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by Yakushiji Katsuyuki

Three years have passed since the birth of the Koizumi Cabinet. While the Cabinet has been preoccupied with such Koizumi reforms as the privatization of postal services, the Liberal Democratic Party (LDP) has changed character. In discussions over constitutional revision and security policy, it has set a course of prioritizing the state over the individual and abandoning the emphasis on "light armament and prioritizing the economy" that was initiated shortly after the end of the war by Prime Minister Yoshida Shigeru and was long the heart of LDP politics.

Facing the end of the Cold War and the beginning of an era of low growth, the LDP has failed to appropriately redefine new policies and has gradually lost the support of the people. The changes we are witnessing now -- the preference for a hawkish policy line -- are the last resort in an effort to keep up the strength of the party. The real problem with changes of this sort is that the reactionary and statist course they represent is gradually being reflected in concrete politics and is starting to have consequences for the daily lives of the people.

In mid June, a project team of the LDP Constitutional Revision Investigation Committee put together a document titled "Summarizing the Points at Issue." This document most directly demonstrates the change in the party's direction. Approved by the LDP board of directors, the group that decides party policy, the document must be considered an official and formal position statement. Although its adoption has not received much attention -- being adopted just before the end of the ordinary Diet session -- its contents might well be call extremist (kagekiteki).

"Summarizing the Points at Issue" signals a determination to revise the Constitution comprehensively, not just Article Nine. Let us take a closer look at the document.

First, it repudiates the present Constitution and replaces its provisions with reactionary elements. On the character of any future, revised Constitution, the document states:

"It must be based on healthy common sense, embodying features such as the values peculiar to our country (i.e. our national character [kunigara]) and the morality the Japanese originally followed -- values which are rooted in [our] history, tradition and culture, but which have been forgotten during the period in which the present Constitution has been enacted and during the occupation by SCAP."

It is not made clear what "history, tradition, culture" or "morality" mean here in concrete terms. It could not possibly do so. What are considered important traditions and cultural norms differ from person to person, and upholding such plurality is the task of the modern state. The state should have no part in defining such concepts in legal terms and compelling people to accept these definitions.

The term "national character" (kunigara) can also be interpreted as "political system" and also has connotations of kokutai (national character). In combination with the expression "the peculiar values of our country", it clearly refers to the Tenno system.

The document goes on to state that, "on the issue of basic human rights, it is necessary to warn of tendencies towards personal selfishness", and that "as regards pacifism, we have to reconsider Article Nine and correct the errors inherent in a pacifist stance adopted by a single country." Here the LDP is fundamentally challenging established features of postwar Japan such as democracy, pacifism and respect for basic human rights. It is explicitly advocating a return to prewar Japanese traditions and culture, which are, in their opinion, ruled out by the present Constitution. As a result, a reactionary course is prescribed.

The second major characteristic of the document is its denial of constitutionalism. Because in the modern democratic state the freedom of the individual is paramount, it is vital that the overwhelming power of the state vis-à-vis the people, and the possibilities for abuse of this power, be controlled. A constitution has been considered an effective means of achieving this, offering a fundamental means of pre-empting the abuse of power by those who wield it. And governing a country based on a constitution is known as constitutionalism.

The LDP is offering a direct challenge to this system. The document continues:

"Until now, discussions about the Constitution have conspicuously and exclusively emphasized the desire of citizens to limit state power. In the future, when we turn to revising the Constitution, any revisions should not focus solely on limiting the power of the state, but should rather set out the respective responsibilities of the public and private [spheres], in order to protect and enhance both the interests of the people and the national interest (kokueki). It is important to appreciate the significance [of the Constitution] as a set of rules defining the roles of both the state and the people in creating a common society (kyosei shakai)."

Speaking as one who upholds the principle of the sovereignty of the people, the state and the people ought not to be regarded as separate entities. However, for the LDP, the state exists independently of the people, and the people are expected to serve the state. Therefore, the LDP asserts that the Constitution should not only limit the authority of those in power, but also should define the duties and responsibilities of the people in pursuit of the national interest. The next passage demonstrates this point more clearly:

"We have to consider not only the juridical side of the Constitution, but also the role the Constitution plays as the basic law influencing the behavioral patterns of citizens and its influence on the spirit (the way of thinking) of the people."

But "the people," considered as individuals, have a diverse range of values, and the freedom of behavior based on these differing values is the most important precondition of a democratic society. The LDP is challenging this and aims at regulating even the speech and thought of the people. This is nothing short of a repudiation of democracy itself. This cannot be called a legitimate discussion of the Constitution. Rather it reduces important and complex issues to the lowest possible level.

As a natural consequence of all this, we observe, as the third characteristic of the document, the emergence of a strong statist nationalism. A desirable state is defined here as a "dignified state", and further, the importance of "patriotism" is strongly emphasized. In the preamble, the importance of "a national

character based upon our country's history, traditions and culture" and of "continuity in protecting and developing the country and transmitting this objective from generation to generation" are emphasized. Also, the "duty of the state to protect the family" is mentioned.

In "Summarizing the Points at Issue" we find other surprises. It is stated that "the equality of the sexes has to be reconsidered from the viewpoint of family and community values." Indeed, there are more than a handful of LDP members who reject the "Law on Securing Equal Opportunity and Treatment for Men and Women in Employment", which aims at a society without gender discrimination, and many also reject the idea of spouses having different family names. Their thoughts on the "equality of the sexes" reflect these attitudes and frankly belong to a bygone era.

On the question of the "division of politics and religion", the document proposes a revision "along the lines of history and tradition." It also includes a proposal to make an official act out of the participation of the Tenno in religious rites which are at present considered private in character. Both proposals are intended to prepare the way for official visits to the Yasukuni Shrine by the Tenno and the Prime Minister.

It is surprising that such a backward-looking proposal to revise the Constitution was approved by the LDP's board of directors with little objection. "Summarizing the Points at Issue" sets out the direction to be taken in any comprehensive revision of the Constitution, and will become the basis for future discussions on the draft of a revised Constitution that is scheduled to be completed by the end of 2005. It has happened in the past that a small group of parliamentarians has drafted hawkish documents and then imposed them on the board of directors. However, a document such as this has never before been approved by the board. Has the LDP taken the path that leads inexorably to a party of the extreme right?

Discussion within the party over the revision of the Constitution is still in the early stages. Even those who initiated "Summarizing the Points at Issue" probably do not expect that revision will follow the recommendations of the document in every detail. However, we should take note that statist attitudes are on the rise within the LDP -- a situation that is also reflected in other policies and bills. Therefore, it is not appropriate to merely dismiss the reactionary attitudes evident in "Summarizing the Points at Issue" with a smile, even though they so obviously belong to a bygone era.

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