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People Power

The recent resignation of Mr. Kurokawa, a high-level prosecutor, as the result of public condemnation of the way the Abe Administration was attempting to extend the retirement age of prosecutors for dubious reasons, reminded me how powerful public opinion can be when a large number of individuals, especially well-known individuals, openly express their opinions.

These days it is extremely easy to do that because of the many public platforms, namely SNS¹, that enable anyone to express an opinion. Often this can lead to individuals being followed by large numbers of people. The greater the number of followers a poster has, the more influential he or she becomes. That can be either a good or bad thing and depends on how the mood of the masses is influenced and manipulated.

Herd mentality is the inclination for individuals within a group to follow along with what the group at large thinks or does. It is also known as mob behavior, group mind, group think, crowd psychology, and other similar terms.² I am always reminded of the Thought Police in the novel Nineteen Eighty-four by George Orwell. It is a type of conformity, which is the act of matching attitudes, beliefs, and behaviors to group norms, politics or being like-minded.³ Either through indoctrination⁴ or coercion⁵ those who conform to the views held by the group often are unable to hold or express any contrary views.

History has shown how herd mentality can have devastating consequences, the most obvious example being Nazism. The more extreme the view, the more radicalized the believers become. Individuals with strong religious beliefs – zealots⁶ - are good examples.

SNS provide ways for individuals to communicate closely with others wherever they may be located. Physical distances are no longer obstacles. They definitely make communication easier and when it is possible to use video platforms, make self-imposed isolation as now during the pandemic more tolerable. It is only when SNS is used to influence and/or manipulate a large number of people that I grow concerned. That, unfortunately, comes down to individual vigilance and determination not to be drawn into herd mentality behavior.

¹ Social networking services

² https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Herd_mentality

³ <https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Conformity>

⁴ 教化

⁵ 強制

⁶ 狂信者