

A Step Toward One-Party Predominance: Japan's General Election of 20 October 1996

THE GENERAL ELECTION IN JAPAN OF 20 OCTOBER 1996 brought back the Liberal Democratic Party (LDP) to a position of predominance, if not preponderance, in the House of Representatives. Out of 500 seats, the LDP acquired 239, while the second largest New Frontier Party (FNP) won 156, the newly-formed Democratic Party 52, the Communist Party 26, the Social Democratic Party of Japan (SDPJ) 15, and the Sakigake New Party two seats. Prior to the general election, the LDP, the SDPJ and the Sakigake had cooperated in a coalition government with 211, 30 and 9 seats, respectively. After the election, the LDP formed a minority government without making a formal coalition arrangement with the much enfeebled SDPJ and Sakigake. Why was the LDP able to make this sort of comeback? Why have 'reformist parties', starting with the New Japan Party, the Renewal Party, the New Frontier Party and most recently the Democratic Party, experienced such a brief period of increased power before their fall (or stagnation)? These are the questions that this article addresses in describing and explaining Japanese politics today.

During the economic boom of the late 1980s and early 1990s, successive LDP governments were the target of continuing criticism. The passage of the bill instituting the consumption tax in 1989 and the revelation of corruption involving high-ranking LDP politicians, before and after, set the stage for the 'reformist era' of 1991-94.¹ It is not the first time that the LDP has been besieged by public criticism. The period of LDP rule which was similarly characterized by the

¹ In writing this article I have extensively consulted four major newspapers, *Asahi*, *Yomiuri*, *Mainichi* and *Nikkei*. My writing on reformism is found in: Takashi Inoguchi, 'The Rise and Fall of "Reformist Governments": Hosokawa and Hata, 1993-94', *Asian Journal of Political Science*, Vol. 2, No. 2, December 1994, pp. 73-87.

peaking of an economic boom and widespread anti-LDP reformist zeal among the public, extended between 1972 and 1975.² A prosperous economy and associated phenomena such as increased income levels and higher inflation seemed to arouse an aggressive mood in the public especially at the height of the boom.³ It was natural that the LDP became the target of criticism since it was the only party in power for an extended period.

The period 1972–75 is known for the accusations against Prime Minister Kakuei Tanaka for his alleged involvement in the Lockheed scandal and the highly inflationary economic policies pursued during his tenure as finance minister. Also during his tenure as Minister of International Trade and Industry, his energy policy – aimed at securing the supply of petroleum through sources not under the US umbrella – apparently later triggered the Lockheed scandal revelations, contributing to his early downfall. At any rate, public criticism of the LDP was extremely intense and ‘reformist’ voices abounded both within and outside the party. In 1976, some reformists within the LDP formed a splinter party called the New Liberal Club amid the turmoil of the Lockheed scandal trial. The LDP was forced to content itself with something less than dominance for the succeeding decade or so. The New Liberal Club merged back into the LDP in 1986 when Prime Minister Yasuhiro Nakasone (1983–87) led public support for the LDP rule back up to a level comparable to that of the pre-Tanaka administrations of Eisaku Sato (1964–72) and Hayato Ikeda (1960–64).

² See Takashi Inoguchi, *Nihon: Keizai taikoku no seiji un'ei* (Japan: The Governing of a Great Economic Power), Tokyo, University of Tokyo Press, 1993, a translation of which is to be published by Routledge.

³ Takashi Inoguchi, ‘The Political Economy of Conservative Resurgence under Recession: Public Policies and Political Support in Japan, 1977–1983’, in T. J. Pempel, (ed.), *Uncommon Democracies: The One-Party Dominant Regimes*, Ithaca, Cornell University Press, 1990, pp. 189–225; Takashi Inoguchi, *Gendai Nihon Seiji keizai no kozo* (The Framework of Contemporary Japanese Political Economy), Tokyo, Toyo Keizai Shimposha, 1983.

THE 'REFORMIST' ERA OF 1991-94

During the administration of Prime Minister Noboru Takeshita (1987-89) and thereafter, the LDP was besieged by a number of scandals, large and small. Public support for the LDP reached its nadir in the late 1980s and early 1990s. The economic boom known as the 'bubble' continued through the late 1980s in part because the Japanese government responded positively – and in retrospect perhaps excessively – to the US government's (and the Group of Seven countries') call for market liberalization and expansion of the domestic market to bring the world out of the recession of the early and mid-1980s. The Japan New Party was born in 1992 against the backdrop of public outrage against the corruption and alleged policy failures of the LDP. Subsequently the Renewal Party was founded by dissenters from the LDP in 1993. (These two new parties were merged to form the New Frontier Party in 1994.) They were able to snatch power from the LDP by forming a coalition with the Social Democratic and Komei parties in 1993 after the resounding defeat of the LDP in the 1993 general election. It was at that juncture that the LDP's thirty-eight-year control of the government was interrupted.

