

Ongoing Political Realignment

By Takahashi Yoshikatsu

A coalition Cabinet led by Murayama Tomiichi and composed of the Liberal Democratic, Social Democratic, and New Harbinger (Sakigake) parties was inaugurated on June 30. The appointment of the chairman of the SDPJ, the "eternal opposition," as the head of a new government supported by the LDP and Sakigake was received with great surprise overseas. The historic decision of the LDP and SDPJ to cooperate, following 38 years—from 1955 until last year—of antagonistic relations, referred to as the "1955 system," was shocking to the Japanese public as well.

"The world of politics is murky" is a famous quote from the late LDP Deputy General Secretary Kawashima Jiro, and undoubtedly few people would have predicted a three-party coalition government with the LDP, SDPJ and Sakigake. However, in view of the changing political situation in the wake of the collapse of the LDP's long reign, the advent of the Murayama government might be

considered an inevitable conclusion.

Two motifs were already apparent when the Hosokawa administration took the stage under the anti-LDP banner: first, the selection of the head of a party that was not the largest to take on the post of prime minister, ignoring Diet Cabinet system rules and, second, a coalition of political parties whose fundamental political beliefs diverged widely. Put cynically, it was all right to openly ignore ideologies and rules in Japanese politics just as long as there was an appropriate slogan.

In the midst of this political situation Prime Minister Murayama, who during the time of the 1960 revisions to the Japan-U.S. security treaty stood in the Socialist camp and strongly opposed the revisions saying, "China and Japan have the same foe in U.S. imperialism," affirmed at his first press conference that he would not alter Japan's foreign policy and would adhere to a cooperative line with the U.S. With regard to

the various nations' leaders who participated in the Naples summit meeting, he indicated that he would maintain the continuity of Japan's diplomatic and security policies. The fact that as prime minister he is sending an unprecedented message put the cynical side of Japanese politics in stark relief. However, these words and deeds on the part of Murayama were manifestations of efforts to dispel unease and encourage trust in response to the tremendous vortex of misgivings engendered both at home and abroad by the appearance of the chairman of the "party against everything," and a member of the Socialists' left wing, as head of the government.

Because the future direction of the realignment of the Japanese political world is closely related to the formation of the LDP/SDPJ/Sakigake coalition government that almost no one could have predicted, I will provide a brief review here.

The shell game

As noted above, since the formation of the Hosokawa government and continuing with that of Hata Tsutomu, it has become possible in Japanese politics to form a coalition of parties whose policies and ideologies are fundamentally different. Particularly with regard to the formation of the new coalition, four background points can be raised.

If rules and ideologies have no significance, the only thing that counts is strength in numbers. Hosokawa led the fifth largest party while Hata was the leader of the third largest, but both were chosen prime minister. If a coalition was to be attempted under the slogan "formation of a stable government," then the argument that a coalition between the LDP, the largest party, and the SDPJ, the number two party, would logically



Social Democratic Party Chairman Murayama Tomiichi, chosen Japan's 81st prime minister, receives congratulations from supporters.

Photo: Kyodo News Service

come into play.

Secondly, the effects of the end of global Cold War structures have diluted the composition of the confrontation between conservatives and reformers in Japan, the showdown between the LDP and SDPJ. The two-party system in place since 1955 has evolved into a power-sharing arrangement under the Murayama government. The effects of the collapse of the Berlin Wall are finally appearing in Japanese politics.

Also, opposing the political machinations of Ozawa Ichiro, secretary-general of the Japan New Party and the primary force behind the Hosokawa and Hata governments, and Komeito Party Secretary-General Ichikawa Yuichi, the LDP, SDPJ, and Sakigake revolted against centralization of power and tried to put a stop to Ozawa and Ichikawa's strong arm politics. "The enemy of my enemy is my friend" as the saying goes, and because all three parties were arrayed against Ozawa-style political maneuvering it could be said that this resulted in the three parties forming a net to encircle Ozawa.

Lastly, seen in a positive light, the LDP, SDPJ, and Sakigake had a renewed perception that in the real world of politics it would be impossible to achieve their own political ideals and policies without being in power, so in order to form a government they chose the coalition route that hardly anyone might have predicted. Both the Socialists and Sakigake had experienced the cozy feeling of being in power during the eight-month interval of the Hosokawa government, and for 11 months the LDP had experienced the wretchedness of life in opposition. All three parties sought to escape their painful opposition party existence and, indifferent to appearances, opted for the path to the acquisition of power.

