

Noda Gives Little Priority to Foreign or Defense Policy

Tadae Takubo

Japanese people were forced to watch two amateur politicians' performances under the ruling Democratic Party of Japan that were poorer even than those under the Liberal Democratic Party. The people might have hesitated to heartily welcome the new Noda cabinet representing the third DPJ performance that has just started. But approval ratings for the Noda cabinet in the media polls published on September 4 were generally high, including 67% for the Nikkei Shimbun, 65% for the Yomiuri, 62% for Kyodo News and 53% for the Asahi. Citizens might have favorably reacted to the new administration, welcoming new Prime Minister Yoshihiko Noda's decent pledge to work hard for the people.

Both politicians and the public are below global levels

Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu got as many as 29 standing ovations when he made a 50-minute speech at a joint meeting of the U.S. House and Senate in May. I have no intent to compare the Japanese leader's speech with the great Netanyahu speech that might have changed U.S. public opinions on the difficult Israel-Palestine peace negotiations. Regrettably, however, both Japanese politicians and public opinions have declined far below global levels.

The DPJ is a group of politicians who have no particular political thought or philosophy, failing to work out a policy platform. Its manifesto is soulless and irresponsible, listing attractive pledges that are designed only to please voters. Such manifesto is destined to be revised. The runoff between Noda and Banri Kaieda in the August 29 DPJ presidential election might have represented a complicated showdown in which politics was linked to policy disputes over whether to revise the manifesto or whether to support tax increases. The DPJ now must manage to secure its unity to avoid a breakup.

Noda prefers internal reconciliation to policies

Calls for the DPJ's "internal reconciliation" and "unity" emerged when Prime Minister Noda after winning the DPJ presidential election said, "Let's call it a no-side." A no-side means the end of a Rugby game. These calls indicate DPJ members' instinct to prolong the life of the party. They do not view philosophies or policies as so important. Azuma Koshiishi, who still wields great influences on the left-wing Japan Teachers' Union, was given the post of DPJ secretary general to control money and decide

whether to approve specific persons as DPJ candidates for elections. The Noda cabinet ministers include eight original members of a parliamentary league which supports foreigners' rights to vote. Noda, though supporting Japan's participation in the planned "Trans-Pacific Partnership" free trade scheme, has retained Agriculture, Forestry and Fisheries Minister Michihiko Kano who has opposed the participation. Kenji Yamaoka was appointed as chairman of the National Public Safety Commission despite his alleged relations with a dubious pyramid sales group. New Defense Minister Yasuo Ichikawa has surprised us by saying innocently, "While I am unfamiliar with national security, this may be interpreted as representing a true civilian control."

What is happening in the East and South China Seas and the Indian Ocean while Japanese politicians are devoted to playing house? China has expanded its scathing maritime operations, heightening tensions with the United States and other relevant countries. The latest cabinet formation indicates that Noda has considered nothing other than his party's unity. Japan now sees the voyage of a government that does not have foreign or defense policy in mind.

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