After coming into power toward the end of 1993, the 'reformist' coalition government was able to pass certain political reform bills, including a change in the House of Representatives election system from the multiple-seat district system (where two to five persons are elected in each district) to the single-seat system (where one person is elected in each district), harsher provisions for punishment against violation of campaign rules and receipt of donations, and provision of public money to political parties to lessen the burden of fundraising. As this legislation was passed, public outrage against the LDP began to subside and the solidarity among the coalition partners started to weaken in 1994. The abrupt call for an increase in the consumption tax rate announced by Prime Minister Morihiro Hosokawa drew severe public criticism, forcing him to resign. After the Social Democratic Party left the coalition early in 1994, the remaining forces survived for a few more months. Without a majority in the National Diet following the withdrawal from the coalition of the SDPJ,

the reformist government headed by Prime Minister Tsutomu Hata was short-lived. The formation of the earth-shaking coalition of the LDP, its long-time rival the SDPJ (formerly known as the Japan Socialist Party), and the Sakigake New Party put an end to reformist government in June 1994.

The new coalition government, headed by Tomiichi Murayama, chairman of the Social Democratic Party, lasted for a year and a half. There were a few notable features of this coalition government. First, the Social Democrats joined the LDP in approving the Japan-US security treaty, turning its back on four decades of vehement opposition. Since the Japanese Social Democrats placed more emphasis on foreign policy differences from the centre-right parties than do European Social Democrats on social policy differences, the results of this dramatic policy change meant the substantial weakening of the political appeal of the SDPJ. This was regrettable because a government headed by the Liberal Democratic Party has long adopted the kind of social policies which may be broadly called social democratic. The LDP party tenets have long had a strong egalitarian feature, especially in terms of policy support for those least competitive socially, occupationally and regionally. In other words, the Social Democrats have substantially reduced their own political space by giving up their intensely nationalistic and somewhat anti-American stand. Yet the positive consequence was the relative ease with which both the Japanese and US governments were able to handle the otherwise much more difficult issues associated with the Japan-US security treaty, triggered by the rape of a schoolgirl in Okinawa by US servicemen, despite the tense atmosphere created by developments in the Taiwan Straits and North Korea.

Secondly, the bureaucratic scandals which originated during the preceding two decades started to manifest themselves in the loosened political mood of the coalition governments,⁴

⁴ Takashi Inoguchi, 'The Pragmatic Evolution of Japanese Democratic Politics' in Michelle Schmiegelow (ed.), *Democracy in Asia*, Frankfurt, Campus and New York, St Martin's, forthcoming. Takashi Inoguchi, 'Japanese Bureaucracy: Coping with New Challenges' in Purnendra Jain and Takashi Inoguchi (eds), *Japanese Politics*, London, Macmillan, forthcoming. 'Malaise dans la bureaucratie japonaise', *Le Monde*, 29 July 1996.

'reformist' and otherwise. The list included unabashed corruption of finance ministry bureaucrats, institutionalized scandals whereby local government officials were found to be entertaining central government bureaucrats, the failure in terms of accountability when an accident occurred at a nuclear power station, the support of the Ministry of Health and Welfare for domestic pharmaceutical industrial interests resulting in the contamination of hundreds of people with HIV, and the bungling by the ministries of finance and agriculture of the liberalization of the housing loan market resulting in the collapse of the bubble economy. That bungling subsequently dragged the economy to its nadir for more than half a decade because of the ministries' refusal to allow ailing financial institutions to go bankrupt. Awash in the frustrations of the recession and political uncertainty, the public found an outlet for their frustration in the accusations of bureaucratic mismanagement. These scandals had a positive impact. They revealed to the public that in order to change the body politic they had to look into its bureaucratic components as well, especially when the body politic has such a powerful and vigorous bureaucracy which is largely responsible for the formation and implementation of public policy.

