THE DECLINE AND REVIVAL OF CONSERVATISM IN JAPANESE POLITICS :

THE LIBERAL DEMOCRATIC PARTY AND THE ELECTIONS OF 1979 AND 1980

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This is to certify that the dissertation, entitled "The Decline and Revival of Conservatism in Japanese Politics: The Liberal Democratic Party and the Elections of 1979 and 1980", submitted by M.M. Kunju in fulfilment of six credits out of total requirements of twenty-four credits for the Degree of Master of Philosophy (M.Phil) of the University, is his original work according to the best of my knowledge and may be placed before the examiners for evaluation.

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PREFACE

THE Liberal Democratic Party has ruled Japan uninterruptedly for the last 28 years. Despite the changes that have occured during these years, the party's hold over the electorate, especially in the rural areas, remains firm. The emergence of new parties representing new ideologies and socio-economic programmes has not posed a threat to its standing nor weakened its appeal to large sections of the people. True, its performance at the polls over the years has not been impressive, but it has not surrendered its mass base to its rivals. Indeed after every set back it has suffered, the party has come back with a better performance. One of the reasons for the party's success, apart from the conservative preferences of rural voters, is the political stability it has given to the country and the economic success it has brought.

This study focuses on two elections in which the LDP first suffered a reversal and then bounced back with a large majority. Its inability to muster even a simple majority in 1979 was seen as an indication of its decline and predictions were made of qualitative

change in Japanese politics emerging within a few years. Even the chances of a coalition government coming into existence were rated high.

But the 1980 elections again swing the balance in LDP's favour, giving it very much more than a simple majority. Although various factors were responsible for this, one obvious explanation is the essentially conservative preference of Japanese voters and their unwillingness to sacrifice stability and economic comfort for the sake of new political experiment. The study is mainly based on empirical data collected and analysed from the primary and secondary sources.

I am greatly indebted to my supervisor Professor P.A Narasimha Murthy, without whose guidance and encouragement this study could not have been completed. I also express my gratitude to Dr K.V Kesavan, for all the help and assistance that I have received from him.

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M. Muhammad Kunju

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CHAPTER ONE

THE GROWTH OF CONSERVATIVE POLITICS

CONSERVATISM has been the dominant feature of Japanese politics throughout the modern period. The oligarchy which assumed actual power after the Restoration of 1868 were conservative in out look. So were the political parties which came into existence in the 1870s and 1880s. Indeed, well upto the 1920s when proletarian parties came into existence, all political parties and groups remained essentially the strongholds of leaders who not only came from a conservative background, but also saw the role of parties in the light of defending and perpetuating traditional values and institutions.

Conservatism was a spill over from the Tokugawa period. Primarily an agrarian society, Japan was closed to the outside world, for more than 250 years and under a feudal system. The Tokugawa rule collapsed when the foundations of the feudal order grew weak and the country came in contact with the outside world. In 1868, the old regime was displaced by direct imperial rule. The new order was essentially intended to be Emperor centred but reinforced with political ideas and institutions borrowed from the West.

Political power was neither transferred to the people, nor their voice heard. While the Emperor was proclaimed sovereign, political authority was controlled by a small band of bureaucrats and oligarchs who played an important part in pulling down the Tokugawa structure. Thus, the administration remained in the hands of a few who were steeped in the Confucianist tradition of Tokugawa days.

However, another set of people who lost their feudal privileges and hold over the people under the new dispensation started building up opposition to the new government. That opposition took the form of an armed insurrection in 1877 and its failure led the more enlightened people to think of constructive opposition within the framework of the new political freedom declared by the new government. Men like, Taisuke Itagaki, Shojiro Goto, and Shigenobu Okuma, who were influenced by the success and strength of western political parties, began to organize dissident groups into organized political pressure groups. Thus were born modern political parties in Japan.

The main objective of the early political parties was to get certain concessions and benefits from the

government and not seek participation in the business of government. The first political party, known as Aikoku Koto (Public Society of Patriots), formed in January 1874, by Itagaki, did not have a long life. Itagaki soon founded another society known as Risshisha. It was primarily concerned with the rehabilitation of the ex-Samurai who were in distress. Though the scheme was not successful, it managed to get the support of the once powerful land-owning class. With the support of ex-samurai, Itagaki again turned to politics and soon formed another society, called, Aikokusha. (Patriotic Society) in February 1875. Though it also died early, the base for a political party had been prepared.

Following the Satsuma Rebellion of 1877 there was continued political pressure for a constitution and a legislature. In the early 1880s, both were promised. Encouraged by this, Itagaki launched a full fledged political party known as Jiyuto (Liberal Party) in October 1881. Soon, another party called, Rikken Kaishinto (Constitutional Progressive Party) was launched by Okuma in March 1882.

Both Itagaki and Okuma were men of Conservative background and hence the political parties which they founded were also conservative in their philosophy. They were, however, the only parties on the scene when the legislature came into being. They also marked the origin of conservative currents in modern Japanese politics. Other conservative parties which came into existence in the 20th Century traced their parentage to either the Jiyuto or Rikken Kaishinto.

In March 1896, the Constitutional Progressive Party changed its name to Progressive Party (Shimpoto) and in June 1898 the Liberals and the Progressives merged together to form the Constitutional Political Party (Kenseito). With this merger Itagaki and Okuma were able to form a party based cabinet. However, it did not help them to maintain unity. The party again split into Kenseito and Kensei Honto (Constitutional Centre Party). While Itagaki's Jiyuto camp called themselves as Kenseito, Okuma's camp assumed the new name Kensei Honto.

The Kenseito, in turn, joined with Hirobumi Ito, who was a leading figure in drawing up the constitution and creation of the legislature, and regarded as a

relatively progressive fief-oriented politician. The alliance between Itagaki and Ito led to a regrouping of the Kensaito which changed its name to Rikken Seiyukai (Constitutional Political Friends Association). The alliance between the two influential politician gave new strength to the party and it eventually emerged as a strong conservative party.

The party continued to stay in power and provide Prime Ministers moving with changes in the political scene. In January 1924, the party suffered a split and a section of it organized another party known as Seiyu Honto (Political Friends Centre Party). But the party got back its strength by May 1925 when the Kakushin Kurabu (Reform Club) and the Chuseikai (Impartiality Association) merged with the Rikken Seiyukai. This in fact helped them to play an important role in providing two-party politics in Japan. The party continued to be divided into two factions, one led by Fusanosuke Kuhara and the other by Chikuhei Nakajima, until all political parties were dissolved in 1940.

Meanwhile, in March 1910, the Kensei Honto re-organized into the Rikken Kokuminto (Constitutional National Party) and in December 1913 it changed its name

to the Rikken Doshinkai (Constitutional Friends Association) and again in October 1916, adopted the name, Kenseikai (Constitutional Association). Finally, in June 1927, the party merged with the Seiyu Honto, the splinter faction of the Rikken Seiyukai. Thus, with a new name, Rikken Minseito, (Constitutional Peoples Party), itemerged as another strong rival conservative party to the Rikken Seiyukai.

In the 1920s though other political groups such as socialist and communist parties tried to make their debut on the Japanese political stage, they were not successful because of the unfavourable political conditions prevailing in Japan. While, there was progress in the industrial sector, labour remained largely unorganized and trade unions were very few. Only less than 7 per cent of the Japanese industrial labourers were organized. The Socialist parties, therefore, remained largely as an intellectuals' party. They also suffered divisions due to complex personal and ideological cleavages. Their popular support was negligible. Even as late as 1937, when they had achieved some unification, the socialist vote was less than 15 per cent. The Japanese communist party on the other hand, remained underground all these years.

In short, since the birth of party government in Japan, conservative politics dominated the political scene of the country. Though a number of political parties with different names and leaderships were born and died, all these parties were conservative in nature and outlook. The general political and social atmosphere in Japan during the pre-war period was not conducive to the growth of radical political parties and opinions. Even the Russian Revolution and the tremendous industrial progress at home did not substantially change this trend. Of course, new political ideas and parties were able to emerge on the political scene after the First World War and the Russian Revolution. But they were not able to make any serious inroads into Japanese politics. While the Communists had to work underground due to stiff government opposition, the presence of the socialists did not have much impact on the political scene.

Even after the Pacific War, when Japan underwent a series of radical political changes, the conservative hold over Japanese Society continued and strengthened further. The pre-war conservative parties emerged again on the political scene. This time, they regrouped into three: The Japan Liberal Party; the Japan Progressive Party; and the Japan Cooperative Party. The post-war

political and economic changes helped the emergence of Socialists as a powerful party but the reins of power continued to remain in the hands of the conservatives. There were internal dissensions among the Socialists, but the record of the Socialists in two coalition governments put them in a better position. They failed to unite as a single party until 1955 and consolidate their hold over the Japanese electorate till the merger of the left wing and right wing factions of the Socialists into a single party. In fact, the growing strength of the united Japan Socialist Party as an alternative to the conservatives compelled the latter to close their ranks and merge into a single political party. This merger and the formation of the new conservative party - The Liberal Democratic Party - consolidated the conservative hold over the Japanese people. Though 28 years have passed, since the formation of the LDP the party still continued in power without any break. Though it has suffered periodical setbacks in the elections, and has lost much by way of popular support, one does not see a strong and viable alternative to the conservatives in the near future.

CHAPTER TWO

POST-WAR POLITICAL SCENE : MULTIPLICITY OF POLITICAL PARTIES

THE impact of the defeat of Japan in the Second World War was vast and deep, and its consequences were far reaching. Besides the loss of large number of men and material and the complete destruction of its two important cities - Hiroshima and Nagasaki - the country's economy was completely shattered. Politically, Japan became an occupied country of the Allied forces which in effect consisted mainly of American forces. But the defeat worked as a blessing in disguise despite all the losses and humiliation. Within a period of about seven years, when the country was under the American occupation, it underwent a sea change in all spheres notably in the field of its economy and politics. The occupation authorities headed by General Mac Arthur, the Supreme Commander of the Allied Powers (SCAP) brought about a thorough overhauling of the entire Japanese political and economic systems and institutions. His main aim was to eliminate the forces which put Japan on the path of militarism and imperialism.

Accordingly, the SCAP initiated a number of radical steps to bring back Japan on the path of parliamentary democracy. The initial programmes, therefore, were complete demilitarization and democratization of the nation supported by a sound economic base. Although

different sections of SCAP differed in their degree of enthusiasm for democratic reforms, it was generally agreed that Japanese institutions were to be changed in such a way that they conformed to Western democratic norms.

The first step towards democratization of the country was to provide a new constitution that transferred sovereignty to the people. In the Meiji Constitution, sovereignty vested with the Emperor. In practice, the Emperor did not rule; groups of political elites ran the state in the name of the monarch. The 'Supreme Command' prerogative symbolized this imperial sovereignty and in the name of this prerogative the military came to exercise uncontrolled power. One of the major aims of the reforms prepared by the occupation was the removal of this prerogative and restoration of sovereignty to the people.

The occupation policy, therefore, aimed at providing a new constitution which transferred sovereign power to the people. A new Constitution was drafted which guaranteed people a democratically elected government. For this, it provided a popularly elected National Diet as the supreme legislative

body and a cabinet directly responsible to it. The constitution stipulated that the Diet shall be the highest organ of State power and shall be the sole law making authority of the State.

The position of the emperor was radically changed. From "Head of State", he became merely the symbol of the State authority and the unity of the people, deriving his position from the will of the people. All his special powers were taken away, including those which could be exercised in time of emergency. His functions have thus became purely ceremonial.

To make the executive responsible to the legislature, the Constitution clearly stipulated that the Prime Minister and other ministers should be members of the Diet and also civilians. As such the legislature (Diet) elected by the people emerged as the highest organ of State in place of the Emperor. Power and the right to rule were given to the people.[1] Further people were guaranteed fundamental human rights.

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1. Hugh Borton, Japan's Modern Century, (New York, Ronald Press, 1955), p. 410; quoted in Nathaniel B. Thayer : How the Conservatives Rule Japan (Princeton University Press, New Jersey, 1969), p.7

To widen mass participation in the political process of the State, the occupation authorities brought out a separate set of reforms. Adult suffrage was extended to women who had never been enfranchised before. The voting age was also lowered from 25 to 20 to encourage mass participation in the democratic process. Freedom of expression and association were also guaranteed. Political groups and parties were given complete freedom to organize themselves to strengthen the democratic institutions. Left wing political parties, especially the Japan Communist Party, whose existence had been banned since its formation in the 1920s, were also allowed to reorganise, and their leaders were released from jail.

The changes effected by the occupation authorities thus encouraged the people to form political parties and other democratic political institutions. The transfer of sovereign power to the people and the introduction of parliamentary democracy, revolving around Diet as the sole law making body with an executive responsible to it, provided confidence to the people in running their own affairs. Consequently, political parties which had been suppressed from the time the military rose to dominance came to the surface once again.

In accordance with the changed political conditions either new political parties were created from the old or previously existing parties were resurrected in revised form. The communists and socialists took a lead in launching their own political parties. On October 4, 1945, the Japanese Communist Party was organized by Tokuda Kyuichi and some other leading communists, many of whom had just been released after nearly two decades in prison. On November 2, 1945, the socialists formed the Japan Socialist Party. The conservative factions also organized their own parties soon. The Japan Liberal Party came into being on November 9, and Japanese Progressive Party on November 16. Finally, another party with a conservative background appeared on the national political scene on December 18, 1945, -- the Japan Cooperative Party. Besides these major parties which had a national platform, there were about thirty other political parties which came into being during this period.

A minor set back suffered by the political parties amidst the freedom gained by them was the directive issued in January 1946 by the SCAP. That directive ordered the removal from positions of responsibility all those leaders who were associated with the execution

of Japan's wartime policies. In consequence the leadership of all political parties, excepting the Communist Party of Japan, was effected adversely. But all the parties could contest in the first post war general election conducted under the supervision of the SCAP in April 1946. As it was the first election ever conducted in Japan with the participation of all adult, male and female, the vote percentage of each parties helped them to guage their political support and establish their political base.

With their leaders purged thus, the parties went to the poll in April 1946. It was the first post-war election in the country in which all adults participated. The parties were naturally eager to gauge the extent of popular support they received and also build a firm political base. A multiplicity of parties fought the election. Three parties belonging to the conservative stream and two to the progressive group.

The multi-party system which emerged on the eve of the first post-war election continued without much change for a decade. In the intervening period all parties went through various changes, permutations and combinations The system itself, however, remained

qualitatively unchanged. In the process of splits, mergers and coalitions, all political parties excepting the Communist Party got an opportunity to enjoy political power, some for shorter periods others for astonishingly longer spells. In the April 1946 elections, the Liberal Party (Jiyuto) led by Hatoyama Ichiro emerged as the largest party with 141 out of 464 seats in the Lower House of Diet, and shared power with the Pregressive Party (Shimpoto) which had 94 seats. The coalition cracked due to internal dissensions following the sudden removal of Hatoyama from public life under the purge order. In the next election the Liberal Party lost heavily. The Japan Socialist Party led by Tetsu Katyama unexpectedly emerged victorious and formed a coalition government with two other conservative parties - Democratic Party of Hitoshi Ashida and the National Cooperative Party. Both the parties were just formed by different conservatived factions in March 1947. The Democratic Party was born out of an alliance between ex-liberal deserters like Ashida and the Japan Progressive Party politicians The National Cooperative Party (successor to the Japan Cooperative Party) and the National Party was the product of a merger between the Cooperative Democratic Party (suc... NP) The sudden growth of Socialists in post-war Japanese

politics caused serious concern in the ranks of conservative politicians and their supporters. However, this was not a bad thing in so far as it held out the prospect of a healthy democratic process taking roots in Japan. It was hoped that if this trend continued, Japan would have a two-party system. However, the Socialist-led ministry resigned soon due to the withdrawal of conservatives from the coalition. Another coalition cabinet of the Socialists and the Conservatives was formed, led by Ashida of the Democratic Party. It too fell soon, paving the way for another election. Meanwhile, the Japan Liberal Party made some changes in its leadership and adopted the name Democratic Liberal Party, in March 1948. The party won the next election held in January 1949, and formed the Cabinet headed by Yoshida. In March 1950 the party again changed its name to 'Liberal Party'.

