

## Eye on Washington by Nicholas F. Benton

### Japan at Toronto: patience running out

At the Toronto Economic Summit June 19-21, Japanese sources told me that their nation's patience with the rest of the G-7 industrialized nations is wearing very thin.

The Japanese, taking a low profile, did not make such feelings known in a way easily detectable to the Western eye. But, according to one well-placed source, from the Japanese point of view, some comments from their government leaders in recent weeks have been unprecedented in their candor.

The two leading examples were the remark by Prime Minister Noboru Takeshita in Europe just prior to the Economic Summit, warning that too much outside pressure against Japan could trigger a "nationalistic" backlash in his country, and the remark by Foreign Minister Uno following a speech by U.S. Defense Secretary Frank Carlucci in Tokyo earlier in the month. Uno said that Carlucci had "made a major mistake" by telling the Japanese population that they had to make a greater commitment to support global strategic military efforts.

In typically Japanese fashion, when this reporter asked a press spokesman about the significance of Takeshita's warning, the spokesman's response during the open briefing session was to deny that any warning was meant by the remark.

After the public briefing, however, another press aide approached me, and gave me a detailed account of the question to Takeshita at that press conference, and of Takeshita's answer. He demonstrated in this way that, in fact, Takeshita did imply a warning in his remark.

In reality, the Japanese were treated extremely rudely at the Economic Summit. There were clearly racist influences underlying much of the hostility to the Japanese economic model, as well as that of the "newly industrialized countries" of Asia, reflected in the formal pronouncements of the G-7.

The more than 4,000 journalists present noticed that the Japanese press briefing room was located two flights of stairs away from the briefing centers of the other major nations, at the other end of the enormous convention center. The Japanese were stuck off in a corner by themselves, even though they had the most ambitious briefing schedule of any nation present. Consequently, attendance at their briefings was uniformly the lowest.

The Japanese held no fewer than five press briefings per day in English, apart from briefings they held for their own media in Japanese.

All the other nations held their press briefings in their native languages only, with no translations provided. Some held only one briefing per day, the others two at most.

Perhaps the biggest direct insult to the Japanese came when U.S. Treasury Secretary James Baker III, during a briefing at the U.S. press center, denied that the Japanese had raised any question with him concerning further integration of the European Community, and the pending U.S.-Canada free trade agreement, which would create two trading blocs that would be protectionist toward third parties, such as Japan.

During their frequent briefings, the Japanese repeatedly said that, since the creation of these two blocs leaves them as the only member of the G-7 not in a trading bloc, they were asking a lot of questions about whether these blocs would put them at a disadvantage.

"We are not making any accusations, but just asking questions. Our businessmen do a great deal of business in Canada and Europe, and this means a great deal to them," one Japanese briefing officer said.

But, when I asked Baker about this, he insulted them by denying that the issue had ever been raised with him. So, many reporters went to the next Japanese briefing seeking a clarification. One asked the same question I had put to Baker of the Japanese spokesman. Sure enough, the spokesman reiterated that this was a major question with them, which they had raised on numerous occasions.

It turned out, according to reports the next morning, that at the dinner meeting of the foreign ministers later that night, this was virtually the sole subject of discussion, perhaps because of Baker's outrageous public evasion. An obtuse response to the concern was even contained in the final economic declaration of the summit, implying that further integration of the EC and the U.S.-Canada trade agreement were steps in the direction of free trade and, as such, would strengthen the force of free trade worldwide.

But, as a spokesman for the EC told me, although this may be the "spirit" of these accords, "There is no legally binding commitment to the fact that there will not wind up being protectionism at our borders."

A Japanese spokesman told me that Japan would not move to turn its trading partners among the "newly industrialized countries" of Asia into a third trading bloc. He cited mainly cultural and geographic factors standing in the way of any such arrangement in the near future, but he did hold out the possibility of some kind of special relationship—although not exactly the same as the other two—emerging over time.