

Eleven Questions About the Murayama Administration

By Matsuyama Yukio

The Japanese political scene has shifted with unprecedented intensity over the past several months and for a journalist like myself, who has observed politics for 40 years, the continuing changes have been astonishing. It is natural that this should seem incomprehensible to people in other countries. Below, I have listed some questions many non-Japanese have asked me recently along with my replies.

Question: *How could long-time, implacable foes such as the Liberal Democrats and the Socialists suddenly form a coalition?*

Answer: Historically, there have been many examples of conservative party and socialist coalitions in Europe. In France, for instance, the current president is a Socialist while the prime minister is a conservative. However, Japan's Socialists have always been diametrically opposed to the Liberal Democratic Party (LDP) ideologically, policy-wise, and from the standpoint of taking action against corruption. One thing that brought both parties together was the end of the East-West Cold War and another was a shared opposition to Ozawa Ichiro.

Following the collapse of the Soviet Union, the Socialists (SDPJ) quickly became more pragmatic, forming a coalition with Shinseito (composed of former LDP members), the liberal conservatives of the Japan New Party, Komeito, and the Japan Democratic Socialist Party (JDSP). At that time it was agreed that previous LDP foreign and defense policies would be maintained.

The LDP, for its part, selected its most ardent liberal, Kono Yohei, as its president in order to eradicate its stale past image. They have since taken the line that as long as an LDP majority government is not possible they will not decline coalitions with other political parties, with the exception of Shinseito and Ozawa Ichiro, who had slung mud

at the LDP when he bolted from the party. There was rather strong sentiment that shaking hands with the Devil would be acceptable if it caused Ozawa embarrassment.

During the administration of Hata Tsutomu there were unexpected moves to shut the Socialists out. Ozawa—who opposes the Socialists—attempted to form a new party, Reformation, composed of Shinseito, the Japan New Party, the JDSP, and Komeito, and to make the Socialists look foolish. With egg on its face and strong anti-Ozawa sentiments, the SDPJ accepted the LDP's invitation.

It might well be said that the ruling coalition's defining slogan is "anti-Ozawa," just as the slogan that defined the Hosokawa Morihiro Cabinet was "anti-LDP."

Q: *Why does Ozawa Ichiro, who is not even a party head, have so much power?*

A: Since he is the same age as Tanaka Kakuei's deceased son he received special treatment from Tanaka from an early age. He swore allegiance to Tanaka, and attended Tanaka's Lockheed trial proceedings without missing a single day. After Tanaka, Takeshita Noboru and Kanemaru Shin, both of whom Ozawa is related to through marriage, took him under their wings. To the extent that he refused Kanemaru's order to become prime minister following the Kaifu Toshiki government, he has always been embroiled in LDP money politics. It is widely known that during his stint as LDP secretary-general he approached business circles during an upper house election and, in the name of "preserving liberalism," forcefully procured ¥30 billion. He has particularly strong influence in the construction industry and it is rumored that even now he is surrounded by piles of money. So the power of money is the main reason.

Secondly is his influence among

bureaucrats, especially those from the Finance Ministry (MOF). Since the Second World War it has been a prerequisite that Japanese prime ministers come from the Ministry of Finance, have experience serving as finance minister, or have friendly relations with the MOF.

In addition there is the question of the United States' trust. In contrast to the typical Japanese politician, Ozawa possesses the logic, vision, and determination valued by other nations. He also pays attention to international opinions and what global role Japan is expected to play. He is especially aware that gaining and keeping the trust of the U.S. is important, and whenever trouble has arisen in Japan-U.S. relations, in construction, telecommunications, defense, or during the Gulf War, he has cooperated with the U.S. Washington, for its part, makes much of his usefulness and trusts him as "a man who can be depended upon."

He is not blessed with an education, style, nor eloquence, but in the sense that he perceived the importance of money, bureaucrats, and the U.S. early on he is a shrewd politician.

Q: *If all that is true, why isn't Ozawa popular in Japan?*

A: The primary reason for the antipathy toward him is that until a few years ago he was up to his eyeballs in money politics. In a sense he is the person least qualified to talk about political reform. There are not a few people who think that in order to clean up Japan's politics, politicians like Ozawa, along with Takeshita and Kanemaru, should disappear from political life.

Second, he only talks about the future and shows no interest in history. In other words, he has demonstrated no introspection regarding the types of mistakes made by Japan 50 years ago. However, for a country like Japan to discuss the future it is necessary to clearly reflect upon the past.