With the return of Hatoyama to active politics when the occupation authorities depurged the former public office holders in October 1950, Yoshida's Liberal Party again began to suffer factional fighting. Conflict between Yoshida and Hatoyama factions within the Liberal Party took a serious turn when Yoshida dissolved the Lower House. Hatoyama, on the other hand organized

another Liberal Party of dissidents; he and his followers again returned to the Liberal Party leaving behind Bukichi Miki, Ichiro Kono and other leaders. Hatoyama again left the Liberal Party in November, 1954, along with Tanzan Ishibashi and Nobusuke Kishi, and formed the Japan Democratic Party. Thus the Conservative Parties regrouped mainly under the Liberal Party of Yoshida and the Japan Democratic Party of Hatoyama. Meanwhile Yoshida was forced to resign due to a shipbuilding scandal, and Hatoyama became the Premier. In the next general election, Hatoyama defeated the Liberal Party led by Ogata Taketora who succeeded Yoshida, by capturing 257 Lower House seats along with his coalition partners. The superiority of Hatoyama's Japan Democratic Party was confirmed in the next election, held in February 1955, when the Japan Democratic Party won 185 seats against 113 seats of the Liberal Party.

Following the 1955 election, the Socialists who had split into rightwing and left wing factions in 1951 over the question of peace and security treaties, joined together to launch a unified Japan Socialist Party. The unification of the Socialists which had a left wing supremacy posed a serious threat to the conservatives who

were split into different camps then. After a series of prolonged discussions, the conservatives finally decided to sink their differences and form a single party. In November 1955, the Liberal Party and the Japan Democratic Party merged together and launched a new unified single conservative party known as 'The Liberal Democratic Party' (LDP).

The merger of conservative factions to make a single political party in November 1955 marked a new epoch in the political history of post-war Japan. The unification of the right wing and left wing factions of the Socialists just before the conservative merger, as a united and strong Japan Socialist Party thus suggested that Japan was heading for a two party system. The conservatives as the ruling party and the socialists as a strong opposition party leaving the Japan Communist party as a balancing factor in fact confirmed this belief as the system worked well for a few years. But a split in the Socialist Party in early 1960 boiled that hope. Moreover, the formation of the Komeito and splits in the conservative party made Japanese politics more complex. The political spectrum contained a multiplicity of parties but power continued to be held by one party.

The Liberal Democratic Party

The Liberal Democratic Party (Jiyu Minshuto) came into being on November 15, 1955, with the merger of two post-war conservative parties - the Japan Democratic Party and the Liberal Party. The merger of these two parties into a single frame was the result of various political developments that had been taking place in Japan since August, 1945. The occupation authorities under the direction of the Supreme Commander of the Allied Powers (SCAP) brought about a series of radical changes in the socio-economic and political fields of Japan. The reforms in the political field which, particularly aimed at the restoration of parliamentary democracy, provided the climate for the re-emergence of various political parties in the country. The conservatives who had been dominating pre-war party politics reappeared on the post-war scene with new party labels. For example, the Liberal party consisted of a number of old members of the Seiyukai; the Japan Progressive Party drew its membership mainly from the pre-war Minseito. These parties mainly represented the 'Liberal forces' and the 'Democratic forces'. The Liberal forces grouped around the Liberal Party while the Democratic forces centered around the Japan Progres-

ative Party. The latter regrouped into the Democratic Party, the National Democratic Party and the Japan Reform Party. The Japan Cooperative Party which followed a separate path finally merged with the National Democratic Party. In the post-war elections these parties often formed mergers and coalitions to form the governments. But personality conflicts among the leaders and organizational weakness kept the parties loose. On the other hand, the Socialists in the early post-war years emerged as a political force and even had an opportunity to share political power twice. But ideological differences between the right wing and left wing factions of the party prevented them from forming a single party. However, in the changed political atmosphere, they decided to sink their differences and launch a unified Japan Socialist Party in October, 1955.

Naturally, the emergence of the Socialists as a powerful political force and finally their unity caused serious concern in the minds of the Conservatives and their supporters. Consequently the conservatives also began to think in terms of launching a united party, in order to check the growing Socialist tide. After prolonged deliberations and persuations

by influential middle men, the two main conservative parties decided to merge to launch a unified and strong conservative party. The Japan Democratic Party led by Ichiro Hatoyama and the Liberal Party headed by Takatora Ogata merged together to form the present Liberal Democratic Party.

The basic ideology of the Liberal Democratic Party was not alien to the Japanese people and politics as its conservative philosophy was deep-rooted in Japanese political life since the beginning of party politics in Japan. But the new conservative party, which was born in a changed political and economic atmosphere had to give a new image to the party in order to maintain its dominance in Japanese politics and to meet the new challenges posed by other parties.

The prime concern of the new party, which was incidently the ruling party at that time by virtue of the merger, was to reaffirm its adherence to parliamentary democracy and reject all political theories that led to revolution and dictatorship. Thus, the party's basic philosophy was expounded as follows: "In forming the party our political ideals are, first, to earnestly proceed along the broad road of parliamentary

democracy. For this reason, we shall to the end denounce all forces and ideologies that condone as political means the use of violence or destruction, revolution or dictatorship. Second, we support freedom of and respect for the individual as the fundamental condition of social order. We oppose, accordingly, absolutism and classism that depend on the use of power". In making parliamentary democracy their main aim, the party took a firm stand against the totalitarianism of those on the far right and left, and especially against communism.

The party manifesto expressed their dedication to a 'three fold consummation'. They are consummation of a culture and democratic nation, of autonomy and independence, and of social stability and welfare state. The new manifesto further represented their vow to extend and perfect the policy measures already in force as the party holding the reins of the government.

The Liberal Democratic Party, in its Policy objectives declared that "to secure national morality and reform education; to reform the political and administrative systems and practices; to achieve economic autonomy; to build a welfare community; to take positive

steps to evolve a peace diplomacy; and to consolidate national sovereignty. While these objectives have to be implemented by government policy decisions through various measures carried out by the cabinet, it sought even constitutional amendment for the consolidation of national sovereignty. It said, "while observing the principles of pacifism, democracy and respect for basic human rights, we shall seek autonomy of the current Constitution and reexamine assorted occupation legislation, revising and abolishing those parts there necessary so as to fit the circumstances of the country."[2]

The programmes of the party can be summarized as follows: (a) To create a democratic order in Japan with better living standards by reforming existing institutions in line with the basic principles of democracy; (b) to strive for improved international relations on the basis of universal justice, international peace and freedom and to build up a self-supporting and independent Japan; and (c) to ensure economic and social stability by carrying out properly formulated plans consistent with individual initiative and free enterprise, and to secure the public interest.

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2. Quoted in Koichi Kishimoti, Politics in Modern Japan : Development and Organization, (Japan Echo Inc, Tokyo, 1977), p. 95

The Liberal Democratic Party which became the ruling party of Japan from its birth itself initially was an elitist party. The party mainly consisted of big businessmen, ex-bureaucrats and other elite segments of the Japanese society. In its early years of existence, approximately 2/3 of its members were University and college graduates. The rural base of the party which was represented by cooperative leaders was marginal with only 6 per cent in 1953. While 50 per cent of the Diet members were graduates of prestigious national institutions of higher learning and hailed from the urban centres, the rural-agricultural representation was 19 per cent. However, the party shortly decided to abandon its old position as an elitist party and to seek a mass base. After the 1958 General elections, the party adopted a number of progrmmes to widen its mass base.

Factions

One of the unique features of the Liberal Democratic Party is the working of factions within the party as a formal entity. Generally, factions, groups, etc., are common in all political parties working in Parliamentary democracies. But the factions within the Liberal

Democratic Party of Japan are peculiar in many respects. They are formal political entities with head quarters, regular meetings, a known membership, an established structure and firm discipline, and of course, led by well known leaders, by whose names the factions are known. In fact, they work as parties within the party.

Although factions became very important and indispensable in Japanese politics after the Liberal Democratic Party came into being, they had been in existence ever since party politics began to play an important role in the affairs of the country. Robert Scalapino, in his book on 'democracy and party movement in pre-war Japan' quotes Ozaki Yukio, a very prominent political leader in 1917, as confessing that "here in the Orient we have political factions but no political party".[3]

The statement of Ozaki is a clear proof that factions in Japanese politics are as old as the parties themselves. But they were not much active nor influential as they are today. In the case of LDP the factions are virtually controlling the party and thereby ruling the country.

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3. Robert Scalapino, Democracy and the Party Movement in Pre War Japan (University of California, Berkely, 1953), p. 115

Any changes in the relative balance of factions can make wide ranging differences in the party, policies and even in the government. In pre-war days, too, factions had formal organizations, held regular meetings and functioned under accepted leadership. The faction leaders gave funds to their followers to fight elections and thus strengthen their factions. There were the usual factional fights over control of the party, for cabinet positions, and party funds. The pre-war factions were, however, loose groupings around an important politician. "... They were not too important. Nobody felt obliged to belong to them. They were mostly groups which gathered for political discussion".[4] The present day factions, oin contrast, are an integral part of the political process. Konzo Kono, vice speaker of the House of Councillors says, "Every body damns the factions, but the Liberal Democratic Party and perhaps the Government would not be able to move without them".[5] While the pre-war factions were addendum to the political process, the post-war factions are an integral part of the political process. It is essential to the functioning of present day Japanese politics.

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4. Masutani Shuji, A Conservative Politician - Interview, April 12, 1966; Quoted in Nathaniel B Thayer, How The Conservatives Rule Japan, (Princeton University Press, New Jersey, 1969,), p. 20

5. Ibid, p. 17

The factions are mainly constituted of the Diet members from both Houses -- the House of Councillors and the House of Representatives. As the House of Representative is more powerful, factions from the Lower House are much stronger than the factions from Upper House, whether they are members of the same factions or not.

According to Nathaniel B. Thayer, five essential goals of the party and nation are achieved through the factions. First, the party chooses its leader through the factions: Second, through the factions the party raises and distributes most of its operating funds. Third, posts both in the government and in the party are determined by and through the factions. Fourth, through the factions comes most of the aid an individual candidate gets for the election campaign. Fifth, the factions serve several profound psychological needs of the Dietmen.[6] The phenomenal growth and influence of factions in the Liberal Democratic Party are mainly due to the party's continuous control over the administration. The selection of the party President is one of the main areas where the factions play an important role.

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6. Kenzo Kono, Interview, January 25, 1966; Quoted in Nathaniel Thayer, n. 4, p. 27

Since the LDP is the ruling party and the Prime Ministership is automatically goes to the party president, a lot of importance is attached to the election of the party president.

Earlier conservative parties usually chose their party leader through consultation among party elders. But after the parties were merged together to form the LDP, the system of choosing the president by consensus has changed. Now the party President is elected by the conservative members of the Diet and representatives from each of the party's prefectural federations. Since the President usually becomes the Prime Minister, the presidential candidates seek the support of various factions. In return the faction members get campaign support in the elections, political funds, and other party or government posts. The other factors that contribute to the development of factions are mainly (1) political funds which are needed by the representative to keep his social commitments; (2) the competition for appointment to the party, cabinet and Diet posts; (3) and the election system for the Lower House provides another element conducive to the growth of factions. The candidates need faction's support to get selected from a particular constituency as there may be vigorous competition. Factions also play a predominent role in the distribution

of posts in the party and government, especially in the formation of cabinet. The factions perform three services enabling the politicians to gather political funds. First, the faction leader himself will give funds directly to his followers. Secondly, the faction leader will arrange for the candidates to meet influential members of the business community. Third, the membership in the faction will help the politican to make use of the other faction for funds.

The Japan Socialist Party

The Japan Socialist Party (JSP) has been the main opposition party since the beginning of LDP rule in Japan. Like the conservatives, the Socialists also have a long history. The socialist movement originated when the Toyo Shakaito (Oriental Socialist Party) and the Shakaito came into being in 1882. Following them the socialists tried to organize their own political parties in 1901 and 1906. In 1901, they formed the Shakai Minshuto (Social Democratic Party) which was immediately disbanded by the authorities. In 1906, another party was formed - the Nihon Shakaito (Japan Socialist Party). But due to governmental opposition and other unfavourable conditions, the Socialists could not become a political force till the end of the Pacific War. Moreover, the ideological

differences and attitudes among its followers kept the party in different compartments.

After the war, when the occupation authorities allowed political parties to function, the socialists who were then divided into left wing and right wing factions joined together. This enabled them to emerge as a powerful political party and lead one of the post war coalition governments. It was a significant development in so far as it was the first socialist-led government in Japan. Though this socialist-led government did not last long, they got yet another opportunity to run the government as coalition partners of the conservatives. But the tussle between the left wing and right wing factions for the dominance of the party and differences in their attitude towards certain important national issues, such as, the San Francisco Treaty and the Japan-US Security Treaty, kept the Socialists again in two different camps.

However, the growing strength of the conservative parties compelled the socialists to close their ranks and unite as a single party. As a result, on October 13, 1955, the present Japan Socialist Party was formed. But the party's unity was short-lived. The right wing faction which was in a minority, left the party in January,

1960 on the question of the projected revision of the Japan-US Security Treaty. It formed the Democratic Socialist Party of Japan. The split in the Japan Socialist Party removed the chances of serious threat to conservative domination, though the party continued to be the main opposition force.

The Japan Socialist Party's ideologies are spelled out in a document adopted at the 1955 reunification convention. In this document, the socialists pledged themselves to realizing a socialist society by carrying out a peaceful revolution, and to recovering and securing the full sovereignty of Japan. At the December 1964 party convention another revised document was adopted which was revised at the January 1966 party convention.

According to this document known as 'The Road to Socialism in Japan', the JSP is a political party which believes in the inevitability of a socialist revolution in Japan and is "convinced that it is possible and proper for a socialist revolution to be carried out democratically, peacefully, and through the Diet". In accordance with the basic principles of socialism, the party pledges to strive for: (1) socialist democracy; (2) socialization of key industries, organization of coope-

ratives among small and medium enterprises and in the agricultural sector, and planned production in all these sectors; (3) land reform and improvement of the living environment; (4) development of education, culture and science; (5) construction of a society held together by solidarity and cooperation; and (6) a foreign policy contributory to the cause of peace and the prosperity of mankind.[7]

On the basis of this document, the Japan Socialist Party formulated a new programme at its party convention convened in January 1974. The convention adopted the "Draft of a Basic Platform for the Unity of the Nation" which was to serve as the platform of a national coalition government. According to this 'Draft', the proposed government was to aim at "protecting the Constitution, Democracy, and non-alignment, and improving the peoples livelihood". As regards security policy, in particular, the JSP intended to notify all foreign countries of Japan's declaration of peace and neutrality, and after abrogating the Japan-US Security Treaty, conclude a mutual nonaggression treaty with China, the Soviet Union, Korea and the United States. The existing Japanese

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7. Koichi Kishimoto, n.3

self-defence force will be disbanded with a certain time allowance and according to pre-arranged procedures, in favour of a stance of unarmed neutrality of the country.[8]

The Democratic Socialist Party

The Democratic Socialist Party is one of the important opposition parties in Japan today. It formally came into being in Japanese politics on January 14, 1960. The DSP was launched by a breakaway group of right wingers who left the Socialist Party, alleging that the party was dominated by left-wingers. But the immediate cause of the split was a difference of opinion regarding the Party's attitude towards the revision of Japan-US Security Treaty in 1960. The party defined itself as "a political association of those people who believe in the principles of democratic socialism" that will "confront capitalism and totalitarianism whether of the left or of the right".

The DSP at its 17th Party convention held in April 1973 set forth the Party's priorities as: (1) elimination of the contradictions attributable to the capitalist

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8 Ibid, p. 108

system and promotion of welfare state; (2) overcoming Marxism-Leninism and safeguarding the free and democratic system; (3) a struggle aimed at overthrowing the conservative government and to make the DSP the parent body of progressive and democratic forces to replace it; and (4) expansion of friendly and harmonious relations with all nations.

At the 18th Party Convention held in February 1974 the DSP adopted a concept of a "progressive-alliance all-people's government". The coalition government called for in this document was to be formed jointly by all progressive forces that would aim at ridding the capitalist system of its contradictions, while steering away from the totalitarianism of both the right and the left, thus opening the way to establishment of a truly democratic socialist government. The political principles on which this coalition government would stand include adherence to the principles of defending all aspects of the present Constitution, establishing a welfare state, and realizing parliamentary democracy. The proposed coalition government would eradicate those forces which stand for radical one-party dictatorship propagated by Marxism-Leninism.

This coalition government would institute a three year plan to solve the nation's basic problems such as inflation, and pollution, so as to defend the people's livelihood. It would also make a shift to a stable-growth policy, develop a stronger mixed economy, and formulate other measures geard to a welfare state, as well as uphold a foreign policy of self-reliance, independence, peace and friendship. The posture indicated with regard to Japan-US Security Treaty is one of a fundamental re-examination to move in the direction of a phased dissolution of the treaty, while bringing about the removal of US bases and forces in Japan. Concerning self-defence, the DSP's attitude is to hold the defence capability to an absolute minimum, although the party considers it necessary to have self-defence forces as an independent nation's responsibility.