THE LDP-LED COALITION GOVERNMENT JANUARY-OCTOBER 1996

Upon the resignation of Prime Minister Tomiichi Murayama in January 1996 the LDP seized its chance to head the coalition government. The LDP president, Ryutaro Hashimoto, became prime minister. Since the LDP does not enjoy a majority in the House of Representatives nor in the House of Councillors, where a large number of seats are still occupied by Social Democrats, many of whom were swept into the Diet amid the anti-LDP upsurge of public opinion in June 1993, the LDP had no alternative but to continue the coalition arrangement with the SDPJ and Sakigake. Prime Minister Hashimoto's skilful handling of such difficult issues as the Japan-US security treaty and the housing loan company failure had started substantially to improve public support for the

Liberal Democratic Party by the summer of 1996. Aware of the substantial decrease in support for the Social Democratic Party and the Sakigake New Party, neither of these coalition partners wanted to see the general elections which the prime minister called for. Prime Minister Hashimoto saw the chance to enhance his power base once public opinion became favourable to the LDP, when he saw Japan facing tough issues that would only be adequately handled by a government capable of delivering on its promises.

Hashimoto had to demonstrate to the public that he could get on well with the United States government on security and economic issues. He also had to demonstrate that he could deliver with his strong command of policy affairs and firm control of the bureaucrats working under him. On these two fronts he performed well. In addition, he had to take care of two more administrative but critical matters. First, the LDP campaign organization was complaining of shortages of campaign funds, preventing him from further postponing the date of the general election. Negative factors included the recession, the strict terms of campaign regulations and enfeebled LDP factions which might have been the locus in campaigning ten or twenty years ago. Secondly, the LDP wanted to gauge the strength of the New Frontier Party, the second largest party, especially in the new electoral system that selects only one candidate per district. The New Frontier Party is a 'reformist' party amalgamated in hodge-podge fashion mainly with the goal of winning a majority over the Liberal Democratic Party under the new electoral system. The two core components are the splinter segments of the LDP headed by Ichiro Ozawa and the Soka Gakkai-based Komei Party. The former needs the strong grassroots voting apparatus of the Buddhist lay organization, while the latter is eager to avail itself of support beyond its own nationwide 10 per cent of the electoral base through a quasi-alliance with sectarian political parties. Some signs, such as those suggesting that the cleavages between the two were widening in tandem with increased influence of LDP candidates among the public, were important go-ahead signs in Prime Minister Hashimoto's decision to call for the general election in early October.

THE OUTCOME OF THE ELECTION

The election was primarily the victory of the LDP and Hashimoto, and that meant secondarily that it was a defeat for the New Frontier Party and Ozawa. Thirdly, it marked the demise of the Social Democratic Party and the Democratic Party. The latter was a party created at the eleventh hour, composed of former members of the Social Democratic Party, the New Party Sakigake, and the New Frontier Party. Anticipating that these three parties were declining in terms of the electoral support they would win, some of their members joined the new party in the hope of getting elected. Fourthly, the election brought victory for the Communist Party, which filled the void created by the near collapse of the Social Democratic Party. Although the number of seats won by the LDP does not exceed a simple majority, the prospect that some members from other parties, plus some representatives independent of party affiliation, might join the LDP in the near future seems to have persuaded the LDP to forgo any kind of formal coalitional arrangement with the Social Democratic Party and the New Party Sakigake. All these factors point in the direction of a revival of LDP predominance in Japanese politics.

Three major observations can be made which explain this outcome. One is that the central bureaucracy prefers one-party predominance. It is averse to the complex consultative processes in which all the coalition partners get involved. The process of achieving modification and acceptance by every coalition partner for each bill drafted by the bureaucracy is not only time-consuming but very difficult to achieve. In other words, the LDP or any predominant party in power feels that if it can deal with the central bureaucracy in legislation alone, so much the better. The LDP has felt this way throughout the brief period of its experience with coalition. So has the national bureaucracy. Underlying this factor is the difficult-to-eradicate influence of the bureaucracy in policy formation and implementation in Japanese politics. In the time-tested division of labour between politicians in the electoral districts and bureaucrats in Tokyo, politicians are expected to win the hearts and minds of the voters and the bureaucrats' role is to

take care of public policy. Needless to say, politicians at the highest level do exercise substantive influence in the broad direction and shaping of policies, but their number is limited, say, to 5–10 per cent of Diet members.