Thirdly, because he inherited his father's solid constituency when he became a Diet member and it has been smooth sailing since he entered politics, he does not understand the position of the weak. He has no compunction about taking forceful measures to achieve his objectives. In Japanese society, which stresses humility and the seniority system, what is seen as arrogance inevitably incites opposition.

He is overestimated as a hard hitter and a doer. His efforts, whether during the Tokyo gubernatorial election, regarding the "social welfare" tax, or the hubbub over the formation of Reformation, have failed without exception.

Q: *Even so, much as they might be said to be united in their opposition to Ozawa, isn't it completely unnatural that the LDP and SDPJ, who fought like cats and dogs, should form a coalition? Won't the government end up being short-lived and dissolve in Cabinet disunity?*

A: Certainly there are many pessimists who believe that the Murayama administration will not last long.

In the first place, LDP President Kono is a dove, but there are still many hawks who feel that the war in the Pacific was not a war of aggression. Nakasone Yasuhiro, Takeshita, Watanabe Michio, Mitsuoka Hiroshi, Kajiyama Seiroku, and other old-style politicians who are enveloped by suspicions regarding money still remain. In terms of make-up, the LDP and SDPJ are like oil and water.

Second, under the single constituency electoral system it would be better for the governing parties, the LDP and SDPJ, to combine forces against the opposition in their respective electoral districts. But in actuality the two parties,

who have battled each other for many years under the multiple constituency system, will not be able to cooperate. During the next election there is a risk that the LDP-SDPJ unity will collapse in local areas.

If the general election results in a decisive blow to the SDPJ in the single constituencies and in proportional representation alike, the LDP should be able to make a considerable comeback. In such a scenario there is the possibility that they would turn against the SDPJ and form a government on their own or a coalition with Sakigake.

Q: *Are there no optimists who think that the LDP-SDPJ government will beat the odds and last for a while?*

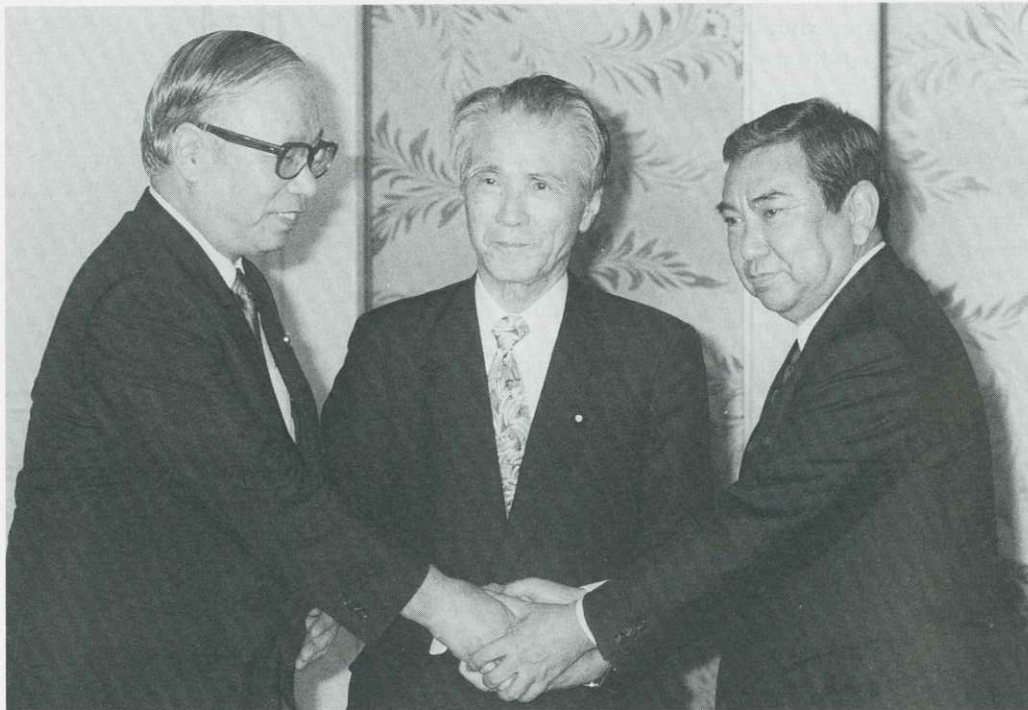
A: Although few in number, there are some. Both the governing and opposition parties are off balance for the upcoming general election and will not be able to cooperate well during the election. Further, there are no great differences between the governing and opposition parties' policies, so it will not be a heated election battle.