The DSP, however, altered its policy of 'Gradual dissolution' of the security treaty, and decided to seek improvement of the working of the present Japan-US Security Treaty while acknowledging its functions . By confirming the significance of the security treaty's functions, the DSP has come a few steps close to the LDP, which regards the bilateral security arrangements

as being of vital importance. It further went on to announce its position in favour of safeguarding the security treaty, during the December 1976 election campaign.

The Komeito

The Komeito (the Clean Government Party) is the political wing of Soka Gakkai, a political organization of Nichiren Shoshu sect of Buddhism. Though the Komeito came into being as a political party in 17 November 1964, its parent body known as Soka Kyoiku Gakkai (Value-Creating Education Society) before the war and as Soka Gakkai after the war, was started in November 1930. Its founders were Tsunesaburo Makiguchi and Josei Toda, both of stout devotees of the Nichiren Shoshu sect. Until the war it remained a religious organization spread over 164,000 households all over the country. It entered politics in April 1955 when it contested in the local elections. According to its President Toda, the objective of its entrance to the political front was to build an "ideal society" by achieving a "fusion of the nation's political principles with Buddhistic teachings". In the 1956 July election to the House of Councillors, the Soka Gakkai got three seats and made its appearance in the Diet. Since then it has contested in all local

elections and House of Councillors elections. In the latter, Soka Gakkai has a record of getting all its candidates elected. This success encouraged the Soka Gakkai to launch a full fledged political party of its own to play an active role in national politics. On November 17, 1964, Soka Gakkai launched its political wing with the name Komeito or the Clean Government Party. The policy platform adopted by the Komeito at the time of its inception defined the party as a mass party which would march forward with the objective of building a foundation of global democracy based on the concept of unity in national politics and national religion, humanitarian socialism keyed to a respect for human nature, and Buddhist democracy. The new party's base initially consisted of about 5,300,000 members of the parent body. Its first Chairman was Koji Hirajima, who was then board chairman of the Soka Gakkai.

At the time of its inauguration its representation in the Diet was limited only to the House of Councillors where it had thirteen members. In the 1965 July elections its membership went upto 20. In the 1967 General Elections, the party put up its own candidates for the first time and won 25 seats in the House of Representatives. With the 1968 election to the House

of Councillors, Komeito representation rose to 24. In the December 1969 General Election it won 47 seats in the House of Councillors and became the number three party in the Diet. This wide support to the Party from the electorate was attributed to the Soka Gakkai's increased membership and influence among the Japanese people. But, soon the Komeito had to end its identification with Soka Gakkai, because of the public criticism of Soka Gakkai's concept of unity of politics and religion. At the eighth party convention held in June 1970, the Komeito decided to pursue a revised policy of "separation of politics and religion" to end its identification with Soka Gakkai. This was the beginning of the second phase of Komeito history as a political party appealing to a broad spectrum of the people, not only Soka Gakkai members.

The new policy document adopted by the party dropped all terms with a Buddhistic flavour such as "fusion of national politics and national religion", "Buddhist democracy", etc. The Party also completely revised its regulations in order to make itself available as an open, democratic party for all the people. It also declared in its new platform that it would "promote the welfare of all people in this nation on

a middle-of-the road basis, and holding the highest respect for human dignity, it shall pursue the national welfare together with the people, with zeal for reform and for sincere practice of its principles". The Komeito also declared that it would work to the best of its ability for the establishment of 'humanitarian socialism', for the safeguarding of the constitution and protection of basic human rights, and for the establishment of parliamentary democracy.

The shift in their policy and orientation caused some set back in the early years of the 1970s. In the 1972 election to the House of Representatives, Komeito was able to get only 29 seats and the Party's position dropped to number four rank. This set back was attributed to the weak support it received from the Soka Gakkai. But the party recovered soon and in the 1976 General Elections to the House of Representatives, Komeito got 55 seats and became the third largest party.

Komeito's stand on foreign policy issues, particularly US-Japan relations, was initially left oriented. The party's original policy line was the 'early abrogation' of the Japan-US Security Treaty which was the corner stone of US-Japan relations. But after the party's

set back in the December 1972 General Elections, the Party changed its policy favouring "immediate scrapping" of the Security Treaty. This shift in policy platform led the party closer to the Japan Communist Party. The party even declared that it might organize joint struggle outside the Diet with the JCP to unite all the anti-LDP forces.

At its 11th Convention held in September 1973, the Komeito adopted "a plan for a new middle-of-road reformist coalition government", calling for the over throw of the LDP regime and establishment of a new government control on anti-LDP, anti-reactionary power, and anti-big-capital influences.

However, its closer relation with the JCP was short lived and it again moved a little to the right. It revised its stand on the Japan-US Security Treaty from "immediate scrapping" to "abrogation based or mutual understanding to be reached through diplomatic negotiations". As regards the plan for gaining power, the party favours the formation of a broad middle-of-the-road popular front.

Though the party maintain its independence as a political party, Komeito is still considerably influenced

by Soka Gakkai in its policy making as well as in its organizational set up.

The Japan Communist Party

The Japan Communist Party is one of the prominent Marxist parties outside the Communist world. The party formally came into being in Japanese politics on July 15, 1922, at the instance of the Third International - the Comintern - in Moscow. But it could not play any active role in Japanese politics till the American occupation of the country. The Communists had to work underground as the Government banned the party and arrested its prominent leaders. Only after the war, when the occupation authorities released all political prisoners including the communists and allowed political parties to function, the Communist party became active on Japanese political scene. The present Japan Communist Party appeared on the scene in October 1945, led by Kyuichi Tokuda. In its early post-war days, the Party considered the Allied occupation as "liberators". In February 1946, the JCP adopted a resolution setting forth a theory of "peaceful revolution under the occupation" to accomplish "a bourgeois democratic revolution in Japan through peaceful and democratic means".

However, in January 1950, when the Cominform criticised the JCP's attitude towards the occupation authorities, the party suffered a split.[9] The mainstream faction led by Kyuichi Tokuda turned more radical. The party's violent tactics led it to a catastrophic defeat in the following elections, and had to abandon its radical posture. At the fifth national convention the party changed its policy and with the seventh conference held in July 1958, the JCP achieved unity in its ranks. Kenji Miyamoto, one of the founder members of the post-war Communist party took over the leadership of the party. At the eighth party congress in 1961, the party characterised the revolution sought in Japan as being "a new, people's democratic revolution against two enemies, i.e. American imperialism and the rule of Japanese monopolistic capitalism". The policy document adopted by the congress also stressed the importance of the Diet in the establishment of a regime based on a national, democratic united front. Kenji Miyamoto, who consolidated his grip over the party by expelling dissidents, led the party to further electoral victory and also to a larger representation

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9 On January 6, 1950, the Cominform organ, 'For a Lasting Peace for a People's Democracy' published an anonymous article entitled 'Concerning the situation in Japan'. The article strongly criticised the party's stand towards the SCAP - See, Robert A. Scalapino, The Japanese Communist Movement, 1920-1966 (California University Press, Los Angeles, 1967), p.61

in the Diet. He even made an understanding with the Soka Gakkai, the parent body of the Komeito. At the 11th Congress, the party clarified that JCP would not seek a one-party dictatorship, but would accept a multi-party coalition in the future.

At the 12th congress, the JCP revised the party platform by dropping the Japanese word dokusai (dictatorship), from the phrase "dokusai of the proletariat" in favour of shikken (exercise of power) as a more appropriate world for the concept of diktatura. It also changed the phrase "the socialist camp spearheaded by the Soviet Union "into a simple 'Socialist Camp' and 'tool' with 'machine' as the Communist name for Japanese Parliament. These changes in JCP's jargon were generally interpreted as an attempt by the party to attain self-reliance and independence and to attach more importance to parliamentary institutions such as the Diet. The party congress also adopted a draft programme for the formation of a democratic coalition government as the immediate, common political objective of all democratic forces. According to the programme the progressive united front government would translate into action a common programme based on the policy objectives of the party. They are:

(1) neutralizing Japan by abolishing the Japan-US military alliance;

(2) Breaking down big-money politics and implementing policies geared to the defence of the people's lives and livelihood; and

(3) opposing all-out revival and intensification of militarism, and seeking democratic management of the Diet and the establishment of democracy in Japan.

The 12th Party Congress through its proposed coalition government policies called for "reducing" rather than "disbanding" the Japanese self-defense forces, and restricting the 'public ownership' of industry to energy related sectors only. The party's new official policy, for the first time, publicly set forth to respect and defend the existing Constitution.

As a move towards the realization of these policy objectives, the Japan Communist Party signed a ten year accord in 1966 on an "agreement of views" for co-existence and reconciliation with the Soka Gakkai. By this time, the Komeito, Soka Gakkai's political outfit was gaining wide political support from the Japanese middle class and was leaning towards the left. However, the agreement was not welcomed by the Komeito; on the other hand, it led only to an aggravation of relation between the JCP and the Komeito.

The JCP's soft line was given further momentum at the 13th Congress in July 1976. The Congress adopted the 'Manifesto of Freedom and Democracy', and at the same time removed the expression *puroretaria shikken* (exercise of power by the proletariat) from its programme, and replaced 'Marxism-Leninism' in the programme and party regulations with 'scientific socialism'.

In the electoral front, however, the party could not keep its increasing strength. While its strength in the House of Representatives increased from 5 to 14 in the December 1969 election, and from 14 to 38 in the December 1972 elections to the lower House, the JCP suffered one of its worst defeats in the December 1976 elections to the House of Representatives. The Party lost half of its seats held previously. But it continued its policy line based on selfreliance and independence, expansion of party influence placing importance on election at various levels.

The New Liberal Club

The New Liberal Club, a break-away group of the Liberal Democratic Party, is one of the latest additions to Japanese party politics. It was formed in June 1976 by six young LDP Dietmen, led by Yohei Kono, who were

critical of the LDP Constitution, ceaseless intra-party feud and political corruption within the ruling party. It represented the first split in the LDP after its formation in 1955. The NLC's origin, therefore, dramatized Japanese politics and caused concern in the conservative camp. Since the ruling party - the LDP - was plagued with factional rivalry and corruption in the highest ranks, the emergence of a new conservative party provided a twist to Japanese politics. The new party's leadership was young and primarily from urban areas. It tried to distinguish itself from other opposition parties by calling itself 'centrist conservative', but it sought to attract the unaligned, young urban voters. The party advocated a new political style in which youthful vitality, clean politics, and public participation in party affairs were emphasized. At the outset itself, it was hoped that the NLC can attract a sizeable section of Japanese voters from the conservative camp who dislike the LDP, but favour the conservative policies.

In the December 1976 general election to the House of Representatives, the New Liberal Club, defying all predictions, captured 17 seats. This spectacular performance was generally attributed to the NLC's new and clean image. In the subsequent House of Councillors

election in July 1977, however, the party's performance was poor compared to the last election. Only one of the party's four national constituency candidates and two of the nine local constituency candidates were able to win the election. The results of the later elections also indicated that the NLC's influence is limited and it can not make any big dent in Japanese politics.

CHAPTER THREE

THE LIBERAL DEMOCRATIC PARTY : ITS RISE AND DECLINE

1955 - 1978

THE merger of the conservative factions into a single party under a new banner - the Liberal Democratic Party - not only opened a new chapter in the history of conservative politics, but also in the annals of Japan's post-war political history. Though these parties and factions had merged often to launch new parties before and after the Pacific War, they never succeeded before in forming a single and united conservative party such as the Liberal Democratic Party. It is true that various factors compelled the conservatives to merge. The reunion of the socialists and their emergence as a strong political party in 1955 was one of them. Pressure from politically influencial business groups was another factor. The changed political conditions persuaded the conservative groups to come together for their own political survival. Survived they not only have, but also held political power without break.

The Liberal Democratic Party has also maintained its unity reasonably well, despite the fact that it remains a combination of powerful groups and factions. On the other hand, the opposition parties have been hurt by serious internal dissensions and splits.

Though the Liberal Democratic Party is not entirely free from dissensions and internal bickerings, its overall image is that of a strong and united conservative party. The split in 1976 when some young legislators broke away and formed the New Liberal Club in June 1976, did some damage to the party by way of electoral set back. The near-defeat of the party in 1976 and 1979 gave the impression that the party's vote-catching power was diminishing, and the party was on the decline. But the latest political events show that that impression was a misleading one and in fact the Liberal Democratic Party is still in full command over Japanese politics and no single opposition party can unseat the conservatives from power in the near future.

The Liberal Democratic Party, formed by the merger of the Japan Democratic Party and the Liberal Party has been the majority party in the Diet[1] since 1955. The mid 1950s were a period of economic and political trial. Economically, the nation needed a firm policy which would bring rapid development.

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1. At the time of the merger in November 1955, the two conservative parties - the Japan Democratic Party and the Liberal Party - were holding together 298 seats out of the total 466 seats in the House of Representatives.

The period of recovery was drawing to an end and the economy needed one more hard push to take it along the path of growth and diversification. Politically the country needed stability which seemed threatened because of the absence of a strong, united, forceful political party. What was more important was that with the socialists moving to form a united party it looked thatthe masses might swing towards the left if they were not offered an alternative. And that alternative had to be conservative. It was against this background that the conservative forces decided to form the Liberal Democratic Party.

One of the important reasons which compelled the conservative groups to come together in 1955 was the need to seek broader support among the masses. Right from the time of revival of political parties, the conservative mainstream was associated largely with ex-bureaucrats and business groups. There was a certain elitism about the conservative parties and this was thought to be a major weakness in their struggle to retain political power. If they were to thwart the efforts of the opposition to unseat them from power, they needed a mass base and a mass base demanded a strong, united and forceful party.

This conservative coalition helped the new Party to cast off its elitist skin and seek support among the masses. A mass base was necessary if the Party were to come out victorious in the struggle to retain power; it had to get rid of the image that it was a Party of predominantly ex-bureaucrats and business groups.

The first item on the agenda of the new Party was to strengthen its organizational structure. The national organization committee of the party set up party branches in 50 per cent of all municipalities in the first year itself. Secondly, a membership drive was begun, especially to attract to the party young men and women. A training centre known as Chuo Seiji Dainakuin (Central Academy) was set up in order to impart training in leadership qualities. The party programmes were widened so as to make them attractive to broader section of the people.

These efforts paid rich dividents in the form of a handsome political mandate in the 1958 elections. The Party got 57.8 per cent of the popular votes and 287 seats in the Lower House of the Diet. It was the first election the conservatives fought as a single

party and at a time when the socialist tide was rising high. The high percentage of votes and the comfortable majority in the Lower House, provided the party self-confidence and a strong political base.

The party now turned to carry out its programmes in a vigorous manner. In 1959, it announced 'seven goals', all aimed at widening the party base. These goals were: (1) the strengthening and establishing of party branches all over the country particularly in all municipalities and hamlets (burraku), stimulating membership by offering entertainment and various other activities; (2) increasing and improving local leadership, sending local organizers to the Central Academy for training; (3) strengthening youth and women organizations; (4) special emphasis upon membership drive among farmers, fishermen and those working in small and medium enterprises; (5) more effective, composite campaign policies for both local and national elections; meetings to explain party policies and programmes; (6) strengthening party morale and consolidating party organization; and (7) encouraging various political and economic movements - the peoples' movement to

defend freedom, democracy, livelihood, free and democratic unions, etc.[2]

The party thus attempted a series of programmes aimed at mass mobilization which went beyond any previous effort by the conservatives. It was able to spread its network all over the country. According to party leaders, by January 1959, as many as 2,200 branches had been set up all over the country. The membership of the party had gone upto 1,500,000 people, including 110,000 young men and women, and 6,100 local organizers.[3] In 1960 the party was able to put 13,000 local organizers in the field out of an estimated 20,000 needed to ensure national coverage.[4]

Further, using its political and administrative power more and more popular programmes were introduced

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2. Scalapino Robert A, & Masumi Junnosuke, Parties and Politics in Contemporary Japan (University of California Press, Los Angeles, 1962), p. 84

3. Takahara Maso, "Organizational Activities of the Conservative Party with Emphasis upon the Shift to Mass Organization", Shiso, June 1959, p. 94. Quoted in Scalapino & Masumi, n.2, p. 83

4. Adachi Koichi, et. al., "We are the Local Organizers of the Liberal Democratic Party", Chuo Koron, April 1960, p. 102. Quoted in Scalapino & Masumi, n. 2, p. 84

in cities and villages to attract young people to the party. Through a significant rise in budgetary provisions for public works, social services and cultural relations, the faithful workers were rewarded and others were attracted to the party.