The second observation is that at the grassroots level in each district there are strong forces – driven by the old jump-on-the-bandwagon mentality – that endorse the strongest and most popular candidate as the candidate backed by the majority of voters in the district. This has been the predominant pattern observed in most mayoral and gubernatorial elections outside metropolitan areas. Even if competing candidates divide voters into two major blocs in election one, in elections two or three the predominant pattern tends to emerge, acknowledging a certain distribution of power and interest among potential contenders. This time there was not sufficient time for a pre-election assessment of power distribution among candidates in each district. Yet recognizing the growing revival of the LDP's influence and the increasing divisions among non-LDP parties, a large number of voters seemed to lean toward the predominant party in the offing, namely, the LDP.

Thirdly, and most directly, a vast number of voters seemed to be disillusioned with the 'reformist' parties. Many of these seemed to be dissatisfied with the way the coalition government works and with the results it has produced. Observing the ease with which parliamentarians change within a brief period of one to three years from one party to another and further to a third or back again to the party they left only one or two years before, many voters appeared alienated by the way politicians seem to use political parties too much as simply instruments for gaining power. Hence the low turnouts for reformist parties (and hence the high voting abstention rates). This was the lowest turnout for a House of Representatives election since 1945.

Needless to say, the complicated and often confusing nature of the changed electoral system played not an unimportant part in the outcome. The new electoral system was a combination of the single-seat constituency system of choosing one candidate per district and the proportional representation for each of eight regional blocs (whereby each voter

casts one ballot for an individual candidate and one ballot for a party). The inclusion of proportional representation was felt necessary in order to persuade risk-averse parliamentarians to vote for the bill when it was introduced in the Diet. In order to save less competitive and less self-confident parliamentarians, those candidates who are not number one in the single-seat district can win election by party-based proportional representation as long as they are ranked sufficiently high on the party list.

Turning to the outcome in terms of the attributes of those elected, we find some interesting developments. First, there were generational changes. In contrast to the sluggish multi-seat constituency system, the single-seat constituency system accelerated the generational turnover by forcing political parties to field the strongest candidate, not necessarily the eldest. Secondly, the number of former bureaucrats elected this time was considerably smaller than in previous elections, for the obvious reason that bureaucratic scandals of the recent past have undermined their credibility. Especially noteworthy was that, for the first time, former finance ministry bureaucrats were with only one exception unable to win election. Thirdly, the number of female politicians increased considerably because both the Communist Party and the New Frontier Party often placed female candidates very high on proportional representation party lists. Both the Communist Party and the Soka Gakkai-supported arm of the New Frontier Party made optimal use of organizationally mobilized votes in the proportional representation system. Fourthly, those elected this time include a fairly large number of politicians who have climbed the career ladder from local assemblies or from the secretariats of members of the National Diet. This feature will become more important as the number of districts increased from 180 to 300. The latter figure coincides with the number of administrative units in Japan before the Meiji government reduced the number from 300 domains to 50 prefectures. In other words, Diet members are now elected in districts that are generally smaller in size than the unit from which mayors or governors are elected. The similarity between local and national politicians seems to be enhanced by the changes in the electoral system.

POLICY DIRECTIONS

In order to identify the direction of policy after the election, we must review the major policy cleavages among the political parties over the past four decades. Two major policy and ideological confrontations have been consistent in Japanese politics: pro-US versus anti-US in terms of the security alliance and pro-business versus anti-business.⁵ The first cleavage was strikingly apparent during the cold war period. But after the cold war the importance of this source of disagreement has been substantially decreased. During the cold war period the LDP favoured the alliance and the Communist and the Social Democratic parties opposed it. Upon joining the coalition government in 1994, the Social Democratic Party changed its policy platform from anti-alliance to pro-alliance in general terms. The New Frontier Party often spearheaded pro-alliance policies, especially when it was out of power (namely, 1994–96).

The second dimension of cleavage was no less significant, because Japan was a developing country for most of the two decades after 1945, and exhibited features that are characteristic of a state engaged in rapid development in close collaboration with business. For the last two decades pro-business policies have increased in importance for two reasons: the reduced growth momentum of the Japanese economy and the trend toward market globalization and liberalization. Especially over the last decade or so the cleavage in the centre-right continuum between pro-market liberalization versus anti-market liberalization has surfaced markedly. The New Frontier Party stressed this issue whereas the LDP, along with the Social Democratic Party, opted for 'balance'.

