

Fukuda Foiled: Japan, USSR Proceed On Fishing Talks

Japan and the Soviet Union have resumed talks on an interim provisional fishing agreement. Negotiations between the two nations had almost completely broken down April 1 when the Soviet Union ordered all Japanese fishing boats out of its new 200-mile zone bordering north Japan.

The breakthrough in the talks came after Japanese Prime Minister Takeo Fukuda, under severe pressure from Japan's businessmen, backtracked on his bid to push for an anti-Soviet "peace treaty" with Peking, the real reason for the initial collapse of the talks. Fukuda's inability to disrupt Japan's growing economic ties with the Soviet Union has wounded his meagre political credibility in Japan.

The Japanese government, reports the April 12 *Daily Yomiuri*, will send a special envoy to Washington "to appease the Carter Administration's anger" over the resumption of the Japanese-Soviet talks. Evidently the U.S. government believes that Japan committed "a breach of international faith" by not following the precedents set in the earlier U.S.-Soviet fishing negotiations.

U.S. pressure on Fukuda has led to a certain stalling of the talks now going on between Japan's Agriculture and Forestry Minister Zenko Suzuki and Soviet Fisheries Minister Alexandr Ishkov. Although late last week Japan's newspapers were predicting that the negotiations would be concluded, the talks have been delayed by the Soviet Union's stalling on the presentation of specific fishing quotas for the Japanese.

The Soviets' delay is a pressure tactic on Japan not to back down in the face of Washington pressure and raise the long-standing issue of the ownership of four islands in the north of Japan. Fukuda was hoping to use this issue to wreck the talks. Last week Fukuda's special envoy to Moscow, chief cabinet secretary Sunao Sonoda and Soviet Premier Alexei Kosygin reached a compromise agreement on the islands which serves as the basis for the resumption of the Suzuki-Ishkov talks. Japan decided to recognize the 200-mile Soviet limit around the four islands in return for fishing rights, thereby bypassing the ownership issue until a later date.

"Perfect Diplomatic Blunder"

The backfiring of Fukuda's disruption tactic has delighted his opponents inside both the ruling Liberal Democratic Party and the press. A columnist for the anti-Fukuda *Daily Yomiuri* lambasted Fukuda's moves as a "series of fiascos" which culminated in a "perfect diplomatic blunder." The *Yomiuri* contrasts the approach of former Prime Minister Tanaka in his talks with the Soviets four years ago, noting that before Tanaka entered fishery negotiations he first sent a

personal letter to Soviet General Secretary Brezhnev stressing Japan's desire to cooperate in the economic development of Siberia. Fukuda, *Yomiuri* notes, displayed only hostility to the Soviet while his government made busy overtures to Peking.

According to *Yomiuri* columnist Minoru Hirano, "the first step taken by the Fukuda cabinet upon its formation was to inform the Soviet Union of a postponement of the Japan-Soviet ministerial conference to be held in Moscow with Foreign Minister Hatoyama present. The official reason was that Hatoyama had to attend the Diet session but a remark by (Chief Cabinet Secretary) Sonoda 'in consideration of Japan-China relations' strongly provoked Moscow. In effect Sonoda's positive attitude toward Peking was much in evidence in January and February." Hirano concludes: "The blunders this time compared with the display of superb diplomatic skill four years ago makes us keenly feel...how difficult it is to conduct equidistance diplomacy toward Peking and Moscow...and what foresight Japan should have in carrying out such diplomacy."

The Peking Angle

The talks between Sonoda and Kosygin made it clear that Fukuda's desire to enter an anti-Soviet alliance with Peking and Washington by signing a peace treaty with Peking which will include an anti-Soviet "anti-hegemony" clause was at the center of the fishing dispute. The talks became most heated when Sonoda referred to the "responsibilities" of a military superpower like the Soviet Union, a remark which Kosygin took as an attack on Moscow's "hegemonic policies." The conversation then exploded with debate centering on "Japan-U.S. relations and the China problem."

Why Fukuda Failed

But the prospect of Japan being trapped in an alliance with Peking and Washington against the Soviet Union was a totally unsellable package to Japan's businessmen. (See Asian Economic Survey). For one thing, the incident occurred at the same time that Japan and the Soviet Union are in the final stages of talks in Moscow around major oil exploration and development projects in the Yakutsk region of Siberia.

The commitment by Japan's big businessmen to develop both the Soviet Union and China was emphasised by Toshio Doko, head of the big business federation Keidanren, who has just returned from Peking. Doko denied that China had succeeded in putting the brake on Soviet-Japanese development. Interviewed in the daily *Mainichi* April 5 Doko "emphasised that Sino-Japanese and Russo-Japanese relations are two different things. 'I thing Chairman Hua Kuo-feng (of China) understands this because he gave us a hearty welcome.'"