Moreover, none of the opposition party leaders, neither Hata, Hosokawa, Ichikawa Yuichi, nor Yonezawa Takashi, possess leadership capabilities or popularity, and the people dislike the dual power structure with strongman Ozawa Ichiro behind the scene.

Also, Prime Minister Murayama Tomiichi is untainted by scandals related to women or money. Considering that the majority of Japanese governments up to now have fallen not due to their policies, but scandals, this is the strength of the Murayama administration.

Asian nations feel comparatively secure about the Murayama government because it has expressed regrets regarding the Second World War. Initially the U.S. issued warnings about Murayama, saying he was a "leftist," but was relieved when he declared that Japan-U.S. security would be firmly maintained and that the Self-Defense Forces were constitutional.

Q: *Even so, how is it that the SDPJ could so easily experience a Copernican revolution regarding the Japan-U.S.*



The leaders of the Sakigake, Socialists and LDP exchanging handshakes at the formation of a new coalition government. The walls between political parties have rapidly crumbled since last summer.

Photo: Kyodo News Service

security pact and the Self-Defense Forces?

A: For some time now there has been growing sentiment within the SDPJ that it would not be possible to maintain public support without shifts in their defense policy. In particular, a refusal to recognize the constitutionality of the Self-Defense Forces would mean that the Murayama government could not exercise control. When Murayama became prime minister it was the perfect time for a "great transformation." Put cynically, it could be said that Ozawa's greatest achievement in bringing the LDP and SDPJ together was that they were forced to adopt the most pragmatic line regarding defense issues. Naturally, it appears that some in the SDPJ's left wing are unhappy at this excessive kowtowing to necessity, but if their last line of resistance is held—that the constitution should not be amended and that it should be recognized that Japan waged a war of aggression in the Pacific—they will probably fall in line with Prime Minister Murayama Tomiichi's realistic approach.

Q: Can the Murayama Cabinet accomplish political reform?

A: They should be able to achieve the single electoral district system, national treasury aid to political parties (¥300 per citizen), and small increases in penalties imposed for election violations, but I do not believe that this will change the quality of money politics and corruption in the political world. Elections will cost money just as in the past. It might well be that vote buying and influence peddling will increase.

To my way of thinking the primary objective of political reform should be breaking bureaucratic control.

Improving the quality of politicians should be the second and both are musts, but there is no sign that both can be achieved under Prime Minister Murayama's leadership. If there is a vacuum in politics, the bureaucrats' power will grow. Further, there is no reason to believe that talented scholars, lawyers, business people, or journalists will participate in elections with the political world as it stands now.

Q: Why is it that there are no politicians with leadership skills in Japanese political circles?

A: Japanese society is based on consensus and it is important for the people at the top not to command, but to be able to achieve deals. We learned a particularly

difficult lesson from the military leadership during the Second World War, so any politician who tries to stand out is cut down to size. For myself, I am of the opinion that in countries that have no tradition of civil freedoms or the right of dissent it is better for those in power not to be strong. It is better to have no leadership than to have the sort offered by Saddam Hussein or Kim Il Sung.

Is it not the case that, compared to the times of Winston Churchill, Charles de Gaulle, Konrad Adenauer, or John Kennedy, Western nations have also come to choose leaders lacking in leadership qualities? It could be said that the mass media has gone so far overboard in their activities, exposing politicians' privacy, that it is more difficult for heroes to come to the fore.

Q: What will Japan's future foreign policy focus be?

A: Resolution of Japan-U.S. trade frictions is the foremost pending issue, but this is not simply a question of opening Japan's markets. We also look forward to a U.S. economic recovery.

Now that the Socialists have become more realistic regarding defense policies, tensions concerning security issues should disappear, but there is the separate issue of U.S. bases. Today the Soviet threat has vanished and the complaints and grievances that people who live near the bases have concerning crashes and noise have nothing to do with ideology. More base streamlining will be needed in the future.

Second, there is the issue of how to deal with tensions on the Korean peninsula. Japan is not concerned about China's nuclear weapons, but is extremely nervous about nuclearization of the Korean peninsula. If the Korean nuclear threat becomes overt, Japanese nationalists will insist on



Although unarmed neutrality has been the Socialists' creed since the struggle against revisions to the Japan-U.S. security treaty in 1960, it appears that they have now conformed to the status quo.