The 1960s were a decade of mixed fortunes for the Party. In the early years of the decade the party fared well. The various measures it adopted to widen its base and strengthen its organizational structure worked well. The party spread its root deep into the countryside among farmers, petty shop-keepers, fishermen, etc. It also received support from the middle class, students and youth.

On the administrative front, the party envisaged a number of plans laying stress on domestic economic issues. Its main aim was to reconstruct the economy through revitalisation of the industrial sector. Utilising the American financial help and technological know-how, the LDP government [illegible] prepared a massive industrialization plan. Top priority was given to manufacturing industries, especially in high technology fields like chemicals and engineering which had

been relatively undeveloped before the war. As a result, within a short period, Japan achieved tremendous growth in the industrial sector. In 1960 alone the economy achieved a growth rate of 13.2 per cent.

This credible achievement on the economic front further increased the party's prospects in cities and industrial centres. More employment and better standard of living enabled the party to increase its influence among the working class.

On the political front, the pressure on the party loosened with the split of the Japan Socialist Party. That split shattered the hope that Japan will move to a healthy two-party system. Further, the split weakened the opposition's prospect to unseat the LDP in the ensuing election. As a result, more and more uncommitted people began to think that only the conservative party can give a strong and stable government. The people's concern was more about political stability and economic betterment, not about ideologies.

In the realm of foreign policy, however, the party had to face stiff opposition from the socialists and the communists. The main tussle was over the renewal of the security treaty with the United States. The Liberal Democratic Party adopted the line of "an independent foreign policy, within the framework of alliance with the West, particularly the United States". The party's objective was to strengthen Japanese nationalism while preserving the commitment to an American-Japanese alliance. On the one hand, it stressed its desire for "peaceful diplomacy" which was in harmony with domestic needs and also friendly relations with all nations including the Soviet Union and China. On the other hand, the Party proclaimed itself against neutralism and in firm support of the western democracies. They also asserted that in order to insure national security and peace, Japan should maintain the "minimum defence power needed to defend the country" through the security treaty and national defence power.[5]

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5. Scalapino Robert A and Masumi Junnosuke, n.2, p. 105

One of the foreign policy objectives of the Liberal Democratic Party was to have the security treaty with the US renegotiated. The original treaty, signed in 1951, contained clauses which hurt Japanese sentiments and so needed revision. This was achieved through negotiations which were begun in 1958. The result was an increase in Japanese independence of action under the treaty without reducing the value of the American defence commitments or committing Japan to excessive defence responsibilities.[6] A majority of the Japanese people favoured revision of the treaty in view of national defense economic needs. But there was a section which felt that the treaty was against Japan's interest, having been imposed when the country was a defeated nation. The socialist and left-wing parties in particular subscribed to this view. They naturally objected to the treaty in any shape or form, and held that revision of the treaty amounted to reinforcing military alliance with the United States. They wanted the treaty to be scrapped so that Japan could maintain friendly relation with all countries, especially the

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6. Stockwin, J.A.A., Japan : Divided Politics in a Growth Economy, (Weidenfeld & Nicolson, London, 1975), p. 64

USSR and China. They formed a People's Council for preventing Revision of the Security Treaty in March, 1959, to coordinate the activities against the revision of the treaty. Initially, the movement against the Treaty revision was limited in scope. The Socialist and Communist Parties, Sohyo (Federation of Trade Unions) and Zengakuren were the main participants in it with some support coming from academicians and the mass media. The conservatives firmly held their ground on revising the treaty and they won. Despite stiff opposition from the Socialists and Communists inside and outside the Diet, the LDP was able to use its strength in parliament to ensure the passage of the bill concerning revision. The manner in which this was done naturally gave rise to widespread criticism of the Party. Even some party members were unhappy with this and as a result Prime Minister Kishi Nobusuke had to resign as leader of the cabinet in July 1960. The Diet was dissolved.

The November 1960 elections were held in a highly surcharged atmosphere created by the revision of US-Japan Security Treaty. However, the LDP was able to put up a united and strong fight. The result was a wind fall and indicated clearly the party's continued

popularity. The party got 57.56 per cent of the votes and 296 out of 467 seats in the Lower House. The split in the socialist votes also helped the Party to demonstrate its dominance.

Hayato Ikeda who succeeded Kishi as leader of LDP and as Premier, sought to give a better image of the party through a conciliatory approach, towards the opposition. Playing down controversial issues such as revision of the Constitution and closer defence cooperation with the United States, he adopted a "low political posture". On the other hand, he laid greater emphasis on economic problems and conceived the 'income doubling plan'. As a result, the Japanese economy moved to the stage of ultra-high growth rates and Ikeda was able to gain considerable political advantage from this. He also made genuine efforts to restore the normal working of the Diet, the reputation of which had been seriously impaired by the events relating to revision of the Treaty. He also made efforts to gain Japan full recognition as an advanced industrial nation. It was during his leadership that Japan gained membership of the Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development (1961).

In November 1963, Japan again went to the polls and the Liberal Democratic Party was returned to power with 54.67 votes and 283 seats in the Lower House. Ikeda continued as leader of the Party and Prime Minister. Ill health forced him to resign in November 1964 and the mantle of the Party and government leadership fell on Eisaku Sato.

The LDP's success during the 1960s were basically derived from the performance of the national economy. Both Ikeda and Sato pursued policies which promoted a high rate of economic growth and brought higher living standards to the people. There was a general atmosphere of economic content and people felt no compelling reason to shift their support away from the LDP.

Even in external matters the achievements of the 1960s were such as to bring credit to the LDP leadership. For instance in 1965, the long-standing problem of normalisation of relations with the Republic of Korea was resolved. And towards the end of the decade Japan obtained a firm American promise that administrative jurisdiction over the Ryukyu Islands would be returned in May 1972. In June 1968, the administrative rights over the Ogasawara Islands were recovered.

These achievements made it easy for Sato to seek in 1970 an indefinite extension of the US-Japan Security Treaty. Notwithstanding the credit which the LDP claimed for these achievements, its performance at the polls began to show signs that it was slipping down in popularity.

In the January 1967 Lower House elections, for the first time the Party's votes fell to 48.8 per cent, though the number of seats it won was more than 50 per cent of that total. One of the reasons for this set back was the growing political corruption in the party and government. In one of the major scandals, the 'black mist scandal' top LDP functionaries were involved and that hurt the party's image a great deal. However, the erosion of LDP's position did not benefit the opposition. In fact the Socialist Party, too, experienced a drop in the per centage of votes received by it from 29.0 (1963) to 27.9 (1967). The Party which gained was the Komeito.

The decline trend which started in 1967 led to a further fall in the per centage of votes received by LDP in the 1969 elections. The party got 47.6 per cent of the total votes polled. On the other hand, the Komeito and JCP improved their showing. The Socialist

Party, too, suffered a sharp set back getting only 21.5 per cent of the votes. The electoral support for the LDP continued to dwindle slowly but steadily, giving rise to the speculation that sooner or later the ruling conservatives and the opposition would have about the same strength in the Lower House. The economic front which had been the pride of LDP throughout the 1960s, showed signs of cracking and caused the party serious concern. Trade friction with the US in particular assumed alarming proportions leading to the devaluation of the Yen in December 1971 by 16.8 per cent. The rapid industrialization and urbanization of Japanese society during the period of high rate of growth produced a new set of social problems. Deteriorating environmental conditions and unsatisfactory living conditions in densely populated areas began to erode the support for LDP in urban areas.

Economic pressure from the United States and the 'China problem' were the two most important external issues which led to the erosion of conservative strength in the early 1970s. The 'Nixon Shocks' were seen by the Japanese mass media as loss of American confidence in the Japanese conservative es-

tablishment. In a bid to refurbish its image and arrest the declining trend in popular support, the Party changed the top leadership by bringing Kakuei Tanaka in place of Eisaku Sato. Taking over the reigns of government in July 1972, Tanaka resolved the China problem by a visit to Beijing in September and sought to give a new direction to economic policy through his 'plan to remodel the Japanese archipelago'. The plan envisaged dispersal of industry throughout the country and creation of small self-sufficient population and industrial centres.

Yet, the Party was not able to arrest the declining trend of popular support. In the December 1972 elections its share of the popular vote was 46.85 per cent though it managed to retain a slender majority in the Lower House.

The party and the government faced serious difficulties. Soon after the elections. The inflationary trend continued unabated, industrial production was stagnant and exports faced restrictive measures by countries seriously affected by Japan's aggressive trading policies.

In the midst of a growing economic crisis, Tanaka tried in April 1973 to replace the multi-member constituency system for the House of Representatives with single-member constituency system. He hoped this change could enable the party to get two-thirds majority in the Lower House necessary to override rejections of government bills by the Upper House. But he failed to get the bill passed against a determined opposition. Further, the ruling party suffered losses in urban local elections in July 1973, although it was able to win the crucial Tokyo Metropoliton Assembly Elections.

Fresh trouble was in store for the Party as the year 1973 progressed. In September 1973 the Sapporo District Court (Hokkaido) gave a ruling that the setting up of a Nike missile base at Nagomma was unconstitutional and violated the provisions of Article 9 of the Japanese Constitution. That verdict put the party and government in an embarassing position. It stirred a new controversy over defense policy and the ruling party's views on the same.

In an attempt to persuade the US and the West European countries to relax their import restrictions

Tanaka made a trip to the United States in July-August and another to Western Europe in October 1973. He also visited the Soviet Union in the same month. But the Arab-Israeli war of October 1973 and the sudden increase in oil prices and export restrictions against pro-Israeli countries put the Japanese economy again in a bad shape. The Tanaka administration had to take a number of measures to restrict oil consumption, particularly by industries. During this period the country's balance of payments moved from surplus to deficit, and for the first time in the history of Japan's post-war economic recovery, the Yen began to experience speculative pressure against it. Further, the big rise in oil price in 1973 increased the rate of inflation to 20 per cent. The shortage of some basic consumer products caused further pressure on the economy.

All these developments pressed the Tanaka Cabinet to have a second look at their economic and foreign policy priorities. A Cabinet reshuffle followed in December leading to the appointment of Takeo Fukuda as Minister of Finance. The priority for high economic growth was abandoned. And Japan moved away from its Western allies in respect of its Middle East policy and took a pro-Arab position.

These changes had the desired effect; further confusion in the economy was checked. Encouraged by this, the cabinet decided to test the Party's strength once again and so fresh polls for the Upper House were ordered. The elections, held in July 1974, did not bring the anticipated results and the ruling party was simply not able to widen the numerical gap with the opposition parties.

But the most serious crisis which rocked the party and government came soon after the election. In what has come to be known as the "Lockheed bribery scandal" it was revealed that no less a person than the Premier himself was involved. The result was a nation-wide shock at the ruling party's moral standing. Tanaka was compelled to resign in December 1974.

Tanaka's successor, Takeo Miki, had to deal with many delicate problems. He had to cope with an economy seriously affected by the after-effects of oil crisis and an extremely complicated political situation at home. He pledged himself to a clean government and fight against inflation. His team was also entrusted with the mission of modernising

the ruling party's structure and of resuscitating Japan's conservative politics.

The new leader was not able to do much. For one thing he came from a minority faction in the party and as such his writ did not reach all sections of the party. Secondly, there was opposition to his leadership within the party. His problems were further compounded by the revelations made in February 1976 during the US-Senate hearings on Lockheed payments. The subsequent arrest of Tanaka on a bribery charge and his release on bail virtually divided the ruling party into pro and anti-Miki camps. The party seemed to have reached its lowest ebb. Prominent members were suspected of being involved in the Lockheed case. As if to lodge their protest against the drift in the party Yohei Kono and ofive other members announced in June 1976 they were quitting the party and forming a new group called the New Liberal Club. This was the first split in the conservative group in 21 years.

Meanchile, Japan went to the polls for the House of Representatives on December 5, 1976. In many ways this election was a turning point in Japanese politics and particularly for the conservatives. The election

result was contrary to all pre-poll predictions. The Liberal Democratic Party suffered a stunning defeat, losing its simple majority in the Lower House for the first time. The share of votes received by the party dropped to 41.78 per cent. As in the past, the defeat of the conservatives did not benefit the opposition parties. None of the opposition parties, including Japan Socialist Party, was not in a position to take over the administration single-handedly; nor could the opposition come together to offer an alternative to the LDP. The conservatives, who were short of seven seats for a simple majority in the 511 strong House of Representatives, admitted eleven successful independents into the party and thus managed to remain in power.

Miki had to step down. The Party was in poor shape and for the first time since 1955 it seemed the LDP would lose its legislative majority to the opposition. It lost control over some important Diet Committees, owing to its declining strength. In the 1977 Diet session the government was forced to accept opposition amendments to a number of cabinet bills,

including the financial bill which proposed a cut in taxes.[7]

While the Lockheed scandal investigations were going on, Japan went for another poll for the Upper House in July 1977. The result further narrowed down the LDP and opposition strength in the Diet. As a consequence, it was generally believed that if this trend continued, the LDP would have to depend on one of the opposition groups for its survival in office. Or, if the opposition parties were able to forge a coalition which accommodated all political lines, there would emerge a nonconservative middle-of-the road government.

The ruling party was not slow in realising the crisis it faced. It got into a mood of self-criticism and began to take a step or two in rectifying past mistakes. The party organization was strengthened and rules governing the election of party presidents were amended. A leadership change was effected in December 1978, which resulted in Masayoshi Ohira

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7. Of 76 bills submitted by the Government, 65 (85.5%) were passed but of those 21 (32.3%) were amended in Diet committees. Quoted in William J Barnds, (ed), Japan and the United States : Challenges and Opportunities, (New York University Press, New York, 1979), p. 83

becoming president of the party.

The new leader found himself in an extremely difficult situation. The factional strife within the party seemed unending and the rank and file wanted younger leadership to come to the top. Believing that a fresh mandate from the people may be the answer to these problems Ohira dissolved the Diet and decided to go to the polls in October 1979.

CHAPTER FOUR

CONSERVATISM AT ITS NADIR : THE ELECTION OF 1979

SINCE the near-defeat in the 1976 Lower House elections, the ruling Liberal Democratic Party had been under pressure for organizational reforms of the party. When the pressure to renovate the party structure became severe in 1978 and the slogans of "organizational modernization" and "party reforms" began to spread in the rank and file, the leadership was compelled to adopt a new system of election to the party presidency. The new system envisaged to give more popular participation in the election to the highest post in the party. It was also designed to counter the criticism that the highest authority in the party and government was being elected by a limited group of Diet members and representatives of the Prefectural Assemblies and that voters were bought through generous use of funds leading to corruption among the highest ranks in the party. By introducing the new two-tier system, the ruling party managers hoped that the system of primary election would widen the electorate and final election by only Diet members would reflect the will of the people who had elected their representatives to the Diet. It was also expected that the new system would reduce the influence of factions in the election of the party president as it would be difficult to exercise control over 1.5 million party voters by various factions.

Hence the election would represent the conscious exercise of individual choice. It would also avert private deals in the selection of the presidential candidate among the party leaders.

The new election system was thus used for the first time in the 1978 November election to the party presidency. Masayoshi Ohira, the then Secretary General of the Liberal Democratic Party was elected to the presidency of the party, (thus to the premiership), defeating the incumbent president and Premier, Takeo Fukuda. In many ways, Ohira's surprise victory over Fukuda turned out to be a significant event in the history of Japanese politics and particularly in the history of the ruling party. It was for the first time that an incumbent party president lost the race. Interestingly, the new election which was designed to contain the factional fight, instead triggered off new factional strife.

Ohira's election was quite unexpected. Ordinarily, a change of leadership was the inevitable result of a policy failure, a political scandal or even the ill-health of the incumbent leader. For instance, it was the Lockheed scandal which forced Kakuei Tanaka to step down; ill health was the excuse for his successor to

quit party leadership and the office of Prime Minister. But Fukuda's departure was outside this pattern. Indeed, he was all set for a second term of party presidency. As head of the party and government he had scored a number of achievements in the economic, political and diplomatic fields. His success in attaining substantial economic recovery including containing inflation, opening of the New Tokyo International Airport at Narita after twelve years of construction and controversy, signing of a Japan-China friendship treaty, -- all favoured him for a second term. As such when Fukuda decided to seek a new mandate from the party through the revised election method, he was confident about his reelection. It was evident from the opinion polls conducted by news media that he had an edge over Ohira.[1] The pundits held doubts only about the second place in the race; whether it would be Ohira or the party Executive Board Chairman Yasuhiro Nakasone was uncertain; Toshio Komoto was put in the fourth place.

