’s Democratic Party).
Kawakami Jōtarō, long-time postwar leader of the Socialist Party, was a close friend who at First Higher School belonged to the Speech Club with Kawai, and his son Kawakami Tamio attests that he let slip before he died, "Had Kawai lived into the postwar years, he might have become chairman of the Socialist Party."

Had he lived and gone into politics, isn’t it likely that his fearsome vitality would have altered the postwar political scene greatly? As is well known, in the political world right after the war, the Marxists regained all their power, and among political party factions, the Communist Party and left Socialist Party saw their strength surge, but the right Socialist Party didn’t flourish. The right Socialist Party had no true leaders, and the base of the right Socialist Party was the ridiculous labor union leaders of the prewar era—the “corrupt” bunch—and the politicians’ organizations of establishment socialists with links to those labor union leaders; their image was very bad. It paled in comparison with that of the Communist Party group who had spent eighteen years in jail and the Socialist Party’s Popular Front group that burned with indomitable spirit and fought gamely.

When it came to comparing favorably with the group that had spent eighteen years in prison, there was no one among the socialists who measured up to Kawai—well-known and burning with fighting spirit. Had Kawai set out into the political world, he would have burnished his resume of struggle and wielded to the full his gift for political action, his fighting spirit, his vitality, his logical ability, his tactical ability and immediately become a political leader beyond compare among the socialists. There is even the possibility that in 1947, in the political developments at the time the Katayama Cabinet came into existence, there might have been a Kawai Cabinet instead.

**Warning Against a Revival of Marxism**

In *Appeal to the Nation*, one of the political developments Kawai predicted as possible in the Japanese political world after the war’s end was the rebirth and expansion of the Marxists. In Germany after World War I, the Communist Party rose in revolt, the German Revolution took place, and Imperial Germany was upended. The same thing was likely to happen in Japan—Japan’s Communist revolution and the overthrow of the emperor. That development was what he most cautioned about in postwar Japan, so he argued that steps must be taken now to prepare against that eventuality. If you think of political developments right after the war, this again was right on the money. In 1950 when the Cominform criticized the Japan Communist Party’s path of peaceful revolution, the mainstream of the Communist Party turned to armed revolution, and secret organizations were created to prepare for armed struggle; many young men dreamed of revolution and joined.

What should one do in a chaotic era? Kawai had considered that early on. I wrote above about how he gathered his disciples and formed the seminar, Blue Sky Club; part of the background seems to have been that Kawai wanted to use that group to launch himself into politics. Tsuchiya Kiyoshi writes of the Blue Sky Club,[17] “It was Kawai who named our group Blue Sky. It was the symbolism of the Young Japan Party, and in Kawai’s mind, undoubtedly, there floated the image of Disraeli of years past standing at the head of the Young England Party. In notes left out on a shelf at the time of his sudden death, he had written of his hopes for a single great people’s movement: ‘I’d like to embark on work that would give full rein to my own powers—careful planning, decisive action, true insight.’ This too hints at Kawai’s frame of mind toward the postwar disarray. Of course, there’s no way of knowing what sort of plan that would have been. But had the torch of Kawai’s idealism, liberalism, and individualism been held high, it surely would have evoked a sympathetic reaction in the great hopes of the young people who shouldered the reconstruction of the homeland. What an enormous loss his death was for advancing democratic revolution!” When no one else was thinking realistically of Japan’s defeat, Kawai had already thought ahead to how to shape political conditions after the war. For that reason Kawai had even
calculated that losing in court and being sentenced was an advantage. If you think of how much respect the Communist Party headquarters group garnered after the war on emerging from their eighteen years in prison, this calculation was surely accurate.

Tsuchiya writes: “Early on, Kawai foresaw the outcome of the Pacific War. And he embraced for himself a keen sense of post-defeat mission. For the four or five years he was banned from the university, his world was restricted to the narrow confines of his study and the occasional trip, and as for contact with people, our meetings of the Blue Sky Club of disciples were virtually it. But in the midst of this, Kawai never lost his deep interest in reality, and his judgment and insight were extremely accurate. In June, 1943 the sentence of fine was confirmed at the grand court of appeal, and with the death of Admiral Yamamoto (April 1943) and the Japanese withdrawal from Attu and Kiska (May 1943), the war situation was worsening by degrees. Concern showing on his face, Kawai said, ‘The war’s already lost. I believe I’m absolutely innocent. But if I’m found guilty, it’s better if it’s several years of hard labor than if it’s a fine. Because in the future, when Japan has lost, if I’ve been sentenced harshly by the military and the authoritarian government, my voice will be that much more effective in pleading Japan’s case to the Allied Powers—they’ll pay more attention to me.’ At the time, I didn’t understand what Kawai was saying, but now when we really need a politician of vast intelligence and strong convictions able to recover Japan’s independence in today’s fierce international standoff, I feel keenly for the first time what Kawai must have been thinking.” Had Kawai’s calculation been entirely on the mark, today’s Japan might have become a European-style socialist country. Kawai had so much potential that even that possibility seems conceivable.

1. Gakusei ni atou, Nihon hyōronsha, 1940.  
2. Jokōshi, later Ochanomizu University.  
5. RHM: English Standard Version (2001). The quotation is from 1 Peter 4:18, which is itself an elaboration on Proverbs 11:31. A difficult passage: “even the righteous” barely merit salvation, and the “evil” not at all.  
9. “Kawai Eijirō no shōgai to shisō.”  
10. “Kawai Eijirō no shōgai to shisō.”  
12. “Kōyū sanjūsan-nen.”  
17. “Kokō rinzen taru bannen,” in Denki to Tsuisō.