⁵ 'Two Major Policy Cleavages, as Revealed by Responses from Parliamentarians', *Bungei shunju*, August 1996. pp. 94–124. Takashi Inoguchi: *Public Policies and Elections: An Empirical Analysis of Voters-Parties Relationship Under One Party Dominance, Papers in Japanese Studies, No. 2*, Department of Japanese Studies, National University of Singapore, February 1989; 'Japan 1960–1980: Party Election Pledges', in Ian Budge, David Robertson, and Derek Hearl, (eds), *Ideology, Strategy and Party Change: Spatial Analyses of Post-War Election Programmes in 19 Democracies*, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 1987, pp. 369–387; see also Takashi Inoguchi, *Gendai Nihon seiji Keizai no lozu*, op. cit.

Given these two polar policy differences and the simultaneous reconfigurations of power among the major political parties, it should not be too difficult to figure out how the directions of government policy will be shaped after the election. First, regarding foreign policy, the LDP government will stress the alliance with the United States. But the alliance will be pursued only within the framework of the accepted constitutional and institutional culture of Japanese politics since 1945. The LDP prefers the Social Democratic Party and the New Party Sakigake as coalition partners for two major reasons: they are much smaller and presumably easier to coordinate; and their foreign policy tenets are slightly to the left but considered useful to contain the more extreme right-wing views in and outside the LDP as well as to hedge 'unreasonable' or 'unrealistic' demands that might come from the US government. Secondly, regarding the administration's economic and social policy, outright deregulation and market liberalization will not be forthcoming. Consistent with the time-tested policy tenets of good governance in Japan, the LDP government will not proceed to take measures for substantial liberalization of the financial market. Its handling of the bankrupt housing loan companies (*jusen*) has given us a glimpse of this thinking, however erroneous it might be. Its tenets consist of bureaucratic monitoring, collective burden sharing, and extension of governmental help to those least competitive and most needy. Yet the LDP government continues to be pro-business. At the same time the LDP government will continue its pro-social policy orientation as strongly as before, because that has enabled the LDP to survive as a catch-all party in harmony with the time-tested tradition of the central bureaucracy: non-partisan devotion to the benefit of the entire nation, especially for those needing the help of the state.

Aside from these two major policy directions, two major issues were at the forefront of campaign issues: administrative reform and the proposed increase in the consumption tax.⁶ Under administrative reform I refer to the series of measures

⁶ Takashi Inoguchi, 'Factional Dynamics of the Liberal Democratic Party', *Asian Journal of Political Science*, Vol. 1, No. 1, June 1993, p. 76-84.

that, in the view of its proponents, should be passed in the Diet in order to rectify some mismanagement of the bureaucracy, including corruption, inefficiency, and outdated organizational frameworks. The consumption tax issue refers to the scheduled increase in the rate from the current 3 per cent to 5 per cent, starting in April 1997. Many parties, including the LDP, the New Frontier Party, and the Democratic Party professed support for administrative reform. The increase in consumption tax was opposed by all the opposition parties, especially the New Frontier and Communist parties.

Administrative reform is a popular issue among voters. They are aware that the central bureaucracy will continue to play a pivotal role in Japanese politics and that its latest slate of wrong-doings must be wiped clean. Aside from public opinion, elected politicians and big business form the two strongest voices for administrative reform. Elected politicians have felt that their power should be enhanced, and hope to take advantage of the chaotic situation in some parts of the central bureaucracy to achieve this. Big business, which feels that its profits are being squeezed by what it believes to be high corporate taxation, wants the central bureaucracy to make much more serious efforts to make itself small and lean, especially as global market forces are reducing the role of the state worldwide.

The public wants to see bureaucracy behave more effectively and with more moral backbone on a number of issues. Although calls for reform differ tremendously from one voice to another, the issue was topical over the last two years as the news has been filled with a number of major bureaucratic scandals. Bureaucrats became scapegoats of a sort. One good indication of this was evidenced in the election results: out of 30-odd candidates with backgrounds in the bureaucracy only a few won the seats they sought this time. Especially conspicuous was the failure of most of the eight candidates from the Ministry of Finance to win election. Only one was elected. The LDP wanted administrative reform to become a campaign issue because it was regarded as a good opportunity for a breakthrough in reducing bureaucratic power and because it was a widely popular issue. The New Frontier Party naturally

made it a campaign issue because of its party platform which centres on deregulation and market liberalization.