However, when the result of the first round of the newly introduced two-tier election was announced,

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1 For example, A September poll of 1500 LDP Prefectural Assembly men by Asahi Shimbun gave Fukuda 40% support; Ohira 27%; Nakasone 12%; and Toshio Komoto 4%. Quoted by Susumu Awanohara, "An all out race to be second", Far Eastern Economic Review, vol. 102, no. 45, November 10, 1978, p.35

it surprised not only the political observers and the party managers but even the general public. Contrary to all expectations and predictions, Ohira won the first round with a decisive margin of 110 points over Fukuda. Ohira received 748 points out of a total 1525 points. Fukuda got 638 points, Nakasone got 93 points and Komoto 46 points. Without fighting for the final round where the party's 378 Diet were to give their choice between the first two winners, Fukuda withdrew from the contest. He conceded Ohira's first round victory as final at a news conference on November 27, telling that "I would not run for the race. I myself was surprised to see the result of the election. A defeated general should not talk of battles".[2]

Ohira's image was that of a dove and his choice as the new leader was naturally seen as a preference for cooperation and conciliation in domestic as well as international politics. He was known for moderation and was expected to adopt a low profile, particularly in handling the opposition.

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2 Quoted in the news item, "Fukuda Gives up Bid for Reelection", Times of India (Delhi), November 28, 1978

But the outcome did not minimise or end factional strife and the play of money politics. On the contrary factional struggles became more intense than before. Fukuda had withdrawn from the final round in the name of party unity and harmony, but his followers sparked off a fresh round of factional bickering. The reason was that Ohira had been supported by powerful Tanaka faction which had great love for Fukuda. Quite naturally Fukuda's followers alleged that a lot of money had changed hands in order to topple Fukuda. It was even suggested that as Secretary-General Ohira had manipulated the new system by enrolling members on a mass scale. The 'young Turks' in the Party and the Seirankai members rallied behind Fukuda in raising the banner of revolt. The 'not-so-young Turk' Nakasone and his followers swiftly moved towards Ohira and strengthened his camp.

Because of the battle between factions, Ohira found it most difficult to fillup party and government posts. When he tipped Zenko Suzuki for the number two post in the party, viz. Secretary General, there was vehement opposition from the anti-mainstream factions. Ohira was accused of breaking the party convention and an agreement to which he was a party that the number two post would be filled with a candidate who did not

belong to the President's faction. Indeed Ohira's own appointment as Secretary-General in 1976 was the result of that agreement. There was similar opposition to Ohira's choice of Rokusuke Tanaka as Chief Cabinet Secretary.

Although Fukuda pledged his support to Ohira, his followers revolted. The Seirankai, a group of ultranationalist Diet members, in particular maintained a relentless attack against Ohira. Soon the faction led by former Premier Takeo Miki also joined the anti-Ohira group within the Party. At one point the opponents of Ohira even threatened to boycott the Special Diet Session convened formally to elect the party leader and Prime Minister. They carried out their threat by a symbolic one-day boycott of the special session and blocked Ohira's smooth succession to the premiership. This obviously was an unprecedented one. The internal differences in the party were well known but had always been kept behind the scene; they were now coming into the open.

The upshot was that Ohira had to drop his trusted aide, Suzuki, and accept Kunikichi Saito for the post of Secretary-General. He was able to keep Rokusuke Tanaka

as the Chief Cabinet Secretary. His 20 member Cabinet also included members from all factions. The Cabinet consisted of four members each from his own faction, the Tanaka faction and the Fukuda faction. Two members each were taken from the Nakasone and Miki factions. The other four members carried the label "independents", but were expected to swing towards the mainstream faction.

Once he had taken firm hold of the reins of government and formed his team in the Party, Ohira was ready to meet the challenge from his opponents. He moved swiftly, notwithstanding his slow but steady approach, to put his own stamp on both the party and government. He even managed to arose nip in the bud what threatened to be a major scandal involving his government in the purchase of aircraft from Grumman and Douglas. He met his critics and the opposition by adopting a policy of cooperation. This approach enabled him to improve the image of the party and his government. In April 1979, the party received a big boost by winning 16 governorships, including the prestigious Tokyo governorship. It was the first major election after Ohira assumed charge of the party and government. The Tokyo victory in particular enhanced his political standing as his

party defeated the candidate (Kaoru Ohta) backed by the Socialist Party and Communist Party by a margin of almost half a million votes, thus ending 12 year old opposition rule in the capital.

Though the party won the local elections with the backing of the Democratic Socialist Party and the Komeito, it was believed widely that Japanese voters were moving to support the LDP despite all the scandals surrounding it.

Ohira's achievements in external affairs were modest. Although Japan's trade and payments surplus vis-a-vis the United States continued to cause some strain between the two nations, Ohira paid a visit to the US and sought to obtain American understanding about his government's earnestness to solve the problem. His presence at UNCTAD V Conference at Manila, and the holding of the seven-nation economic summit in Tokyo were some of the other important things that happened during his term.

On the house front he faced countless economic and political problems. He was not able to take any major political initiative because of the very thin

majority his party held in the Lower House. The leadership of a large number of Standing Committees, including the all-too-important Budget Committee, fell into the hands of the Opposition and this put him in an extremely difficult position. He had to depend on the opposition even for normal legislative business. What was even more galling was that often he found it difficult to carry his own party men with him because of intense factional struggle. These political difficulties were some what mitigated by a reasonably good showing by the economy (7 per cent growth rate) but the danger of inflation fed by rising oil prices loomed on the horizon.

All these prospects and problems tempted him to think of a snap election in October 1979. The victory in local elections in April, popularity figures for the party shown by opinion polls, hopes of economic recovery, and diplomatic gains in the Manila Conference and in the Tokyo Summit encouraged him to risk a general election. Yet another factor which weighed in favour of an early election was his own political future in the party. He thought he could strengthen his position in the party and government if he could turn what he thought was a favourable climate into an electoral victory. He was not sure whether he would be able to continue till the

next presidential election coming at the end of 1980 with a slender majority in the Diet. His opponents were waiting in the wings and wanted him to trip so that they could challenge his leadership.

Perhaps, Ohira also overestimated the weakness, disunity and confusion which prevailed among the opposition parties. The five opposition parties which scored an impressive victory in the 1976 election, when a non LDP coalition government seemed imminent, seemed that they were serious about unseating the LDP in the near future. As it turned out, they lost their vigour and enthusiasm after the election. They were not able to agree on a common programme and wanted to keep the Communist Party out of their grand coalition. The idea of a joint opposition front had collapsed when some of the opposition parties collaborated with the LDP in the April local elections to defeat the leftist candidates. Furthermore, each opposition party had its own internal problems. The Japan socialist party, the number one opposition party, was facing a serious difference with their traditional trade union supporters. By threatening to withdraw their automatic support to the JSP, the unions were pressing the party to include their demands for shorter working hours, a five day week, stabi-

lization of consumer prices by publishing production cost and heavy tax on the rich in the party's programmes. Then there were feuds between the moderate and extremist factions inflicting deep wounds on the party. All in all it appeared that JSP was not in a position to offer a serious challenge to LDP, nor to forge a strong united front. The party was not even hopeful of retaining its position in the Diet. The New Liberal Club, which caused a split in the LDP in 1976 and posed a serious threat to the LDP's aging leadership and its electoral prospects was also in some sort of trouble with the resignation of its Secretary General, Takeo Nishioka and three other NLC Diet members in July. Moreover, it had failed to attract more LDP Dietmen to its fold and emerge as a rival conservative camp. Therefore, the party's chances to attract more LDP votes in any election remained unlikely. The Komeito was also in disarray because of the resignation of Daisuke Ikeda, as head of the party's parent body, Soka Gakkai. It was predicted that the weakening of Soka-Gakkai, the main supporter of Komeito, would cost the Party at least twenty seats out of its 56 seats in the Lower House. The Democratic Socialist Party also was not in an advantageous position due to the absence of strong leadership. The only party that

was in a position to gain from an election, apart from the ruling party, was the Japan Communist Party. Its strength lay in major urban centres where the other non-conservative parties too had stakes. Komeito and DSP were in an extremely delicate position in view of the fact that they had moved much closer to LDP and could not now make a 180 degree turn to please the other opposition parties. Indeed the only issue on which they found they could run down LDP was corruption. On the other questions like opposition to further expension of nuclear power and tax increases their position remained ambivalent.

Ohira hoped that in a snap election his party would retain its majority with a minimum of 271 seats needed to control the Diet Committees. That position would also strengthen his hold on the party and the government. Ohira and his main supporter Tanaka, therefore, decided to call the election to the House of Representatives on October 7, 1979. They banked primarily on the proven track record of the party in the realm of economic management which had brought material satisfaction to the voters.

The anti-Ohira factions in the party were opposed to the decision to hold elections in October. Former Premiers, Takeo Miki and Takeo Fukuda both deplored the election phobia and warned that it would create a political vacuum. But they were both in a dilemma because postponement of the elections till 1980 as proposed by them would jeopardise the party's prospects if the economic situation took a bad turn. Their primary aim was to oust Ohira by seeking postponement of elections, even if that step were to weaken the party considerably.

Undeterred by the strategy of his opponents, Ohira got the Lower House dissolved in September, a full year ahead of its term. Political observers watched the situation with great interest. If Ohira led the party to a major victory he would strengthen his own hold over the party and also ensure LDP's continued rule. If, on the other hand, he failed to lead the party to a thumping victory, there would be accentuation of intra party factional fights leading to a crisis. A depleted LDP would also mean a signal for some sort of coalition to run the government. Some observers even predicted that LDPs monopoly of power was coming to an end.

There were no important issues involved in the campaign. The only thing vaguely resembling an 'issue' was Ohira's pre-campaign announcement of a tax increase for the financial year 1980. As this was expected to place a larger burden on the lower income wage-earners, opposition parties used this as an anti-LDP club. Even Ohira's own partymen opposed the proposal on the ground that a pre-election tax increase would only alienate the electorate from LDP. Critics pointed out that it was Ohira, as finance minister in the Takeo Miki government, who resorted to deficit financing in a big way. Therefore, his sudden concern for restructuring the nation's finance was seen a belated political move. The proposal was of course withdrawn in the end. Instead, he pledged to hold down the rise in consumer prices to 5 per cent, achieve full employment, streamline government expenditure and increase taxes only with public consent.

There were indications that the elections might be marred by political scandals involving the ruling party. Early in the year the Grumman pay off scandal surfaced which resulted in the punishment of some officers and withdrawal of a sitting LDP member of parliament from the party. Then came another scandal involving

the quasi-governmental Japan Railway Construction Corporation and the Environment Agency. A Board of Audit investigation revealed that these two agencies had allowed their employees to draw extra pay and bonus on the strength of bogus travel documents, with the knowledge of transport and finance ministries. The scandal was a minor one compared to the infamous Lockheed scandal, but it cast an ominous shadow on the political arena. Even the Chief Cabinet Secretary, Hokusuku Tanaka, admitted that the Audit finding would greatly affect the outcome of the election.

The election-eve predictions gave a bright chance of victory for Ohira and his LDP. "Ohira charts a victory path", "Ohira's party All set for Decisive Win", were some of the titles seen in the mass media, both Japanese and non-Japanese.[3] They said that the LDP will capitalize on the weakness of the five major opposition parties and will surpass its target of securing the magic number — 271 seats — required for the party to recapture key Diet Committees.[4]

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3 Far Eastern Economic Review, vol.105, no.37, September 14, 1979, p. 16; Times of India (Delhi) September 18, 1979, p. 6

4 The Kyodo News Service, a Survey, a week ago forecast 270 seats for the LDP. See, 'Tremors from Tokyo,' The Hindu (Madras), Editorial, October 10, 1979

It was expected that LDP's gain would be mainly at the cost of the Japan Socialist Party. It was also predicted that the four centrist parties (DSP, Komeito, NLC and the tiny USDP, the latest addition to the Japanese parties) which had agreed to cooperate with each other in about 1/3 of Japan's 130 multi member constituencies, would retain their pre-election strength. The Japan Communist Party which suffered a serious set in 1976 election, was expected to score substantial gains.

The election was held on October 8, 1979. The outcome was contrary to all expectations and predictions by LDP leaders and political observers. The ruling party secured only 248 seats, less than one seat in the 1976 election. The Japan Socialist party, as expected lost a number of seats. It received only 107 seats, 16 seats less than before the election. The party which gained most was the Japan Communist Party. The result went far beyond what was predicted by political observers, who forecast only a marginal increase in the number of seats by JCP. In reality, the party more than doubled its 1976 strength with 39 seats. Another surprise was the Komeito's performance, which despite pre-poll predictions of a major loss, actually gained two more seats.

The DSP, with 35 seats, gained six seats more than its 1976 number. In addition to the LDP and JSP, other losers included the New Liberal Club and the United Socialist Democratic Party (USDP). The NLC lost as many as 13 seats, while the politically lightweight USDP lost one of its three seats.

The result thus caught not only the ruling party by surprise but most political observers and a large part of the electorate as well. Until the day of election, the LDP was considered by most to be in an extremely strong position, with pollsters giving it upto 30 per cent of the popular vote and a maximum of 285 seats. But the out come put Ohira and the LDP in a difficult position. Contrary to expectations that the LDP will get a stable majority of at least 271 seats in the 511 seat House of Representatives, the ruling party ended up even without a simple majority in the initial line up. Nevertheless, the party increased its share of popular vote by 2.8 /percent and was able to continue in power by admitting 10 independents to the party fold. While the 258 seats gave the LDP a working majority and assured its unbreakable rule in Japan for some more years, Ohira's dream of leading his party to a major victory was shattered completely. The party again lost its control over the Diet Committees, and thus also its free hand in

legislation.

Everything went wrong for the LDP leading to a near debacle. Its election strategy was rated poor, and the pre-election announcement of a tax increase was ill-advised. Even the weather gods remained unhelpful. Heavy rains on the polling day kept the turn out low — 68.1 per cent, the second lowest after the 67.95 per cent turn out in 1947.

The party's choice of candidates was also considered to be a contributory cause, especially in view of the multimember constituency system.[5] By endorsing too many candidates the party split votes. In Aichi District, for example, both LDP candidates were defeated though they received together 114,721 votes, while all the four seats went to opposition candidates who secured 87,219; 75,602; 71,515; 71,342 votes each.[6]

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5 In 129 of Japan's 130 electoral districts, three, four or five representatives are elected to the Diet. The remaining district, Amami Oshima, is a single member constituency.

6. Hans H. Baerwald, "Japan's 35th House of Representative Election : The LDP Toys with a Return to 1954", Asian Survey, vol. xx, no.3, March 1980, p. 261.

Ohira's pre-election announcement of a planned tax increase as a means of redressing the 40 per cent deficit in the national budget and its subsequent withdrawal due to fierce opposition from his own party and the oppositions were cited as another reason for the poor performance of the party. His opponents criticised him for exhibiting a lack of leadership.

But according to Garrett Scalera, head of the Tokyo Institute of Policy Studies, the over riding factor in the LDP defeat was "the lack of coherent platform based on a sense of real direction".[7] This view was shared by many other political commentators. According to Lewis John, "in the past, the LDP just needed to say 'vote for us and business as usual'. With a GNP growing at a rate of ten per cent or more annually, that was a hard offer to turn down. But no one actually set out a real policy, a philosophy for running the country. When the world wide economic bubble burst and the local economy took a dive this deficiency became apparent. This is a new concept that is evolving on the Japanese political scene and the LDP is neither aware of it or is not prepared to address it ...".[8]

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7. Quoted in John Lewis, "Ohira's Mandate of Indifference", Far Eastern Economic Review, vol.106, no.42, October 19, 1979, p. 12

8 Ibid, p. 12

Whatever were the reasons, the poll result turned out to be a double edged weapon in the hands of Ohira's opponents. Takeo Miki, leader of one of the anti-Ohira factions, termed the defeat as an "unmistakable failure" on the part of Ohira and thus put all blame on him. Fukuda and Nakasone, the other two leaders of anti-Ohira factions, joined with Miki and even declared an open revolt against Ohira, swearing to oust him from the party presidency and premiership. Throughout the month of October, they continued demanding Ohira's resignation to 'show his responsibility' for the party's defeat. By calling for the Premier's resignation, they sought not only to settle scores with Ohira but also to undermine the considerable influence of Ohira's main ally, Tanaka. Fukuda saw the Ohira-Tanaka partnership as instrumental in denying him the premiership in 1972, and for jolting him out of office.

