

Senseless cabinet reshuffle -- Don't politicize consumption tax hikes

Koichi Endo

Prime Minister Naoto Kan's latest reshuffle of his Cabinet and the senior officials of his Democratic Party of Japan featured two key points; the displacement of Chief Cabinet Secretary Yoshito Sengoku and transport minister Sumio Mabuchi subjected to censure motions in the opposition-controlled House of Councillors and of National Public Safety Commission Chairwoman Tomiko Okazaki who refused to apologize for her participation in anti-Japan demonstrations in the Republic of Korea; and the inclusion into the Cabinet of an opposition party member Kaoru Yosano who had warned that the DPJ could destroy the Japanese economy. Other changes were nothing more than replacements linked to the two key points. One of such replacements led to the unusual appointment of former House of Councillors President Satsuki Eda as justice minister. The upper house presidency might have been downplayed.

Provocations are only destructive

The Cabinet reshuffle has been dubbed by media as a shift for a consumption tax hike. Such dubbing is stupid. The consumption tax hike is not such an easy challenge that can be overcome by simply including into the Cabinet of a utilitarian politician who easily "crosses the aisle." Whether the tax should be increased or not is no longer the case, but how to realize the tax hike has become a political challenge. Free remarks by a proponent of the tax hike within the Cabinet make little sense.

How to build a consensus in the Diet is now essential. While Prime Minister Kan is now required to court opposition parties in order to have the tax hike passed, he has made two appeals through the Cabinet reshuffle. One is the appointment of Yosano as fiscal and economic policy minister. But this has caused frictions within the ruling DPJ and prompted the opposition camp to toughen its attitude and threaten to propose a censure motion against Yosano.

In the other appeal, Kan checked the opposition camp by saying: "The opposition camp certainly holds a veto power, but should know it is also in a position to be responsible for the people." He rightly argued that even the opposition camp cannot be allowed to make irresponsible responses to fiscal reconstruction that is a national challenge. But this kind of argument should be left to be made by critics like me. What the prime minister must do is to implement policies. He might have failed to

understand that opportunistic provocations similar to those that he had made as an opposition member are only destructive.

Kan engages in in-house power struggle

Kan has made such personnel management actions and remarks that have all worked negatively. He might either lack political sense or have some political purposes.

Maybe both are the case with him.

He is suitable for the post of the policy board chairman in an opposition party, but not of the prime minister. This has been proven over the past six months or so. He could have acknowledged this point. But he may still be reluctant to resign. What would he do when he is willing to retain the post for which he is not suitable? At a New Year party Kan hosted at the prime minister's official residence on the New Year's Day, he vowed to "get full power." He might have no choice but to engage in a struggle for power within the party. This represents a typical pattern for leftists.

"A political party is a tool," Kan said in the past. The consumption tax issue and personnel management may be nothing more than toys for his game of politics. The people of Japan cannot tolerate such situation.

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