The New Frontier Party used the issue of the consumption tax increase to castigate the LDP, knowing how the tax hike dealt a nearly mortal blow to the incumbent party in the recent past. The New Frontier Party had experienced its own failure in introducing a national welfare tax in 1994, in the wake of which Prime Minister Hosokawa resigned and the 'reformist' coalition government collapsed in June 1994. Between 1979 and 1989 at least four LDP prime ministers had been forced to resign over the tax issue. But aggressive negative campaigning by the LDP dealt a deadly blow to the New Frontier Party on this issue by portraying it as unscrupulous about taxes: in 1994 the NFP proposed raising taxes at a rate much higher than 3 to 5 per cent and in 1996 it proposed freezing the consumption tax rate and substantial reductions of corporate and income tax.

In any case, the New Frontier Party failed to mobilize opposition. This was largely because a large number of voters were aware that the government is in serious fiscal trouble, and that this will not be rectified unless the whole revenue-expenditure structure of government finance is revamped (especially regarding expenditures for welfare, pension and medical insurance schemes) and unless the government manages to increase its revenues, even if that means raising consumption tax. The arguments of the New Frontier Party apparently did not convince the vast majority of voters. Its message was that through steadfast and thorough deregulation and market liberalization Japan could achieve a substantial increase in profits and income and that tax reduction would contribute further to bring back economic prosperity. What many voters were concerned about was the negative consequences of deregulation and market liberalization, especially for the construction and distribution industries, but also for the financial market, and government procurement. Those less competitive socially, occupationally or regionally tended to align themselves with either the LDP or the Communist Party because both portrayed themselves as champions of the weak in an era of relentless globalization and liberalization.

FORMATION OF THE CABINET

After the election the LDP first contacted its two former coalition partners, the Social Democrats and the New Party Sakigake, to suggest continuation of the coalition arrangement. Both refused but agreed on 'cooperation from outside' (*kakugai kyoryoku*), meaning essentially that they would give their support to the nomination of Hashimoto as prime minister at least, and to legislative bills when appropriate. The New Frontier Party and the Democratic Party also decided not to join the cabinet. So the LDP formed the new Cabinet on its own, relying on the outside cooperation of the Social Democrats and the New Party Sakigake and on the support by a number of non-party-affiliated independent winners.

Lacking the need to cater to other parties, the LDP was left with the difficult task of balancing its own factions in the cabinet. That exercise is akin to forging a coalition among political parties, in that it is strategic and reflects the power of each unit. This time around, reflecting the changed power balance of factions after the election, the new cabinet is made up of 6 cabinet members from the Obuchi (former Takeshita) faction, 5 from the Miyazawa faction, 4 from the Watanabe faction, 4 from the Mitsutsuka faction, and 1 from the Komoto faction. Hashimoto himself comes from the Obuchi faction. The Obuchi faction dramatically increased its numbers from the third largest to the largest faction in terms of the number of members of both Houses. This is significant against the backdrop of substantially reduced factional activities (and hence their importance in Japanese politics as a whole) during the coalition period of 1993–96. Factions held less sway than they once did in financing election campaigns during this period. Although campaign funds obtained by faction bosses did not increase as much as they might have wished, it is clear that many LDP candidates sought factional backing as well when their struggle in the new electoral districts faced fierce competition from other parties. Once it became clear that a non-coalition cabinet would be formed by the LDP, the factional instincts of party members were immediately revived. It would be interesting to analyse patterns of cabinet formation in the light of the two prevailing

formulas of the past: the minimum winning coalition and the 'wall-to-wall carpet' coalition. The former refers to the formation of a cabinet with persons from a minimum number of factions surrounding the prime minister's faction. The latter refers to the inclusion of members from more or less all the factions irrespective of their number of members in the Diet. The former formula was conspicuous for the period between 1956 and 1974 while the latter stood out during the period between 1974 and 1993. It looks as if the same preferences of the latter period were revived in 1996 after a three-year interruption. This may be explained by two major factors. First, the factions are not as powerful as they were in the heyday of the LDP. Secondly, the LDP was not able to capture a strong majority. What they got was merely a plurality, although a wide plurality.

