

Japan's new premier: an easy U.S. partner?

by Lydia Cherry

In an Aug. 29 interview before leaving for the United States to meet with President Bush, Japan's new Prime Minister Toshiki Kaifu vowed to resist the growing protectionist pressures at home, and to lead Japan into a closer working relationship with the United States. According to wire service reports, Kaifu said that Japan will not renege on agreements to liberalize farm and other markets, even though voter anger over the concessions to U.S. trade bashing in these areas was largely responsible for the ruling party's electoral setbacks in recent months.

A Japanese Foreign Ministry official said about the two government heads: "I think they will establish a very good personal relationship. Prime Minister Kaifu's theses are in line with President Bush's gentler and kinder nation concept." Despite the announcement Aug. 10 by new Japanese Trade Minister Hikaru Mitsunaga, that Japan would not discuss any trade problems under the threat of U.S. retaliation, this is known to be part of the Bush-Kaifu agenda. Japan was named a violator under the U.S. Omnibus Trade Act's Super 301 clause, an amazing piece of legislation which gives U.S. government officials authority to take unilateral punitive economic actions against nations which the U.S. has decided need to make "structural changes" in their trade practices.

The U.S. government approved of the Japanese "Old Guard's" tagging of the relatively inexperienced Kaifu, who belongs to the smallest, Komoto, faction of the ruling Liberal Democratic Party and has no power base of his own. The U.S. embassy in Tokyo was much less pleased with Ryutaro Hashimoto, the ruling party leader who initially emerged as front-runner after Prime Minister Sosuke Uno's forced resignation just a month ago. (Hashimoto was then secretary general of the ruling party; and in the Kaifu cabinet he is finance minister.) Hashimoto, according to Japan experts, is part of a generation of new leaders unhindered by some of the Old Guard's feeling of "debt and obligation" to the United States. It is clear that the U.S. establishment doesn't want another Nakasone, a prime minister with a vision for Japan.

Kaifu has interesting connections of his own. Though not belonging to Noboru Takeshita's party faction, he was hand-picked by Takeshita when the Old Guard decided against Hashimoto. Takeshita was forced out of office because of the all-pervading Recruit stock share scandal. Like Takeshita, Kaifu is a graduate of Wasade University in Tokyo, and both

developed their rhetorical skills as members of the Wasade debating club.

Kaifu also is reported to have close ties with circles in Britain. The *Financial Times* noted Aug. 11 that Kaifu has been a longstanding member of the Japan-British Parliamentarians League and was a founding member of the "2000" group of Japanese and British political and business leaders formed five years ago to discuss issues of mutual long-term interest. Kaifu was awarded a Knighthood of the British Empire by Queen Elizabeth II when she visited Japan in 1975. The *Financial Times* added that, as Japanese television viewers could see during interviews with him at his Tokyo flat, Kaifu hangs a large British flag on the wall of his study.

Waiting in the wings

Without leadership with a vision for Japan, there is speculation that the LDP could continue its losing streak in the more crucial lower house elections, expected for December or early 1990. The Japan Socialist Party, which made significant gains in the elections for the upper house of Japan's parliament in late July, is organizing an opposition strategy for the lower house elections.

The JSP is trying to tone down its left-wing rhetoric to make its party line more palatable, in particular to the smaller opposition parties which together with the JSP have the majority in the less powerful house. Thus, it was announced Aug. 21 that the JSP has reversed its decades-old stance and has decided to uphold the U.S.-Japan Security Treaty, if it comes to power in the next election. Socialist Party Secretary General Tsuruo Yamaguchi also promised at least temporary Socialist support for the Armed Forces—again a turnaround. The JSP's gains were made in the earlier elections by submerging these issues altogether and focusing on how the LDP leadership was corrupt and had caved in to U.S. trade war demands to the point of destroying the country.

In its move to the right, at least for public consumption, the JSP is not abandoning its old friends. JSP chairwoman Takeko Doi on Aug. 16 attended a peace forum with members of West Germany's Socialist Democratic Party (SPD), where she called for SPD support in promoting confidence-building measures in the Pacific. Kyodo news service noted that Hans Schierer, an SPD district leader in Schwandorf district of Bavaria near the German-Czech border, proposed, and Doi agreed, that if the SPD takes power in the general election a year from now and the JSP does likewise, the two governments should form a bloc in facing similar problems. Doi pledged to arrange a meeting with Canada, Communist China, the Soviet Union, the United States, and both Koreas for "confidence-building talks." In a speech Aug. 14, on the anniversary of Japan's World War II surrender, Doi elaborated: "Our party intends to hold an international forum with the U.S., Canada, the Soviet Union, China and both Koreas to bring about the nuclear weapons-free area in Asia, after realizing Japan's arms reduction."