

Test of Success

By Eiji Suzuki

Now that the structure of the world economy is undergoing rapid change, other nations are starting to have far greater expectations of Japan's economic and technological power. At the same time, Japan is facing a multitude of domestic structural problems that urgently need to be solved.

Given this state of affairs, MITI's "vision" appropriately proposes the following three objectives for international trade and industrial policy in the 1990s: 1) Contributing to the international community and promoting internal reforms; 2) Improving the quality of Japanese life; and 3) Securing the foundations for long-term economic growth.

Its responses to domestic structural issues have not always been the best, yet Japan must now contribute to the global community as a truly internationalist state. This will, I believe, have to mean transcending vested interests and conventional wisdom. And that is why I am so anxiously and somewhat skeptically watching to see just how MITI intends to actually implement the vision's three most difficult principles: integrating foreign and domestic policy, effecting continuing internal reforms, and enhancing cooperation among administrative bodies.

In addition to dealing with the fundamental problem of how Japan is going to attain truly comfortable living and material affluence, the Japanese people will have to rethink their concept of the rich life. In recent years, the trend has been to minimize the importance of family life, in other words, married life that is centered around children, child-rearing and a happy family life.

Thus policy has to pay more attention to how to create lifestyles reconciling and balancing both the home and the workplace, not only from the standpoint, as outlined in the vision, of helping women play a greater role in society, utilizing women's abilities and facilitating the entry of women into the workplace, but also from the standpoint of marriage, childbirth, child-rearing, and building a materially and spiritually rich household.

The birthrate in Japan has fallen to 1.57. Extrapolating from current trends,

some demographers predict that in 100 years, the population will be half what it is now. Such statistics demonstrate the importance of taking another look at our concept of "a richer life centered around the family."

The basic stance of the latest MITI vision, which aims to balance and harmonize quality of life with industry and production, marks a dramatic shift in the nation's trade and industrial policies away from an emphasis on economic growth and production.

Since the publication last year of the "Report by the Committee for the Study of Labor Problems," the Japan Federation of Employers' Associations has been dealing with various issues such as high land prices, differentials between foreign and domestic prices, the tax system and welfare, and has come up with a large number of proposals and recommendations. Japan's nominal wages are among the highest in the world, but a number of problems have to be dealt with, such as

how to raise the real standard of living for Japan's workers and how to remedy the situation in which urban salaried workers do not earn enough in their lifetimes to buy their own home.

I totally approve of the idea of a human-oriented international trade and industrial policy. Moreover, I very much hope for the development and implementation of the policies described in the vision for the 1990s, as well as a responsiveness to the problems of the global environment as part of an international contribution in the 21st century and in line with its emphasis on restoring the environment. I fervently hope that with the broad support of all classes of people, labor and management alike, the vision will bear positive results.

In conclusion, I would like to thank the members of the Industrial Structure Council who worked out the report. ■

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Rethinking the Industrial Structure Council

The Industrial Structure Council has been crucial to Japanese industry's post-war restructuring. Rebuilding the coal industry, determining oil and nuclear energy policy, and nurturing the petrochemical industry, the computer and information-processing industries and other leading industries, the Council has provided a forum for the public and private sectors to cooperate in setting strategic goals and overseeing the division of labor in implementation.

Not so in the 1990s. Liberated from the fixation on surpassing the Western economies, industrial policy in the post-catch-up 1990s will face a host of new issues requiring inter-ministry cooperation. To take just one of these issues, the overconcentration on Tokyo clearly cannot be solved by MITI alone. In fact,

many of the problems cited in the "vision" have long been centers of contention among the National Land Agency, the Ministry of Home Affairs and other bureaucratic fiefdoms.

There is, of course, no reason why a MITI vision should have to limit itself to strictly MITI problems. Yet when it deals with issues on other ministries' turf, it runs the risk of being a typically nice-sounding and innocuous government report unless it includes implementation specifics. Important though this vision for the 1990s is, it may be even more important to rethink the Industrial Structure Council's *modus operandi*.

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