The Problem of Disciplinary Punishment at the Department of Literature in the Final Stages of the University of Tokyo Struggle and the Assumed Proposal of Blank Slate

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On December 23, 1968, at the final stages of the University of Tokyo Struggle, Acting President Ichiro Kato requested the All-Campus Joint Struggle Student League (Zenkyoto) to come to the table for a final discussion. It is assumed that he proposed a “blank slate” on the issue of student suspension from the Department of Literature, but the League rejected this discussion. This assumption is not true. The author investigates the reasons why a student was suspended from the Department of Literature, why the League continued to demand a “complete revocation” of that suspension, whether or not the riot police’s battle against students at Yasuda Auditorium on January 18 and 19, 1969 could have been avoided, and why the struggle was prolonged up to December 1969 only at the Department of Literature.

The problem of disciplinary punishment at the Department of Literature during the University of Tokyo Struggle finds its roots in the indefinite suspension of Tadashi Nakano, a Department of Literature student who got into a scuffle with Associate Professor Hiroshi Tsukishima and grabbed the professor by his necktie and hurled violent words at him after the concluding meeting of the conference of students and professors at the Department of Literature on October 4, 1967. In the University Council, then Dean Tatsuro Yamamoto of the Department of Literature, exaggeratedly described Nakano’s behavior as the usage of “violent language unworthy of a student” that was directed against some teachers, and decided to punish him. This statement was revised a month later but the modification has not been disclosed. Dean Kentaro Hayashi, who assumed office at the Department of Literature in November 1968, did not discuss the detailed facts of Nakano and Tsukishima’s action, except for being placed under classroom arrest earlier in the same month, and maintained the official assertion of “impolite behaviour” by the student against the teacher. Professor Yozo Horigome, who took on the role of the Dean of the Department of Literature in August 1969, erased Nakano’s suspension, but continued to claim that the suspension had been lawful and disregarded the fact that Tsukishima was the first to act violently.

The disciplinary punishment at the Department of Literature was the second of two contentious issues of the University of Tokyo struggle. The first was the disciplinary punishment at the Department of Medicine that turned to be an erroneous punishment of an absentee student. After this
punishment was completely revoked in November 1968, the second became a primary issue. On December 23, 1968, Acting President Kato proposed to the Joint Struggle Student League that he was ready to reconsider the suspension at the Department of Literature when the institution of disciplinary punishment would be modified. However, there was no prospect of approval of this proposal by the Department of Literature Dean Hayashi and other professors and the proposal was rejected by the Student League. It was not, ultimately, an offer that could be termed a “blank slate.”

Key words: the University of Tokyo Struggle, suspension of a student from the Department of Literature, complete revocation, blank slate, facts of the action