

## Remembering Tom Sekine and the Uno Study Group in Toronto

written by Jennifer Welsh and John Simoulidis as recalled by Robert Albritton

Rob often tells the story of first meeting Tom when Tom asked to sit in on a graduate class Rob was teaching on Marx's *Capital*. This was somewhat unusual at the time, and still is. Tom contributed to discussions, often politely challenging the interpretations of both graduate students and the instructor. While gradually learning more about Kozo Uno's levels of analysis approach, Rob developed a respect for Tom's reading of *Capital* that would grow into a lifelong collaboration. Together they started a study group in the early 80's at Rob's home on Lauder Avenue. In 1986 the study group moved to Rob and Jennifer's home on Broadway Avenue and would meet regularly, with occasional interruptions, for the next twenty years.

The connections within the group were both scholarly and warm. All the Uno group members were invited to Rob and Jennifer's wedding party at their home in May 1987. Early people with whom we haven't had contact recently included Raphael Indarte and Stephen Strople. The group with whom we have had contact in recent years includes John Bell, Colin Duncan, Brian MacLean, Stefanos Kourkoulakos, Michael Marder, John Simoulidis, Randall Terada, Marc Weinstein, Dennis Badeen and Richard Westra. Occasionally there were women in the study group: Nchama Miller and Shannon Bell come to mind.

And there were Japanese professors and scholars who Tom invited to join the monthly meeting when visiting in Toronto. They included Makoto Maruyama, Tamiko Kurihara, Tomiichi Hoshino, Shoken Mawatari and Masaru Kasai. These exchanges were intellectually fruitful. Some worked on early translations of Uno's *Types of Economic Policies Under Capitalism* while others contributed to a collection co-edited by Tom and Rob, *A Japanese Approach to Political Economy: Unoist Variations*. They also led to new friendships. Rob and Jennifer had visited Japan in spring of 1990. This included a trip to Sendai and a wonderful onsen visit hosted by Mr and Mrs Ouchi.

The group studied diverse readings – not just those of the Uno school—in order to extend dialogue with other schools of thought. Suggestions were made by individual group members for what to read next. The composition of the study group changed over the years as visiting professors returned home and graduate students moved on after finishing their dissertations. The longest group member aside from Rob was Stefanos Kourkoulakos who was in the group from 1990 to 2007. In 2003 Stefanos hosted Tom and Kazuko Sekine as well as Rob, Jennifer and their daughter Sian on a visit to Greece. And in 2008 Rob and Jennifer hosted the Sekines in their rented villa in Provence. The relationships formed through the study group became friendships. And in recent years Jennifer and Shie Kasai have remained in touch through email.

Tom Sekine, of course, was the centre of the Uno study group, even after he returned to Japan. He was highly respected, almost revered. He often pulled people's diverse positions together - a master at mentoring and encouraging deep thought and reflection. Rob doesn't recall Tom ever

being in a fight with anyone, although there were respectful disagreements. Engaging with Tom meant that you were safe to take an intellectual risk as it would always prove fruitful.