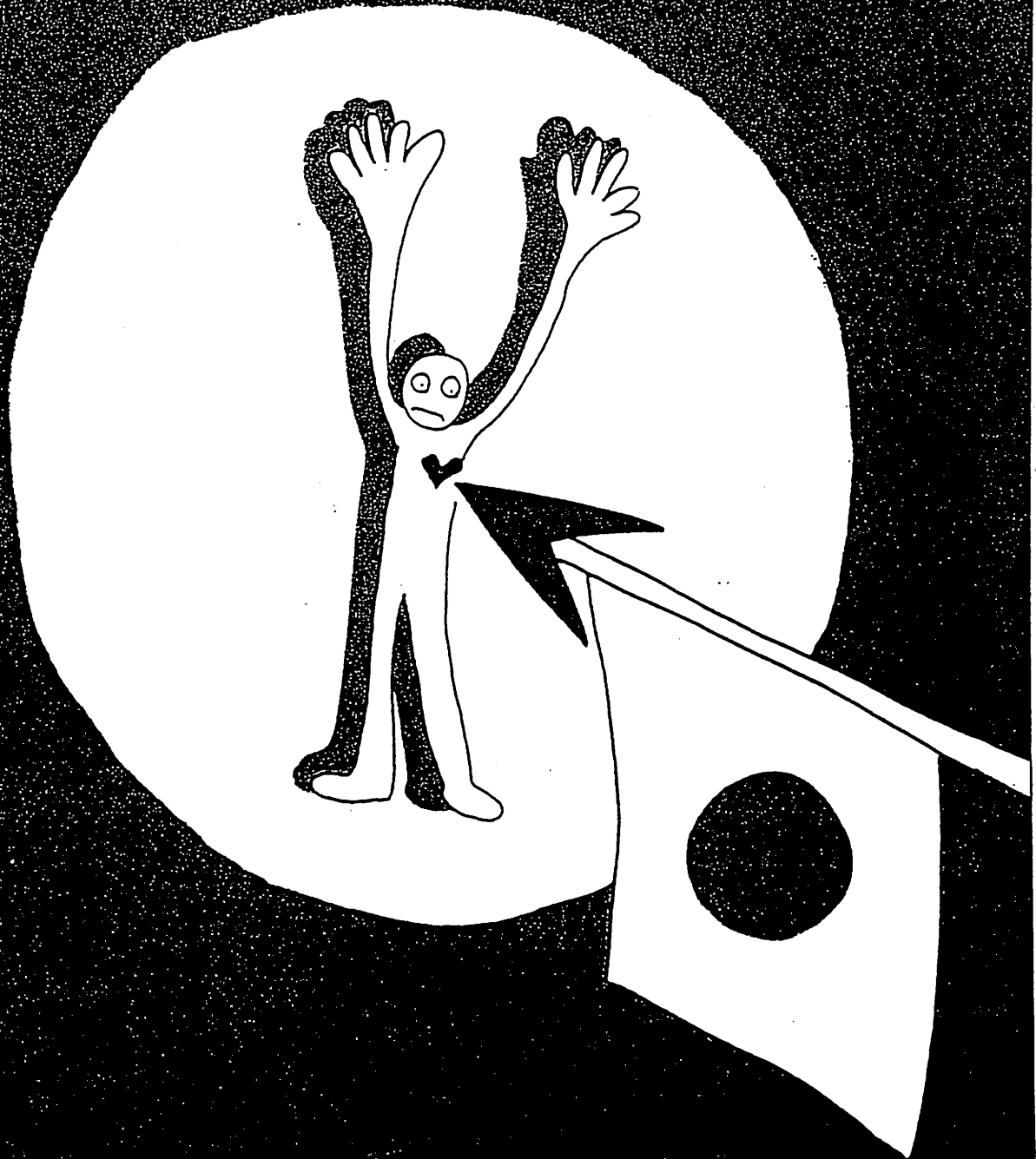


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A New Nationalism?



From a Class Party to a National Party: Japanese Communist Party Survives through the Worldwide Decline of Communist Parties

An Interview with Kato Tetsuro

Since the 1989 destruction of the Berlin Wall, and the 1991 collapse of the Soviet Union, the world's communist parties have gradually disappeared. The old-style international communist movement centered on the Comintern and the Cominform was disbanded. In northern Europe and England, the parties disbanded voluntarily. The French communist party has tried to survive by changing its attitude toward Stalinism, but its membership has diminished to less than one third of what it once was, and it has become weak. In Asia and Latin America they remain, but in Africa most which were, established by the support of Soviet Union, have disappeared.



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In this situation, why is it that only in Japan—one of the most developed capitalist countries—the communist party, the Japanese Communist Party (JCP) has survive. It's strange to see from outside. I may say some reasons about the survival. First, they have maintained an independent attitude towards the Soviet and the Chinese Communist Party. And in the era of Eurocommunism in the 1970s, they began preparing to be a national party, participating in assemblies and elections under a flexible policy like the Italian Communist Party.