With regard to the membership of the cabinet, we can observe two clear features. One is the focus on administrative reform. The appointment of Jun'ichiro Koizumi (as Minister of Health and Welfare), one of the most vocal Diet members arguing about and articulating the critical need for administrative reform in Japanese politics, was meant essentially to establish the supremacy of politicians over bureaucrats and begin the bureaucracy-trimming process. The other is the revival of the *zoku* parliamentarians who build their careers by cultivating policy expertise in one or two specialized policy areas such as construction, welfare, or education through membership on Diet and LDP policy affairs research committees, while they make best use of their expertise to mobilize support from relevant industrial or union organizations.⁷ *Zoku* parliamentarians became conspicuous because of the increasing importance of seniority and policy expertise in connection with the factional affiliations of cabinet appointment since the mid-1970s. During the period between 1993 and 1996 the coalition partners were able to restrain tendencies to make such appointments, but with the revival of a one-party cabinet, maintenance of factional balance, salience of

⁷ Takashi Inoguchi and Tomaoki Iwai, *Zoku giin no kenkyu* (A Study of Zoku Parliamentarians), Tokyo, Nihon Keizai Shimbunsha, 1987. See also 'Iki fukikaesu Jimin zoku giin' (LDP Zoku Parliamentarians Revive), *Yomiuri Shimbun*, 8 Dec. 1996, p. 3.

the role of the *zoku* Dietmen and the seniority principle have been revived.

CONCLUSION

The 'reformist' coalition governments of 1993–94 rode to power on the tide of public outrage against corruption. But once 'reform' legislation was completed, the public more or less retreated to 'normalcy'. The 'reformist' residue of public outrage was absorbed nicely by the New Frontier Party and other newly-born parties during the post-1994 period as well. Then came the disenchantment with the Social Democrats who almost completely reversed their policy platforms on foreign policy and security arrangements in the process of becoming a coalition partner in 1994–96. The coalition experience was just as disillusioning. The economy did not pick up. The coalition looked clumsy. While politicians competed among themselves, the bureaucracy was again in the ascendant, which should not have been the case with a 'reformist' government. And perhaps the tide of further democratization and market liberalization as promoted throughout the world by the United States, especially in the early days of the Clinton Administration, subsided somewhat during much of the 1993–96 period, which acted to weaken 'reformist' voices in Japan. The US strategy of promoting the opposition and making use of the mass media did not work very well in Japan. It helped the opposition somewhat to assume power for slightly more than one year from 1993–94, but it could not prevent the substantial weakening of the non-LDP parties that took place during the 1993–96 period. No wonder the LDP was able to win a wide plurality this time, if not a majority.

Other than the tide swinging back toward one-party predominance at the level of party politics in Tokyo, two other major forces have been at work.⁸ One is the strong preference of the central bureaucracy for dealing with a non-coalition

⁸ Takashi Inoguchi, 'Asian-Style Democracy', paper presented at the United Nations University Conference on the Changing Nature of Democracy, Nissan Institute of Japanese Studies and St Antony's College, Oxford, 25–27 July 1996.

government because it requires less time, energy and effort. The other is the pronounced preference at the grassroots or local level to have one strong person representing the whole district. The introduction of the winner-takes-all system for House of Representatives elections reinforces the tendency in Japanese local politics to dilute party politics and seek one strong individual as district-wide representative, with virtually every major party and group getting on the bandwagon. The LDP thwarted the New Frontier Party in district-level races. In most non-metropolitan districts, public works do matter very much and when LDP politicians who could deliver on public works competed, they won. The Soka Gakkai-backed New Frontier Party suffered somewhat because Soka Gakkai, sensing the downward tide of the main body of the New Frontier Party, started investing interests in other parties including the LDP and the Democratic Party (meaning giving support to their candidates at the district level) and also because the LDP beat the Soka Gakkai challenge in many districts including a few downtown Tokyo metropolitan districts that were once the Soka Gakkai's stronghold.

In conclusion, the 'reformist' era of the early and mid-1990s can be understood as a 'reformist' era similar to that of the early and mid-1970s, when the anti-Tanaka cabinet headed by Takeo Miki (1974–76) and the splinter party known as the New Liberal Club (1976–83) effectively absorbed much of the anti-corruption and anti-LDP sentiments. The general election of October 1996 put a virtual end to the 'reformist' era of the 1990s. The irony is that the 'reformist' parties were beaten by an LDP which waved the banner of reform in its election campaigning in a manner not unlike the Chinese style of 'waving the red flag in order to oppose the red flag'. A further irony is that under the leadership of Ryutaro Hashimoto, known for his cordial working relationship with the bureaucracy, his policy expertise, and his desire to establish the elected government's political supremacy over the bureaucracy, the LDP might well advance, if in small steps, the reformist agenda of more effective taming of the bureaucracy.