Photo: Kyodo News Service

reinforced military preparedness or perhaps even nuclear weapons. It is indispensable to the peace and security of Asia as a whole that North Korea not be allowed to possess nuclear weapons. However, there is danger that hasty implementation of sanctions against North Korea will have the reverse effect, just as when the prewar economic blockade against Japan led to desperation and the attack on Pearl Harbor. It would be better to assume that North Korea is not going to proceed as logically as an advanced democracy might.

Third, how should international contributions be made? There is already a national consensus that Japan should contribute more internationally in terms of personnel as well as money. However, when it comes to the question of whether that should extend to the military, specifically U.N. peacekeeping forces in addition to peacekeeping operations, there is a difference of opinion between hawks and doves. This also ties in with a permanent seat on the U.N. Security Council. The hawks are actively trying to obtain a Security Council seat while the doves are taking a cautious stance, fearing that this might be linked to military contributions. The Foreign Ministry is taking the hard line on this matter. For the time being the Murayama Cabinet is putting forth cautious arguments, but if the Socialists lose the general election events would probably proceed at the Foreign Ministry's pace.

There is also the Japan-Russia relationship. Japanese welcome the disappearance of the Soviet threat and hope that the Russian economy stabilizes, but as long as there is no effort to return the Northern Territories I believe that it cannot be expected that Japan will undertake full support for Russia.

During the Second World War Germany unilaterally abrogated the nonaggression pact and invaded the Soviet Union. In the Far East, on the other hand, the Soviet Union unilaterally tore up the Japan-Soviet neutrality pact and invaded Japan. In addition, 600,000 Japanese soldiers were hauled off to Siberia as prisoners and the Northern Territories were snatched.

Japan is aware of its sins against America and the nations of Asia, but believes it did absolutely nothing wrong against the Soviet Union. At a minimum the Soviet Union should have recognized Japan's residual sovereignty over the Northern Territories and shown some intention of returning them. That would constitute a compromise under which Japan would recognize the permanent residence rights of the Russians who now live there.

Q: *What will the focus of internal policies be?*

A: First, political reform. In Japanese politics the power of civil servants is so strong that it might be better to refer to a "bureaucratocracy" rather than democracy. Other nations are also watching to see how much politicians can dilute the power of government officials.

Second, how to overcome the recession? With the strong yen, rapid export growth is not to be expected and increasing unemployment is also possible. If this situation continues it will naturally lead to increasing criticism from business and labor circles that Murayama knows nothing about economics.

Third, the tax question. In answer to the expectations of the public and the U.S., the Murayama Cabinet intends to continue tax cuts for at least three years, but the issue is finance sources. Increases in consumption taxes will inevitably incur public opposition, but without a tax increase there is some question as to whether administrative reforms and deficit bonds alone will do the trick.

Q: *When will the next general election be held? And what will the results be?*

A: Prime Minister Murayama will undoubtedly postpone the dissolution of the Diet for as long as possible in order to prepare for a general election. Whatever their protestations, the other political parties also know deep down that an immediate dissolution would be trouble. The business world also feels that measures toward an economic recovery are the top priority and that

this is not the time to be fussing with a general election. Bearing all of this in mind the common sense view is that there will probably be no election until spring next year. However, this will change if public opinion in favor of an early dissolution suddenly increases.

It is absolutely impossible to predict the outcome of an election at this point in time, but a public opinion poll undertaken by the *Asahi Shimbun* in July should provide an idea of the percentage of support enjoyed by the political parties: LDP 38%, SDPJ 15%, Shinseito 10%, Sakigake 6%, Japan New Party 6%, Komeito 6%, and Communist Party 3%.

It is unlikely that the LDP and SDPJ will pool joint candidates in single constituencies. At the same time the opposition will probably not cooperate for the election and nobody can envision the results, but my feeling is that for the LDP, which can field candidates in all 300 constituencies, and Shinseito, which is rumored to have abundant funding, the numbers will be higher than reported in the *Asahi Shimbun* poll and a bit lower for the SDPJ, Japan New Party and JDSP.

Regarding proportional representation, the entire nation will be divided into 11 blocks and the winners from each party will be determined according to the number of votes obtained. Here as well we can predict that the SDPJ, Japan New Party, and JDSP will lose votes.

Except for the Communists there is no marked difference between the policies of individual parties, so it is likely that the number of nonvoters will increase among people who are tired of politics.

There is a great probability that the election will result in an LDP government or an LDP-Sakigake coalition, with the Socialists no longer needed and being tossed back into the opposition. If this happens there will be another political reshuffling. Political instability and confusion will continue for some time.

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