Prime Minister Murayama stresses that his Cabinet's fundamental character is a "social democratic, liberal, dovish government." Deputy Prime Minister Kono Yohei, president of the LDP, also basically concurs with this line of thinking. Finance Minister Takemura Masayoshi, chairman of the Sakigake, had tried hardest to achieve a govern-

ment that was liberal and dovish in character and his fundamental policies were in agreement with those of the SDPJ.

However, two hours before the start of the plenary session to designate the prime minister on June 29, the final day of the regular Diet session, former prime minister and president of the LDP, Kaifu Toshiki, announced his intention to leave the LDP. As an influential figure at the center of the LDP, he could not condone a coalition between the LDP and SDPJ. In addition, with the backing of his former opponent, Ozawa, he hurriedly placed himself as an opposition candidate to Murayama in the election for prime minister. Then, as no candidate obtained a majority of first round ballots, a second runoff election was held, which Murayama won. The final election results were 261 votes for Murayama Tomiichi, 214 for Kaifu Toshiki, 29 damaged ballots, five absent, and five abstentions.

Toward a two-party system

I would now like to review the character of the government and opposition, and the future reorganization of the political world from the standpoint of the political situation immediately following the inauguration of the Murayama coalition (as of July 7, 1994).

During the period of the Hata government, labeled an "anti-LDP, pro-reform government," a tripartite political deadlock developed between the former coalition parties, the LDP, and the SDPJ and Sakigake. However, the Hata Cabinet's former coalition parties' support of ex-Prime Minister Kaifu to induce the breakup of the LDP and SDPJ during this latest change of government was a limited, but forward, step toward the two-party system Ozawa Ichiro and others seek. Ozawa wanted to maintain the government even after the Hata Cabinet's mass resignation, and only missed achieving this by a slight margin of votes. The former governing parties felt that it was quite an achievement that former Prime Minister

Nakasone Yasuhiro and former Foreign Minister Watanabe Michio of the LDP cast their votes for Kaifu and that they had managed to amass a force of over 200 Diet members. Holding two cards, former Prime Minister Kaifu, whose popularity with the public is quite high, along with former Prime Minister Hata, the former governing parties can count the pluses.

In the future Japanese political world, several smaller parties, such as the Communists, will probably continue to exist, but on the whole it appears that the infrastructure for a two-party system has been created.

One, a group with liberal, dovish characteristics, can be seen as the core of the three parties in the Murayama government. For example, regarding Japanese participation in U.N. peace-keeping operations there is the stance that cooperation should be limited to non-military facets, within the limits of the Japanese Constitution. *Japan, A Small But Brightly Shining Country* written by Takemura Masayoshi, who broke away from the LDP to form the Sakigake Party last year, symbolizes their vision for Japan. Rather than striving to become a great military or political power, political power should emphasize the attainment of a political ideology that seeks to put precedence on each citizen's individual life over the state.

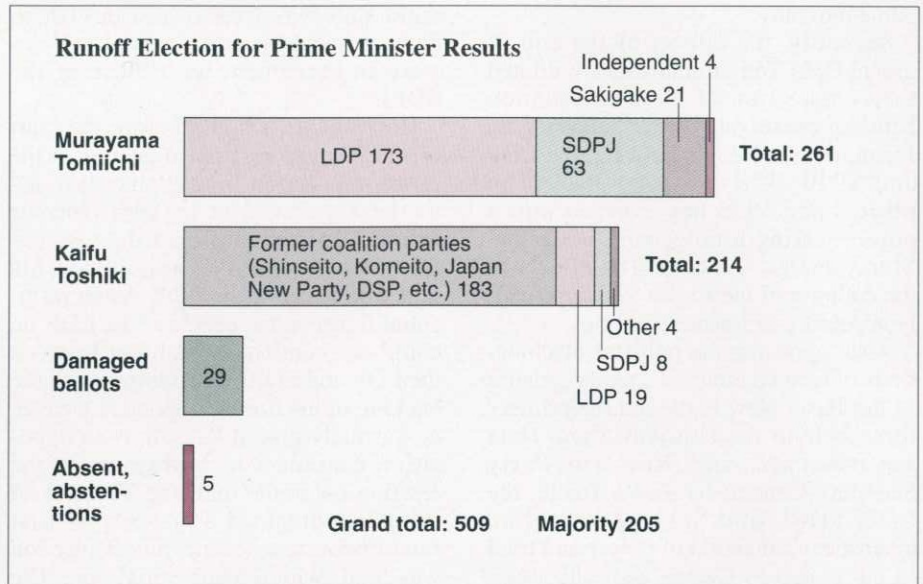
Another vision for the nation, as symbolized by Ozawa Ichiro's work, *Blueprint for a New Japan: The Rethinking of a Nation*, puts the emphasis on political influence. Ozawa's concepts stress the ideological objective of converting Japan into a "normal" nation. This is a position that rejects the path of economic development that conservative politics has followed since the end of World War II. As such, the path toward becoming a "normal nation" as recommended by Ozawa and Ichikawa, places considerable importance on diplomacy and national defense policies. For example, they hold the position that the Self-Defense Forces should, if necessary, be permitted to exercise military force overseas in order to promote international contributions.

