

Simulating the Government by the Democratic Party of Japan

By SUGIURA Masaaki

An opinion poll conducted by the Liberal Democratic Party of Japan (LDP) figured a devastating "defeat" of the party. A survey conducted by Teikoku Databank, a private corporate credit research company in Japan, showed that 48.2 % of Japanese companies consider a change of governing parties at the next general election "necessary." We can see that Japanese business circles are eagerly waiting for the advent of a regime change. The Democratic Party of Japan (DPJ) stands a fair chance of rising to power, if an early dissolution of the House of Representatives is realized. However, the conceptual plan for the administration sketched out by Mr. Ozawa Ichiro, the DPJ leader, does not give us a clear picture of what his government would be like. Therefore, let me simulate what is going to happen if DPJ comes into power.

[Cabinet]

As for the timing of announcing the cabinet list, it cannot be after the general election. Presumably, it will be scheduled either on the day of the dissolution of the the House of Representatives or on the day of the announcement of the general election, and thus DPJ will appeal to the nation for their confidence in "Ozawa Cabinet." They indeed are thinking that way. As regards nonpolitician candidates for cabinet member, they will be given higher rankings on the party's proportional representation list to win seats in the Diet and join the cabinet. For example, Mr. Sakakibara Eisuke, former Vice Minister of Finance for International Affairs, or Mr. Fujii Hirohisa, former Minister of Finance, will possibly be placed at the top of the list to be appointed Minister of Finance. The first candidate for Deputy Prime Minister would be Mr. Kan Naoto. A front-runner for Chief Cabinet Secretary would be Mr. Hatoyama Yukio, who has been moving in tandem with Mr. Ozawa recently. A shoo-in for Minister of Health, Labour and Welfare, now in focus, is beyond doubt Mr. Nagatsuma Akira. The cabinet list will be based on the premise that DPJ can form a single-party administration.

[Taking Control of Bureaucracy]

Seeking power by accusing the LDP of its collusion with bureaucrats, DPJ will be put to the test of its ability to take control of them. According to the senior leaders of the DPJ, they have already set down to envisage each ministry's personnel reshuffles, thereby replacing senior officials

of such troubled governmental bodies as Ministry of Finance, Ministry of Defense and Ministry of Health, Labour and Welfare. In other words, DPJ considers taking on the US pattern of administration change, which is accompanied by sweeping reshuffles of government officials. Appointments of non-bureaucrats to director-general level posts are also in the options. Mr. Ozawa also plans to assign 100 DPJ Diet members to each ministry. In addition to existing "Senior Vice Minister" and "Parliamentary Secretary" for each ministry, he will create a new post of "Advisor to Minister," and increase the number of Deputy Chief Cabinet Secretaries in the Prime Minister's Office, which is now two, one from the House of Representatives and the other from the House of Councilors. The increase by 100 people means almost twice the number of people will supervise bureaucrats. I am afraid that this might entangle the chain of command in the administration.

[Livelihood of the People]

Prospect of no dependable source of revenue notwithstanding, "dole-out campaign promise" will be put into effect. A per capita "Child Allowance" of 26,000 JPY per month will be issued until a child in a family completes junior-high school education at the age of 15. Public high school education will be made free of charge, and the tuition for private high school, universities will also be reduced. Temp service within two months will be prohibited. The national average of minimum hourly wage will be raised to 1,000 JPY. "Individual Household Income Support System" will be established for farmers. Also, another "Income Support System" for families engaged in forestry and fisheries industry will be discussed. Provisional tariff on petrol will be abolished and a tax cut of 2.6 trillion JPY will be carried out. Notorious "Health Care System for the Latter-stage Elderly" will be eliminated. The problem is that the cost required to implement these policies is estimated at about 20 trillion JPY, roughly one-tenth of Japan's national budget. It would be virtually impossible to generate such an amount of money. It is truly the Achilles' heel of the DPJ. The general public would herald the introduction of these policies at the outset. But after half a year or so, they will learn of a payback called consumption tax in a foreseeable future. The market will even more sensitively react to the launch of a new administration, sending stock prices into a tailspin.

[Foreign Policy & National Security]

While stressing the importance of maintaining and developing the Japan-US Alliance, Mr. Ozawa has not changed his stance on a bill to extend Japan's refueling mission as unconstitutional. When it comes to Japan's relations with the US, Mr. Ozawa once infuriated Mr. John Thomas Schieffer, US Ambassador to Japan, who paid Mr. Ozawa a visit last year to ask him to approve of extending the refueling mission, and they have not yet been reconciled. Suspending the refueling mission apparently contradicts his support of the Japan-US Alliance. To him, the national security of Japan, while centering on the Japan-US Alliance, should eventually be covered by the peacekeeping

operations of the United Nations. Needless to say, however, the UN is of little use when it comes to national security of Japan. A country would surely be overthrown if it sits and waits for a call for the UN Security Council in a time of crisis. Mr. Ozawa's adherence to the belief in "almighty" UN should stir domestic debate over the country's foreign and security policy. But, remember the case of the Japan Socialist Party's administration of Japan, led by Mr. Murayama Tomiichi, which so unabashedly veered towards upholding the Japan-US Alliance, sacrificing the party's decades of antagonistic stance against the alliance. Likewise, Mr. Ozawa's foreign and security policy might easily be turned over.

[Mr. Ozawa's Qualification for Premiership]

One of the important qualifications of Prime Minister is an ability to win the mass media over to his or her side. Louisiest of all at this ability was Mr. Mori Yoshiro, who had his beat reporters turn their backs on him, instead of drawing their teeth, thus his administration ended up ephemeral. Mr. Ozawa's attitude towards the mass media is strikingly similar to that of Mr. Mori. Mr. Ozawa is easily irritated and blurts unnecessary things at press conferences. Frustrated by his irritation, reporters feel antipathy against him and this feeling will be exacerbated. Possibly, Mr. Ozawa is a timid person. Although his political style has often been described as "iron fist" or "self-righteous," it could be a reflection of his timidity turned inside out. His heart disease may be the cause of his short temper. Failure in media strategy could be fatal to his administration. Besides, could he physically survive severity of the budget committees of the two Houses? Given his lackluster popularity among the people, he is not cut out for Prime Minister. I am not quite sure if he is really willing to assume Prime Minister's post in the first place, even when the DPJ comes into power.

(This is the English translation of an article written by Mr. SUGIURA Masaaki, political commentator, which originally appeared on the BBS "Hyakka-Seiho" of JFIR on October 6, 2008.)