Ohira was not slow in gauging the designs of his opponents, and he refused to yield to demands for his resignation. He termed their outcry as a pretext to oust him somehow and motivated by a desire for revenge. He, therefore, decided to face the challenge from his critics at any cost. His advantage was that though the party had failed to get a majority, his own faction

was strengthened by getting 14 more members elected to the Diet and his close ally Tanaka's faction had gained two more seats. His opponents' factions had lost three of Diet seats.

The post-election fight among the party factions was ferocious. Leaders of the rival factions held a series of meetings with party Vice President Eiichi Nishimura acting as mediator. But the impasse continued The whole thing reached an explosive point when the anti-Ohira forces boycotted a formal meeting called by the Party to select its leader. The quarrel took such ugly turn that the business community which was traditionally behind the LDP voiced its discontent and the president of the Japan Chamber of Commerce appealed to the Party to choose as leader a man of good sense who could handle the challenge faced by the nation and also fulfil people's expectations. Ohira at one point apologized for the slowness of the democratic process, adding that his "... head aches over the slow pace". Not to be out done Fukuda said he was "fighting for the country".

Finally, the intraparty fight paved the way for a show down between Ohira and anti-Ohira factions, the latter led by Fukuda on the floor of the Diet. The

leadership contest was between Ohira and Fukuda. No one gained the required majority in the Lower House voting in the first round of balloting. In the second round, Ohira won the contest with 138 votes against 121 votes for Fukuda. Thus, Ohira became the Premier for a second time, but the events which led to his election left deep scars in the body politic of Japan.

Factional fights in the party were not new, but this time they were carried out in full public gaze. They were "a very Japanese political move in very un-Japanese manner", as one observer put it. According to another observer, the LDP was unlikely to vanish from the scene in the immediate future, but "the cancer that has been eating away at the party for the past few years is now in full view and the long-term prognosis is not encouraging".[9] The party virtually remained split. Despite the claims made by Fukuda that he had "absolutely no intention of splitting the party", the fact remained that the party was split, though it was not visible.

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9 Quoted in John Lewis, On the Brink of a Fatal Break up, Far Eastern Economic Review, vol.106, no. 46, November 16, 1979, p. 12

Victory did not end Ohira's difficulties. He had to restore the factional balance within the party. Aware of the coming problems he observed: "I feel I have finally managed to get out of hot water, but I expect to dip into even hotter water".[10]

Though they conceded defeat, the anti Ohira factions led by Fukuda, Nakasone and Miki, kept their options open, disregarding the facade of party unity. They said that they would keep their distance from the Premier and "cooperate only on a case-by-case basis". However, Ohira temporarily managed to get a truce with his main opponents and finally was able to fill the top three executive posts in the party. The most important executive position, viz. Secretary-General, went to Yoshio Sakurachi who represented the Nakasone faction. Fukuda's trusted aide Shinato Abe was selected for the post of Chairman, Policy Affairs Research Council, and Ohira's confidente Zenko Suzuki was appointed as head of the Executive Council. But making the Cabinet proved much more difficult. Out of the 20 men he selected for his team, 15 were new faces who had never held administrative portfolios before; ten out of twenty were Dietmembers

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10 Ibid, p. 12

who had supported Ohira in the Diet drama, and eight were supporters of Fukuda and his allies. The make-up of the new cabinet underscored the hold of various factions and Ohira's precarious position. In the previous Ohira cabinet there were fewer anti-mainstream members.

Ohira thus began his second term of office on a weak note and followed a policy of compromise and caution. His detractors, though lying low, never ceased their anti-Ohira activities. They took every opportunity to hit back at him. One of the points on which they continued their attack was his China policy. He paid a visit to China on December 5, 1979. It was the first visit by a Japanese Premier after Tanaka's 1972 visit, when the Japan-China normalization agreement was signed. His allegedly soft policy towards China stirred up a heated controversy within the party. The right-wing party members who wanted Japan to maintain strong ties with South Korea and Taiwan, opposed Ohira's tilt towards China at the cost of Japan's traditional friends. Influential members of the Executive Council of the party including Ichiro Nakagawa and other right wingers known for their close connections with South Korea and Taiwan, opposed to extend US $ 1.5 billion in official loans to

China. They alleged that the Premier had taken a 'rash decision' without foreseeing its implications for Japan's relations with ASEAN countries, the United States and the Soviet Union. Another issue which drew criticism from his critics in the party was Ohira's peace plan to end the conflict in Kampuchea. That plan was rejected and he drew a blank in his attempt to play the role of a mediator.

Although the new year portended fresh political and economic difficulties, attention was mainly focused on the presidential election scheduled to take place towards the end of the year. The factional leaders who were well aware of the toppling drama enacted by the Ohira-Tanaka team, started a vigorous membership drive. Intraparty battle lines were once again drawn clearly. According to Asahi Shimbun, out of the 3.1 million new voters qualified to cast votes in the 1980 November election, the Ohira-Tanaka expected to get 905,000 primary votes and came first in the line. With 841,000 expected votes Takeo Miki's man, Toshio Komoto, stood in the second place, Yushiro Nakasone with 419,750 votes was ranked next, and Fukuda was given the fourth place with only 355,500 votes.

Though these figures gave a rough indication of the relative standing of the LDP leaders anything could happen within the nine monthpre-election time and change the outcome. Therefore, factional fight for supremacy, alliances and counter alliances between various factions began to appear on the political scene. Allegations and counter allegations regarding the membership drive by various faction leaders were played up by the news media. As it appeared that the new members brought into the party fold were really bought in, the criticism was mainly against Ohira's ruling faction. Fukuda reportedly told Ohira: "The abnormal situation in which the gathering of votes is being carried out by defraying dues with party funds is tantamount to bribery and cannot be ignored from the standpoint of (the) purification of politics."[11]

Though eight months away still, the presidential election set the stage for a new confrontation between Ohira and anti-Ohira factions. Meanwhile, the opposition parties made a fresh attempt for a viable coalition against the ruling party in view of the forthcoming Upper House election. On January 10, 1980, the Japan

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11 Cuoted in John Lewis, "Blood Sports of the Ruling Class", Far Eastern Economic Review, vol. 107, no. 8, February 22, 1980, p. 10

Socialist Party, and Komeito (middle-of-the-road party) entered into an agreement for a coalition. The proposed coalition was criticised by other opposition parties, notably, the Japan Communist Party, as an "anti-Communist-pro-LDP policy", yet the possibility of evolving a strong coalition by including the Democratic Socialist Party as an alternative to the ruling party seemed to be within the realm of possibility.

On the economic front, too, Ohira began to face serious problems. Inflation and recession caused by rising oil prices began to affect the country's economy. In the fiscal year ended on March 31, 1980, Japan's deficit stood at an alarming figure of $ 13,930 million, seriously affecting the country's growth rate. The suspension of Iranian crude oil supply as a retaliation against the Japanese support to the US over the hostage issue, further aggravated Japan's economic problem.

Seeing these political and economic problems as a threat to party's prospects in the forthcoming Upper House elections in June, Ohira appealed to his opponents in the party to cooperate with him to face these challenges. Moreover, in an attempt to get over economic difficulties, Ohira paid a visit to the United States

in May. In his meeting with President Carter, he tried to convince his american hosts that Japan was more interested in her relations with the US than the Iranian oil. By reaffirming Japan's firm alliance with the US, he sought to enlist American trade support to Japan. Ohira also visited Canada and Mexico during his American trip. In Mexico, he tried to get more Mexican oil but achieved limited success. However, his visit highlighted Japan's increasing role in world politics.

All these moves were criticised by the Opposition, which charged that Ohira was not showing enough independence over the American hostage issue and invited Iran's displeasure and suspension of oil supply. They alleged that instead of adopting an independent foreign line the Premier rushed to the United States to show his American tilt and Japan's interdependence. They also charged that he neglected the deteriorating conditions of Japan's economy and the common man's difficulties.

Seeing the state of affairs in the LDP and the vulnerability of its leader, the Japan Socialist Party decided to table a no-confidence motion against the Ohira government, in

May. When the motion came up for discussion, it was considered as a usual opposition ritual to denounce ruling party and government. The opposition also thought that only by blasting the government for mounting inflation and corruption in high places, they could seek popular support and boost up their chances in the Upper House elections. Within the LDP, the anti-Ohira factions were also making plans to embarrass him. Through a small party reform group, they put forward some demands including firm action against political corruption. Ohira refused their demands telling that the time was not proper for such a step. Taking advantage of the move for a no confidence motion, the anti-Ohira factions insisted that he accept their demands if he expected them to vote against the motion. Before the voting, mediators tried to make a compromise between the warring factions. But Ohira refused to yield to the demands of his opponents or make a compromise with them. He did not expect the withdrawal of support by his opponents in the party especially at a time when the Upper House elections were nearing. The anti-Ohira factions, on the other hand, angered at Ohira's refusal to negotiate termed his attitude as 'arrogance'. They ordered their members in the Diet to abstain from voting on the no-confidence motion. In consequence on May 16,

1980, the day on which the motion was moved 69 members belonging to Miki and Fukuda factions abstained from voting and the no-confidence motion was carried through with 243 for and 187 against [illegible] the Ohira government. Thus the 7 month old Ohira cabinet fell.

Ohira refused to accept defeat and let his opponents take over the government. He dissolved the Lower House immediately saying that the Selectorate should be given a chance to decide the shape of Japan's political future. The Lower House election was called for June 22, and the Upper House election, originally scheduled to be held on June 29, was advanced by a week so that both elections could be conducted simultaneously on June 22. It was for the first time in Japan's postwar political history that both elections were taking place on the same day.

The sudden fall of Ohira cabinet, however, put the party in a critical condition. Ohira's people demanded severe punishment of the deserters by way of denial of party tickets and campaign funds. The anti-Ohira factions formed a joint committee to plan their strategy and gave the impression that a new party may be formed. Taking advantage of the unexpected turn of

events in the ruling party, the opposition parties began to float coalitions. The JSP, Komeito and DSP though holding opposite views in matters of defense and foreign policies, tried to forge a grand coalition against the LDP. Political pundits and pollsters forecast that the LDP era was over and that one party rule was also drawing to a close. Takayoshi Miyagawa of the Centre for Political Public Relations, predicted that the LDP was certain to lose. He said: "I firmly predict that the day of one party rule is over".[12] Others predicted that if the LDP lost its majority by a few seats, it would probably seek a coalition with the Democratic Socialist Party. If it lost by a big margin, the JSP may form a coalition big enough to take over the administration.

These forecasts and observations as well as the mounting public criticism of the suicidal intraparty feuds, alarmed the LDP leaders. They even began to think of forming coalitions with the Opposition parties. While expressing concern over the party's steady decline, Ohira himself openly argued for a political alliance with nonleftist opposition parties. However, that was

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12 William Chapman, 'Ohira's Defeat Threatens Major Upheaval', Indian Express (Delhi) (by arrangement with Washington Post), May 26, 1980.

a far fetched idea and the Party satraps would not let it happen. They realised that they had 'cut off (LDP's) nose to spite its face' and the bleeding had weakened the party. In a belated move, they tried to forge some unity in the party and face the twin elections. But the question was whether the LDP would wither away completely or survive to uphold Japan's conservative political tradition.

TABLE 4.1

PARTY POSITION : OCTOBER 1979 ELECTION

Party	No. of Seats won in 1979-October Election	No. of Seats won in 1976-Election	Strength at the time of dissolution of the Lower House on Sept 7, '79
Liberal Democratic Party (LDP)	248	249	249
Japan Socialist Party (JSP)	107	123	117
Komeito (The Clean Government Party)	57	55	56
Japan Communist Party (JCP)	39	17	19
Democratic Socialist Party (DSP)	35	29	28
New Liberal Club (NLC)	4	17	13
United Socialist Democratic Party	2	-	3
Independents	19	21	7
vacancies	-	-	19
Total	511	511	511

Sources: Information Bulletin, 1979, Public Information Bureau, Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Tokyo, vol. 26, no.18, October 15, 1979, p.193

Financial Express (London), October 9, 1979

CHAPTER FIVE

THE CONSERVATIVE REVIVAL : THE JUNE 1980 ELECTIONS

THE June 1980 elections to both Houses of the Diet, in many ways, stand as an epoch-making event in the political history of post-war Japan, especially in the history of the ruling Liberal Democratic Party. The twin elections not only made history by giving a big push to the ruling party, but they disapproved the general belief that Conservatism in Japan was on the decline. But the outcome was contrary to all expectations and predictions, confirming the strength of Conservative sway over the Japanese electorate. By giving a landslide victory to the ruling party, the electorate once again proved its preference for conservatism and its unwillingness to try a new experiment.

The opposition sponsored no-confidence motion, the withdrawal of support by anti-Ohira factions, the unexpected fall of Ohira Government and an informal split in the ruling party made Japanese politics an interesting reading during the month of May. But when the schedule was announced for the twin elections in June, no one expected that Japanese politics is going to make another history short of new radical experiment. The questions in the minds of Japanese political observers were how would the Japanese voters react to

the May events; how far those events would affect the fortunes of various political parties in the country; whether the electorate will accelerate the already declining trend of conservative politics and declare the end of one-party rule in Japan; whether the LDP and Ohira will be able to scrape through the elections as they had done in the previous elections; was a coalition government in the offing? If so, what sort of a coalition government will that be? What would be its implications for Japanese political and economic future?

Hardly ten days before the twin elections, Japanese politics changed its course rather unexpectedly. The change was caused by no other person than Ohira himself. It was, of course, not by toppling his strong political rival in the party; it was not by imposing a general election upon the Japanese electorate, or falling himself from the helm of power. But it was by his own disappearance from the Japanese political scene for ever. The sudden death of Ohira on June 12, changed the political atmosphere again. Both the ruling party and the Opposition found themselves in a peculiar political atmosphere. The LDP lost its leader at a very critical juncture. The opposition was deprived of their

main political target. The anti-Ohira factions suddenly lost their political aim even before the fight had begun. While Ohira's death brought a temporary truce among the warring factions, a new tussle started in the background between different factions for the leadership of the party. At the same time, the usual election issues were pushed to the background and the ruling party conducted the electioneering campaign with the portrait of the expired leader. Though it was expected that only a marginal increase would accrue to the LDP through sympathy votes, the election result derailed all calculations and predictions. It took by surprise not only political observers and the opposition but also the ruling party. The election gave a thumping victory to the Liberal Democratic Party with 284 seats out of 511 seats in the Lower House. In the Upper House, too, the party returned with more seats. Above all, a new and young leadership emerged in the party with the elevation of Zenko Suzuki as the president of the ruling party and hence, the head of government.

The series of changes cited above started with the hospitalization of the 70 year old Prime Minister who has suffered in early June a mild heart attack amidst the election campaign for his party. Though the doctors

declared him to be out of danger and hoped to discharge him from hospital within a week, doubts were raised whether he would be able to campaign for his party or even lead the party. Further, his hospitalization reduced the chances of his presence at the Venice Conference of the Industrialized Countries in which Japan has a leading role. All these developments put the LDP in a predicament, especially when it was fighting for survival. Ohira, however, used his hospital bed to affirm his determination to lead the party and appealed to voters to support the LDP for political stability. He said, "the country would be plunged into a period of political instability if the Liberal Democrats failed to retain their majority in the Lower House. There is no other party which is capable of running the country through the tough times ahead. I am determined to regain my health as soon as possible and lead the party to victory".[1] But his optimism began to fade as his condition failed to improve even after ten crucial days. His own announcement later that he had given up hope of directing the ruling party's campaign strengthened the general belief that he was unlikely to attend the Venice

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1. Peter Hazelhurst, "Mr Ohira's Illness Disrupts Election Campaign", The Times (London), 3 June, 1980.

Summit of June 22. Political observers and news media began to make their usual predictions and speculations. The Japan Broadcasting Corporation (Nihon-hoso-Kyokai) predicted that the announcement would make "tremendous impact on Japan's political structure" at a juncture when the ruling party stood in danger of losing its majority in both Houses of Diet. The Asahi Shimbun declared that Ohira "will find it difficult to remain in power if he can not attend the summit and fails to campaign for the election". The paper even speculated three names as possible contenders for the party leadership: Yasuhiro Nakasone, former Secretary General of the party, Toshio Komoto, a former Minister of International Trade and Industry, and Kiichi Miyazawa, a former Minister of Foreign Affairs.[2] Meanwhile an opinion poll conducted by Mainichi Shimbun showed that only 21 per cent out of 3000 voters supported the Ohira government and 46 per cent refused to support it.