Both the Socialists and the Democratic Socialist Party (DSP) have the same support matrix in Rengo (the Japanese Trade Union Confederation), a national organization of labor unions. Although they recognize the existence of the Self-Defense Forces, the Socialist Party charter notes that the existence of the Self-Defense Forces is unconstitutional while the DSP takes the position that the existence and role of the SDF should be actively sanctioned and participation in overseas peacekeeping operations should be promoted. In other words, this is another split issue and can be seen in the battle for power between the parties of the new and former governments. I believe the ideological differences between the dovish, liberal government and the neo-conservatives who emphasize the state over the individual will be key in the future reorganization of Japanese politics.

At this stage the differences between the Murayama coalition parties and the parties of the former Hata Cabinet cannot clearly be delineated into two forces based simply on their visions for the nation. Reorganization is still in progress and within Kono's LDP there are several influential groups that emphasize the state and strongly demand amendments to the constitution. Further, there are some influential members of the former coalition parties who cannot follow the line taken by Ozawa and Ichikawa.

In addition to competing visions for the nation, there are the questions of switching political leadership from bureaucrats to politicians, from bureaucrats to the people, and whether to move from centralized authority to decentralization.

Moreover, with regard to political methods and attitudes toward political conduct, with Ozawa and Ichikawa holding actual power—making it a Shinseito/Komeito Cabinet, or in other words, a two-tiered, political power sharing arrangement—there were facets of the actual political situation that were difficult for the public to see during the latter part of the Hosokawa Cabinet and during the Hata administration. As such we can also note the interstices of poli-



tics spearheaded by strong leadership and politics of open information and transparent policy decision processes.

With regard to the handling of tax reforms (including consumption tax increases), membership in the U.N. Security Council, the nuclear development issue in North Korea, and other important political issues, we cannot omit a discussion of the differing ways in which the political ideologies and the political and administrative systems discussed above would deal with these issues.

The Murayama coalition government has the head of the SDPJ as its leader, but as the prime minister himself has stated: international agreements, including security and defense issues, will be respected and order will be maintained, and the same efforts as always regarding the elimination of international trade frictions, expansion of domestic demand, shrinking of the trade surplus, and promotion of deregulation will be made without fail for sound growth and stability in the world economy. The government and public are both fully aware that as a member of the family of nations Japan must stress harmonious ideologies and continue to cooperate or it will be difficult to survive into the 21st century.

In July 1993 a general election that

focused on whether LDP-style politics would continue or whether there would be a shift to anti-LDP politics was held. However, since then there have been three changes of government and dizzying changes in alliances and combinations between political parties. Small new political parties and policy groups have also appeared one after another. However, the public has yet to pass judgment on these abrupt changes in the political system or on political reorganization. It is believed that there is growing public sentiment that, after the completion of the realignment of the lower house into 300 single-seat electoral districts this fall, the people should be allowed to pass judgment on the new form of politics under the new election system.

Reorganization of the Japanese political world is still in progress and it appears that confusion and trial and error efforts will continue in the future. However, following the end of the Cold War it should be thought necessary that a general election be held as soon as possible under the new electoral system in order to formulate a new national consensus.

Takahashi Yoshikatsu, a political commentator, is a professor at Tokushima Bunri University in Tokushima Prefecture.