In short, the problems created by Ohira's hospitalization and the declining popularity of the party and government worried the LDP leadership and strengthened

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2. Peter Hazelhurst, "Mr Ohira may be Forced to Resign After Doctors' Ban on Venice Trip and Campaign in Elections", The Times (London), June 10, 1980

their belief that the party was going to lose the election. Further concern was caused by a statement made at this time by the President of the powerful Japan Federation of Economic Organizations. While lashing out at the 'political degeneration of the LDP stemming from the politicians' selfish lust for power and money', the new President remarked that he would not care for the 'formality' of government so long as the economic system was maintained.[3] The statement clearly indicated that the business community which had always supported the conservative party, was also expecting a change, and was even prepared to welcome any form of government as long as its interests were protected.

While every one was thinking that there would be an end of LDP's 25 years old single-party rule in Japan, Ohira died in early hours of June 12. That created a bewildering political situation. The mainstream factions in the LDP was left with no leader, as Tanaka was not a formal member of the party; the anti-mainstream factions lost their factional rival. The opposition was deprived of their political target. The prediction

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3. The Hindu (Madras), "Poll Line Up in Japan" (Editorial), June 12, 1980

began to change. It was generally expected that the death of the Premier would help the ruling party in getting more votes as the Japanese traditionally sympathise with the dead. These expectations were shared by every opposition leader. Yoshikatsu Takeiri, Chairman of the Komeito, and Hideo Den, founder leader of the small United Socialist Democratic Party (USDP), admitted that Ohira's death would make a substantial impact. While acknowledging the possibility of such an impact in favour of the LDP, the other major opposition leaders warned the electorate of dangers if it tilted towards LDP. The Japan Socialist Party chief, Ichio Asukata, warned that, "we should not succumb to any sentiment or emotion, but instead strive to seek the people's cool headed and strict judgement of the LDP in the election". The Japan Communist Party head, Kenji Miyamoto said that the party had "no intention of softening its original election strategy of bitterly attacking the LDP".[4]

Besides, the opposition parties' hardline policy not to give more chance to LDP to exploit Ohira's death,

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4. John Lewis, "Death of a Premier, Birth of a Coalition", Far Eastern Economic Review, vol. 108, No.26, June 20, 1980, p. 10

no one really anticipated a major shift in voters' behaviour. On the other hand, it was expected that Ohira's death would cause more problems to the ruling party. Since the party was never known for its internal cohesion, the inevitable leadership tussle would lead to the Party's disintegration. In fact the factions began to mobilize their strength for the leadership struggle within a few days after Ohira's death. While the Tanaka-Ohira factions projected Kiichi Miyagawa as their candidate, the Miki faction named Toshio Komoto, as its candidate. Fukuda still entertained hope that he may again be recalled to lead the party in the interest of stability and continuity. Nakasone, who was head of his own faction, was also interested in getting the top party post.

Nakasone's move was critical in so far as his shift either way could be decisive. His own chances were not bright but the 46 members of his faction were certainly in a position to decide who will be the leader. The Fukuda, Miki and Nakagawa factions which supported Toshio Komoto, had 80 votes as against the 93 controlled by Tanaka and Ohira factions.

The warring factions accepted a temporary truce. Putting aside their factional feuds, the Party conducted the election campaign jointly with the funeral portrait of Ohira as its banner. Leaders like Fukuda, Miki and Nakasone called for support to the policies followed by Ohira. They warned against ending the party's 25 year old rule and claimed that a coalition government would result in political turmoil of the kind for which Italy was famous where frequent changes in government had hampered the industrial growth of the country.

Opinion polls conducted by the Japanese Broadcasting Corporation (NHK) suggested the LDP was certainly going to get 'sympathy' votes but predicted that the average voter was going to opt for a broad coalition comprising the LDP, DSP and Komeito. The same poll also showed that an opposition coalition of JSP, DCP and Komeito was favoured by only 10 per cent of the voters surveyed. The JSP-JCP alliance was preferred by less than 5 per cent voters.

Although the idea of a coalition was widely discussed by the media, it was evident that none had any idea about what would be the most viable coalition. The three non-Communist opposition parties, viz. JSP,

DSP and Komeito were thought to be the most likely coalition, but their differences over certain critical issues like security and national defence were so wide that it was impossible for them to come together in a coalition. The JSP stood for the abrogation of Japan-US Security Pact, neutrality and disarmament. The party described its policy as one of 'unarmed neutrality'. Others were more or less in a mood to endorse the security arrangement and accept the self defence forces as necessary. The JCP stood for scrapping the security treaty and freezing the self defence forces at 180,000 men. Thus, the antagonistic views of the major opposition parties on Japan's foreign policy and defence policy, virtually made an exclusive opposition coalition nonworkable. It looked as if the only workable coalition was that of one or two like-minded opposition parties and the LDP. The DSP in fact took the initiative for such a coalition. On June 16, the DSP leader Ryosaku Sasaki expressed his willingness to enter into a coalition government with the LDP. The following day, one of the LDP leaders and a candidate for the Prime Ministership, favourably responded to the idea by saying that an alliance between the DSP and the LDP could provide Japan with a strong government.

The manner in which the Ohira government fell, intra party strife within the LDP and the apparent opposition unity generated a great deal of interest among Japan's friends and allies. Although, they had no reason to believe that the LDP would not be able to muster enough strength to return to power, they feared that Japan might be entering a period of political instability and this might in turn affect its economy. And their fear was not entirely unfounded in view of the poor showing of the party in the '76 and '79 elections; the party had not only failed to get even a simple majority but its share of total votes polled had been falling.

The country went to the polls on June 22, 1980. As it was the first ever double election in post-war Japan, the electors were to elect 511 members to the Lower House (House of Representatives) and 126 members to the Upper House (House of Councillors).[5] An estimated 59 million out of 81 million eligible voters flocked the 50,000 polling booths spread over the country. There were 835 candidates in the race for the 511 seats of the Lower House and 269 aspirants for the 126 Upper House Seats. The turn over of voters was 6.56 per cent

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5. The House of Councillors is the Upper Chamber of the Diet consisting 252 members. The term of members is six years, and election for half the members taken place every three years. The present Upper House was necessitated by the retirement of 126 members elected in July 1974.

higher than the turn out for the previous Lower House election held in October 1979, and 6.69 per cent higher than that of the 1977 Upper House election.

The election results derailed all calculations and predictions of election observers. The Liberal Democratic Party swept back to power winning a clear and comfortable majority in the House of Representatives on its own. By capturing 284 seats, the conservatives confounded the critics and dashed the hopes of the Opposition parties of coming to power in coalition. With an impressive gain of an additional 36 seats, the ruling party captured control of all the 16 Standing Committees of the Diet which was necessary for smooth legislative business.

The LDP received 36 more seats at the expense of the JCP, DSP, Komeito and the independents. The JSP, barely managed to retain its pre-dissolution strength of 107 seats. Interestingly the NLC, the splinter group of the LDP was the only opposition party which improved its position from 4 to 12 seats. Among the other opposition parties, the Komeito's loss was heavy. It lost 25 of its 58 seats in the previous House. The JCP lost 10 of its 39 seats secured in the last election. The DSP had to surrender only 4 seats out of the 36 seats

it was holding. The minor USDP improved its position from 2 to 3 seats. The number of successful independents also fell from 19 to 11.

In the Upper House elections also the conservative party improved its strength. The party increased its position from 124 to 135 by capturing 11 seats more. The JSP lost 5 of its 52 seats in the pre-election standing. The Komeito lost 2 seats, thus reducing its representation in the Upper House from 28 to 26. The JCP lost 4 seats from its pre-election standing of 16 seats. The NLC lost two of its previous 4 seats. Only the DSP improved its strength slightly by gaining one more seat, to make the total 11.

In the Lower House election, the LDP obtained 47.9 per cent of the votes cast and 55.6 per cent of the seats. Similarly, in the Upper House the party secured about 43 per cent of the votes cast. In terms of both votes won and seats gained in this election, the party had regained its 1969 Lower House strength of 288 seats, and received 47.63 per cent of the votes.

This spectacular victory was all the more convincing in view of the fact that in the elections of 1976

and 1979 the party was able to get only 41.78 per cent and 44.59 per cent votes, respectively and was not able to get even a simple majority. On both occasions, it had to induct independents into the party for a simple majority in the Lower House. In the Upper House scoring also, the party improved its strength by eleven seats. Before, election, the party had only a paper thin majority of 2 seats with 124 seats against the combined opposition strength of 122 seats (six vacancies existed at the time of election).

Several reasons were put forward by poll-analysers and political observers for the LDP's unexpectedly strong showing. Most observers cited the psychological impact of Ohira's sudden demise as one of the main reasons for the LDP's victory. Opposition leaders such as JCP's Kenji Miyamoto, too, subscribed to this view. According to him "the ruling party's gain could be attributed directly to the sudden death of Mr Ohira, for the opposition's campaign had been directed against him."[6] Yoshio Sakurauchi, Secretary-General of the LDP also agreed that Ohira's death had influenced the outcome of the election, adding that "we should remember this and not become arrogant now we are back in power".[7]

6. Peter Hazelhurst, "Spectacular Win for Japan's Ruling Party", The Times (London), 24 June 1980

7. Quoted in Ibid

It is true that Ohira's death in the midst of the election campaign was credited with attracting a large number of sympathy votes for the party. But it would not have been much if the party had not fully utilized the situation. The LDP, well aware of the traditional tendency among the Japanese to sympathise with the dead, designed their election campaign to arouse emotional feelings to the maximum. By using the funeral portrait of Ohira as the party banner, the LDP made use of the psychological factor. Moreover, by adopting a temporary truce, the factional chiefs were able to convince the electorate that they buried their differences in the wake of Ohira's death. This impression also helped the party to win back the voters who were disgusted with the constant factional feuds in the party.

Another important reason for the LDP's victory was the opposition's failure to make use of the opportunity which they finally got. This was the first general election in Japanese political history in which the opposition and the ruling party appeared in equal balance. In all previous elections, the opposition campaign was aimed at exposing the ruling party's failure in adopting certain socio-economic measures for the welfare of the people and political corruption in the ruling party.

But in this election the situation was entirely different. The ruling party's influence was at its low ebb. The fierce factional rivalry reached a point that the party was about to split any moment. The general impression was created that the party was going to loose the election and a coalition government would replace the one party rule in Japan. For the first time the opposition carried out the campaign with the slogan of a change in government as its primary goal. It was commonly known that a coalition was absolutely necessary regardless of its shape, if the opposition were to gain control of the government. Consequently the call for a coalition government was heard throughout the campaign.

But the opposition parties failed badly to project a model of a strong and viable coalition capable of running the country's affairs in case the ruling party failed. Ideological differences, mutual prejudices, personal preferences, etc., pulled back the general interest of the opposition unity. Ultimately, the opposition parties appeal for a change in government was rejected by the Japanese electorate.

The opposition parties did forge a strong alliance comprising of three major opposition parties, early in the year, in view of the coming Upper House elections.

Since half of the 252 Upper House seats were coming up for election on a regular basis every three years, each party used to get enough time to prepare for the election. The opposition parties usually make political alliances and adjustments by overlooking party differences. Their main aim was to consolidate maximum opposition votes and capture more seats in the Upper House. When they made a coalition early in the year, their original plan was to experiment with an election coalition only for the Upper House local constituencies with the aim of forming a strong coalition in another three years time when the general elections were to be held in normal course. In any case they did not anticipate an immediate general election, as the previous election was held only few months earlier. So, the coalition already formed by the JSP, Komeito and DSP did not work out in detail a blue print of what a coalition government would be like. But the unexpected fall of Ohira government and the announcement of Lower House elections simultaneously with the Upper House elections caught the opposition napping. The unusual importance attached to the Lower House election in view of the ruling party's weak position forced the opposition parties to change their political priorities abruptly. The general impression that the ruling party would lose the election

because of its own fault tempted every opposition party to think about maximising its gains alone. Thus, lack of time and experience, coupled with conflicting interests of each opposition party and divergent views on important policy matters, threw the whole idea of an opposition coalition into disarray.

The temporary truce observed by the party factions following Ohira's death revived hopes that LDP may do well in the election and tempted some opposition parties like DSP to try for a coalition with the ruling party. For the DSP, this was a perfectly logical step to take as its policies were identical with the ruling party on some important issues. On the other hand, this development weakened the cause of opposition unity and the chances of an opposition coalition government. The ruling party utilized this occasion and tried to convince the Japanese electorate that a vote for the opposition was an vote of political instability in Japan.

It is obvious that the electorate was not impressed by the idea of a coalition government. It believed that the type of coalition which the opposition had in mind spelt a weak form of government and therefore against its

interest. "Voters had turned towards the ruling party because they were convinced that a much vaunted plan for a coalition government would not provide the country with stability".[8]

Various political scientists also subscribed to the view that a coalition government meant political instability. According to Ichio Watanabe, a political scientists, the ruling party's victory "was a vote against instability. The ruling party has been tainted by a number of financial scandals but voters supported the conservatives because the alternative might have edged the country into an era of political uncertainty".[9] Reinforcing this view, a noted political commentator, Koichi Kawamura, pointed out that "the floating vote which swung the balance in favour of the ruling party was influenced by the threat of instability than the conservative policies".[10] Also, the continuous rule of a single political party for two and half decades, the economic miracle it had brought about and the political stability it ensured went against a new experiment being

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8 Quoted in Peter Hazelhurst, n.5,

9 Peter Hazelhurst, "Lining Up to Fill the Chira's Shoes", The Times (London), 25 June 1980

10 Ibid

tried with a coalition. Finally, the Japanese "attitude that there is something questionable about coalition is prevalent both among political leaders and to an even greater degree among the population in general"[11] turned against the opposition.

One other factor which helped the ruling party was its election strategy. By successfully interweaving campaign activities for both the Upper and Lower House elections, the LDP was able to dig up greater reserves of support than it had done in the previous elections. On the other hand, the opposition parties' attempt to campaign on three different levels simultaneously - for the Lower House, the National Constituency seats and the Local Constituency seats in the Upper House — proved to be too heavy a burden. Even highly organized political parties such as the JCP and the Komeito were unable to mobilize their full strength for all three election levels. In contrast, by the double election, the LDP achieved the organization of horizontal pressure groups in the Upper House election and of local interest in the Lower House election.

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11 Shinohara Hajime, "Logic and Psychology in Japanese Politics", Japan Quarterly, vol.27, no.4, October-December 1980, p. 455

Besides, the climate also favoured the ruling party this time. By giving a sunny day, the weather gods tried to compensate the LDP what they had denied them by a heavy downpour on election day the previous year. Because of the fine weather, the party was able to mobilize large number of voters, especially from among the farmers and business community, who are the traditional supporters of the conservatives. The record percentage of voting thus highly benefited the ruling party.

In short, the sympathy vote presented by Ohira's death, the temporary truce in infighting, the opposition's failure to provide a strong and viable model of a coalition government, the natural apathy of the Japanese against coalitions, the fear that a coalition could mean a weak form of government, the LDP's better election strategy and a high turnout at the polls, worked in favour of the ruling party and helped it to get a sweeping victory at the polls.

TABLE 5.1

PARTY POSITION : HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

PARTY	No. of Seats Won in June 1980 Election	No. of Seats won in Oct 1979 Election	No. of seats at the time of dissolution in May 1980
Liberal Democratic Party (LDP)	284	248	258
Japan Socialist Party (JSP)	107	107	107
Komeito (Clean Government Party)	33	57	58
Democratic Socialist Party (DSP)	32	35	36
Japan Communist Party (JCP)	29	39	41
New Liberal Club (NLC)	12	4	4
United Socialist Democratic Party (USDP)	3	2	2
Others	0	0	0
Independents	11	19	4
Vacant	0	0	1
Total	511	511	511

SOURCE: Information Bulletin, 1980 (Public Information and Cultural Affairs Bureau, Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Tokyo), vol.27, no.7, July 15, 1980, p.150

TABLE 5.2

PARTY POSITION : HOUSE OF COUNCILLORS

PARTY	No. of Seats won in June 1980 Elections: N C	L C	Total	No. of Seats not up for Election	Past Election Strength (Total)	Pre Election Strength (Total)
Liberal Democratic Party (LDP)	21	48	69	66	135	124
Japan Socialist Party (JSP)	9	13	22	25	47	52
Komeito (Clean Government Party)	9	3	12	14	26	28
Democratic Socialist Party (DSP)	3	2	5	6	11	10
Japan Communist Party (JCP)	3	4	7	5	12	16
New Liberal Club (NLC)	0	0	0	2	2	2
United Socialist Democratic Party (USDP)	1	0	1	2	3	3
Others	1	1	2	0	2	2
Independents	3	5	8	5	13	10
Vacant	-	-	-	1	1	5

TABLE 9.2 : Party Position : House of Councillors - contn.

PARTY	No. of Seats Won in June 1980 Election: NC	LC	Total	No. of Seats not up for Election	Post Election Strength (Total)	Pre Election Strength (Total)
Total	50	76	126	126	252	252

NOTE: NC = National Constituency

LC = Local (Prefectural) Constituency

Out of 252 members of the Upper House 152 are being elected from Local constituencies and 100 are elected from National constituencies.

SOURCE: Information Bulletin, 1980 (Public Information and Cultural Affairs Bureau), Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Tokyo), vol.27, no.7, July 15, 1980, p. 151

CONCLUSION

THE defeat of Japan in the Second World War and the consequent occupation of the country by the Allied forces was a turning point in the history of Japan. The occupation forces under the command of the SCAP brought in a series of radical changes in all spheres of Japanese life. On the political front, the changes were mainly aimed at transforming the country from its imperialist and militarist path to a parliamentary democracy. In place of monarchy, a popularly elected government was established. As the parliamentary system generally functions only through political parties, different parties representing divergent political shades and beliefs started organizing themselves. A new constitution, which recognized the principle of popular sovereignty made the parliament, the supreme law-making body of the country.

The principal political groups that emerged on the post war political scene, were the Conservatives, the Socialists and the Communists. They legitimized their role in the new political set up with the formation of parties. In the early post-war years, conservatives as well as Socialists were voted to power. But after a short-period of Socialist rule in 1948, the

Japanese people began to shift their political preference in favour of the Conservatives. Since then the Conservatives have won all the general elections. In November 1955, two main Conservative parties - the Liberal Party and the Democratic Party - merged into one single Conservative Party. With the formation of the new conservative party, the Liberal Democratic Party, the conservative hold over government became stronger. Since then the LDP has been ruling the country uninterruptedly though other mass-based political parties representing various political ideologies and socio-economic programmes have also been functioning freely. In a way this single party dominance is an important feature of Japanese politics.

A variety of changes have taken place in the country's political, economic and social fields during the last three decades. The occupation forces have left the country, sovereignty has been restored, democracy has taken roots in the country, and the economy of Japan has become one of the strongest in the world. Elections are held periodically giving a chance to all political parties to try to capture political power. Education and social changes have made the Japanese people politically conscious. The rapid growth of

industries has altered the rural-urban population balance with people from the countryside moving to cities and new urban areas. A highly articulate working class has emerged, and powerful trade unions have come to play a major role in society. The country's doors are no more closed to the outside world. Nevertheless, the domestic political scene, with its single-party dominance, has not undergone any radical change. The Liberal Democratic Party's rule continues without any indication of a break. Though the influence of the party declined sharply in the 1970s, its position remains unassailable and this was demonstrated in the election of 1980.

A careful examination of the fluctuations in the electoral performance of the conservative party in 1970s as well as in 1980 reveals that the party has built a strong mass base over a period of time. The numerous changes in national life did not lead to any major erosion in people's faith in conservative politics. Despite a minor set back suffered by it, the party enjoyed support of the Japanese electorate. There was no effective challenge to the party from any source because the voters were simply not prepared sacrifice political stability and economic prosperity for the sake of an experiment.

There are seven political parties working within the Japanese parliamentary framework. All these parties are technically post-war products. In fact, except the LDP, the JSP and the JCP, all other parties appeared on the political scene only in the 1960's and 1970s. But the origin of the conservative parties, the forerunner of the LDP, goes back to the early days of party politics in Japan after the Meiji Restoration. When the Restoration took place in 1867, the Japanese society was basically a traditional agrarian society. Despite the adoption of western ideas and institutions, the country retained its traditional socio-political and ethical ideas, values and attitudes. This strong traditionalism also affected the nature of politics in the early years of the Meiji Restoration; it was basically conservative politics. Therefore, the parties which made their appearance on the Japanese political scene were intended to safeguard the interests of the dominant agrarian groups. This trend continued unabated well into the first decade of the 20th Century.

After the First World War and the Russian Revolution, revolutionary ideas made their presence in Japanese politics. The dominant political trend, however, remained conservative. As a result, progressive political

parties had to work underground till the end of World War II. Even the Socialist party, despite industrialization and the emergence of a working class, remained a party of intellectuals and failed to weaken the hold of conservatism over the Japanese masses.

In short, the political and social conditions of pre-war Japan were essentially dominated by the conservative philosophy. Though the Second World War and the defeat in the war led to an over-all change in Japanese political and economic spheres, the society remained more or less conservative in thinking. Even the occupation authorities did not touch the Japanese traditionalism as they feared that it will hurt the sentiments of traditional conscious Japanese.

It was only in the relatively freer atmosphere of the immediate post war years, that political conservatism came to be challenged by others. The socialist party was even voted into power in 1947-48, though it could not remain in power for a longer period owing to internal problems. Meanwhile, the Japanese needed political stability to rebuild their nation which was completely shattered by the war.

As the nation moved closer to independence, the nation moved once again towards conservative political parties represented by the Liberal and Democratic parties. Since then it has been a story of continuous conservative domination and that has been rationalized on grounds of political stability and economic prosperity. That dominance was reinforced in 1955 when the Liberal Democratic Party was formed.

Three years after it came into existence, (1958), the LDP demonstrated its power and influence by winning 287 out of 467 seats in the Lower House and 57.8 per cent of the votes. In contrast, the Socialist Party won 166 seats and 32.94 per cent of the votes; the JCP got only one seat and 2.55 per cent of the votes. The strength of conservatism was left in no doubt.

In the next elections held in 1960, the LDP increased its representation in the Diet and returned its share of the votes. It won 296 seats and 57.56 per cent of the votes. The JSP lost its strength further, owing to a split. Its representation in the Diet fell to 145 seats and its share of popular votes to 27.5 per cent. The new party - the Democratic Socialist Party - got away with 17 seats and 8.77 per cent of the votes.

Together the two socialist parties received 36.13 per cent vote, but this gain was not at the expense of the Conservatives. It was the Independents who lost their strength from 13 seats in 1958 to 6 in 1960 and their share of popular votes from 6.71 per cent to 3.18 per cent. The JCP won three seats with only 2.93 per cent votes. This trend continued in the other two elections held during the 1960s.

In the 1963 election, the LDP's share of Lower House seats was 283 with 54.67 per cent votes. The JSP received 29.03 per cent vote and won 144 seats. The DSP lost its electoral support from 8.77 per cent in 1960 to 7.37 per cent, despite an increase in number of seats. Only the Communists and the Independents fared better.

In the 1967, the LDP suffered a heavy loss of votes by 5.87 per cent, but gained 277 seats in a House of 486 seats. The JSP also suffered a loss from 29.03 per cent to 27.87 per cent votes, from 144 to 140 Lower House seats. The DSP did not benefit much. Its percentage of votes increased only from 7.37 to 7.40 per cent. The JCP's strength also remained static.

The loss of conservative votes was due to the entrance of the Komeito (Clean Government Party) in to the electoral arena. As a new party with support from the powerful religious organization, Soka-Gakkai it attracted a good number of conservative votes. Its score was 5.33 per cent votes and 25 seats.

In the 1969 General election the LDP lost further ground. The party had to remain content with 47.63 per cent votes and 288 seats. But the Socialists lost heavily in this election. Their vote percentage sharply dropped from 27.89 per cent to 21.44 per cent and their seats from 140 to 90. The middle-of-the-road parties showed a better record. The Komeito more than doubled its vote percentage from 5.39 per cent to 10.91 per cent and captured 47 seats. At the other extreme, JCP improved its position from 4.76 per cent to 6.81 per cent votes and 5 to 14 seats.

Between 1958 and 1969 the LDP lost ten per cent of its strength in terms of popular votes, from 57.8 per cent to 47.63 per cent. During the same period it managed to win more than 50 per cent of the seats. The margin of loss did not suggest that political conservatism was rejected.

On the other hand, JSP, the LDP's main opponent, lost both in terms of vote per centage and number of seats. The Party's strength declined by 11.5 per cent votes, from 32.94 per cent to 21.44 per cent. In terms of the number of seats the difference was 76. Partly this was due to the split in the Party in 1960. But the splinter group, the DSP, also lost its strength from 8.77 per cent vote in 1960 to 7.74 per cent vote in 1969. The main beneficiary was the Komeito, which scored 10.91 per cent vote and 47 seats in 1969.

In short, the 1960s saw the consolidation of conservative hold over Japanese politics. The Socialists, on the other hand, ceased to be a challenge to the conservatives. This consolidation became possible mainly because of the base which they inherited from pre-war years. Secondly, the conservatives fulfilled the Japanese desire for a stable government which was necessary to rebuild the country's shattered economy. Thirdly, the JSP, the only party which could offer an alternative government underwent a split due to ideological differences. Its continued opposition to the US-Japan Security Treaty also worked against it in the sense that it went against the popular belief that the Security Treaty brought security as well as economic prosperity to the country.

In the 1970s the LDP declined sharply, particularly in the 1976 and 1979 elections. In the 1972 election the party's loss was marginal in terms of popular vote. While it got 46.85 per cent vote it lost 17 seats. Its overall score was only 271 seats out of 491. It was nevertheless a significant victory.

The JSP continued to lose both in terms of the number of seats and per centage of votes. The Komeito too, lost 2.45 per cent votes and 18 seats. The Japan Communist Party, however, secured 10.49 per cent vote and 38 seats, a record performance since the party's appearance in electoral politics.

The nadir of LDP's popularity was reached in the 1976 general election. Its popularity in terms of vote went down to 41.78 per cent, the lowest till then and the number of seats it controlled dropped to 249 forcing the party to lose its simple majority. There were many reasons for this sharp decline in the party's popularity. First of all, the 1976 election came at a time when the nation's high economic growth came to an end. The 1973 "oil shock" and the general decline in international trade seriously affected Japanese economy. Secondly, political corruption accumulating over long years erupted

in the form of 'Lockheed pay off scandal', leading to widespread criticism of the ethical standards observed in the Party. Finally, the party suffered a split just before the election. The splinter group, known as the New Liberal Club, attracted a sizeable number of conservative votes.

What is important here is that LDP's loss did not directly benefit the nonconservative parties. The combined increase (for JSP, JCP, DSP and Komeito) in the opposition votes was a negligible 0.4 per cent. Virtually the entire loss in the LDP's per centage of votes went to the New Liberal Club. Among the opposition parties only the Komeito increased substantially its per centage of votes. The JSP, while improving its strength from 118 to 123, did not increase the per centage of votes it received. In fact, it lost 1.21 per cent votes. The JCP retained the per centage of votes but lost more than half of the seats it held. The DSP, despite an increase of ten seats, failed to get a substantial gain in terms of per centage of votes. The increase in the number of seats it gained was no indication of its popularity.

In short, the LDP's decline in the 1976 election can not be taken as the spreading of roots of the non-conservative forces.

The Liberal Democratic Party's losses were repeated in the 1979 elections. The party got one seat less than in 1976. But the per centage of votes increased by 2.78 per cent. Taking into account the losses and gains of the nonconservative parties and low percentage of polling, the LDP's inability to increase its strength was no indication of a further erosion of its hold. The JSP lost as much as 16 seats, while the Komeito lost a small share of the popular votes. Even the JCP, which registered a big increase from 17 to 39 seats, barely managed to increase its popular votes by 0.04 per cent. The NLC's strength also came down to 3.02 per cent votes and four seats.

Even if we consider the loss suffered by NLC as part of conservative decline, the combined strength of the LDP and NLC came to 47.6 per cent against 48.9 per cent in the 1976 election. The LDP on the whole remained unhurt. It seems the votes were merely content to register their displeasure over the party's failure in eliminating political corruption and intra-

party feuds. Therefore, the LDP's failure in increasing its strength was no proof of declining. Having lost its simple majority in the Lower House in 1976 and 1979 and also the share of popular votes from 47.63 per cent to 44.59 per cent between 1960, and1979, the LDP performed a near miracle in the 1980 elections bagging 47.9 per cent of the votes polled and 284 seats out of 511 in the Lower House and 135 seats out of 252 seats in the Upper House, the party demonstrated that it was not a dead force in Japanese politics. With NLCs 12 seats, the combined strength of conservative ranks in the Lower House stood at 296 seats as against the non-conservative total of 201 seats. The remaining 14 were held by minor parties and independents.

On the eve of the election the atmosphere was full of prospects that an opposition led government might take office. The scenario which was built up consisted of a collapse of the ruling party and the emergence of a LDP opposition front. But nothing of that kindh happened. Even the increase in voting turnout did not benefit the opposition much. Their voting per centage stayed without much difference. The JSP, main challenger to the LDP and the architect of a grand coalition, had to remain content with its previous standing of 107 seats. Among

the other non-conservative parties the Komeito lost as many as 24 seats. The JCP lost 10 seats and the DSP, 3. The number of independents also fell from 19 to 11. Only the other conservative outfit, the NLC, increased its strength from 4 to 12 seats.

The 1980 election result thus not only showed that the Conservative rule in Japan will continue for another term, but it belied the general belief that the Conservatives are on the decline in Japan. It also shattered the Opposition hope of coming to power through a coalition or sharing power with the Conservatives. It further recalled that the Japanese preference for conservatives rule still remains and the voters' unwillingness for a new political experiment offered by the Opposition.

Looking back, the Conservative decline in terms of electoral strength during the 1970s, it was not an erosion of conservative hold over the Japanese people. The set back suffered by the LDP was largely due to the shifting of floating votes which has become a major factor in recent years. The uncommitted and floating votes were easily attracted by the opposition parties by way of exposure of scandals, policy blunders, political corruption etc. This was possible as the LDP has been in power since its formation.

The LDP's revival in the 1960 election was made possible, in part, due to the disunity of the opposition, differences on basic issues, the general dislike of the Japanese about a coalition, LDP propaganda that coalition implied instability, the economic prosperity brought by them and swinging the floating votes in favour of the LDP.

TABLE

HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVE ELECTIONS (1958-1980)

Number of candidates elected by party, in election after the formation of the Liberal Democratic Party in 1955. (The figures in paranthoses indicate the percentage of votes obtained)

PARTY	ELECTION YEAR								
	1958	1960	1963	1967	1969	1972	1976	1979	1980
(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5)	(6)	(7)	(8)	(9)	(10)
LDP	287 (57.80)	296 (57.56)	283 (54.67)	277 (48.80)	288 (47.63)	271 (46.85)	249 (41.78)	248 (44.58)	284 (47.88)
JSP	166 (32.94)	145 (27.56)	144 (29.03)	140 (27.89)	90 (21.44)	118 (21.90)	123 (20.69)	107 (19.71)	107 (19.31)
Komeito	-	-	-	25 (5.38)	47 (10.91)	29 (8.46)	55 (10.91)	57 (9.78)	33 (9.03)
DSP	-	17 (3.77)	23 (7.37)	30 (7.40)	31 (7.74)	19 (6.93)	29 (6.29)	35 (6.78)	32 (6.60)
JCP	1 (2.55)	3 (2.93)	5 (4.01)	5 (4.86)	14 (8.03)	38 (10.79)	17 (10.39)	39 (10.42)	29 (9.83)

/contnd../

Table: House of Representative Elections: Contn..

1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
N L C	-	-	-	-	-	-	17 (4.18)	4 (3.02)	12 (2.99)
USDP	-	-	-	-	-	-	5	2 (0.68)	3 (0.68)
Independents & Minority Parties	13 (6.71)	6 (3.18)	12 (4.92)	9 (5.77)	16 (5.47)	16 (5.32)	21 (5.78)	19 (5.02)	11 (3.68)
Total	467 (100.00)	467 (100.00)	467 (100.00)	486 (100.00)	486 (100.00)	491 (100.00)	511 (100.00)	511 (100.00)	511 (100.00)

NOTE: LDP = Liberal Democratic Party; JSP = Japan Socialist Party; Komeito (Clean Government Party) DSP = Democratic Socialist Party; JCP = Communist Party; NLC = New Liberal Club; USDP =United Socialist Democratic Party.

SOURCES: For 1958-1976: Barnds William J (ed), Japan and the United States. Challenges and Opportunities (New York University Press, New York, 1979), p.23; For 1979: Information Bulletin, 1979 (Public Information Bureau, Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Tokyo), vol.26, n.10, October 15, 1979, p.192; For 1980: Information Bulletin, 1980 (Public Information Bureau, Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Tokyo), vol.27, no.7, July 15, 1980), p. 150.
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