Another reason behind the success of the JCP has been the big change in the Japanese political situation at the time of the breakdown of the Cold War. A split in the conservative parties finished the era of domination by the Liberal Democratic Party (LDP), and they were reorganized. The Japanese Socialist Party (JSP) and LDP formed a coalition, and the JSP, which opposition, changed its name to the Social Democratic Party (SDP). I moved toward the acceptance of the US-Japan Security Treaty and the Self-Defense Forces (SDF). As traditional social democracy—the JSP had belonged to the left wing of the Socialist International—was disbanded virtually. In this situation, many supporters of the JSP—traditional reformists and supporters of the Peace Constitution based on the unique circumstance—came to support the JCP.

The JCP won 14.6 percent of the popular vote in the election of the House of Councillors in July 1999, and in the election of the House of Representative in October 1996 won 13.1 percent. This

figure is close to the ratio of votes of the SDP's last period, (15.1 percent in the general election in 1993). But even if we add of the votes of the JCP and SDP, the figure dose not reach the amount of the two parties won in the old days. So, we can say that reformists who maintained their traditional attitude within a Japanese society that was swinging toward the right, support the JCP.

Third, in local politics, the JCP has become the leading party, with more assembly members even than the LDP. These voters' support trends to go to active assembly members in local movements, so they don't always directly support the party, but at least people has come to feel familiar with it.

Finally, with the organization, the old leader Miyamoto Kenji retired and leadership was transferred to young leaders such as Fuwa Tetsuzo and Shii Kazuo. These new leaders have worked to make the organization a little more flexible than before. For example, in the 1990s, internal conflicts and expulsions and removals caused by conflicts did not come to the surface. Membership from 480,000 members at the peak in 1982 to 370,000 now, and they lost more than one million readers of their organ, "*Akahata*" from 3,550 thousand in 1980 to 2,300 thousand now. It can be said that they have made the organization slenderer, and they have worked to unite the faithful under the leadership.

The Party's Inconsistency

The above-mentioned details, have actually at the same time, led to inconsistency. The first, related to the Japanese political situations, involves the fact that the party changed from a class party to a nationalist party, which is a contradiction. At the party convention, they decided to set a the policy for building a democratic coalition government in the early 21st century, and for that, forged that they needed to swing toward the right following the experiences of western social democratic parties. But if they put the policy into practice, they will draw the criticism from traditional reformists who support the foundation of the party.

The new leaders are steering the party in a moderate and right direction. For example, in 1998, Chairman Fuwa Tetsuzo insisted that based on "The theory of the provisional government," they would shelve the issue of the U.S.-Japan Security Treaty. And he nominated Kan Naoto, chairman of the Democratic Party, the main opposition party to be Prime Minister in the diet election. He also said in case of emergency, the Japanese that nation would probably depend on the SDF.

Recently, on the East Timor issue, the JCP tacitly admitted the intervention by the multinational forces against the militias; and changed its attitude toward international disputes compared with the case of the Gulf War. On the issue of the sending the Japanese SDF overseas, there is a possibility that they will show a different attitude than before. This is shown by the fact that the party failed to protest when SDF ships were sent out to intercept North Korean boats that had entered into Japanese territorial waters.

On the issue of the "Hinomaru and Kimigayo", which the government wanted to legislate as national flag and national anthem, the JCP expressed the opinion that "We could accept the law, if it were legislated after a national debate". This is very strange because the JCP has traditionally opposed the Emperor system. After listening the opinion of the JCP, Chief Cabinet Secretary, Nonaka Hiromu said "When I heard that, I thought we could make the "Hinomaru" and "Kimigayo" legal

It is unique that, in the case of the JCP, they have been able to carry forward a policy change from a class party to a national party as accepting the symbol of Japanese nation, connected with nationalism. This is different from western social democracy, that aims for the support of the middle class. But a policy change like this will inevitably alienate traditional reformists who were the supporters of the JSP and the JCP in the days when they were counter-forces to the LDP, the defended the Constitution, and held the policy of unarmed neutralism. In fact, an opposition group within the JCP has made an internet homepage named "Sazanami Tsushin" (Newsletter of ripples). On this homepage, they criticize the leadership. Even people who are not the members of the party have come to contribute to the homepage, expressing their discontent.

Diplomacy: Turning Away from Proletarian Internationalism

A change is also seen in the JCP's diplomacy.

Until now, the main policy of diplomacy, in the JCP's policy was the development of proletarian internationalism based on the international communist movement, against American imperialism. Thus, the period that they have had little relations with NGOs and NPOs like PARC, except on the anti nuclear issue, has continued.

But after the Cold War, they began to forge relations with citizen's movements or NGOs, and to

approach conservative or even the foreign governments. They have sent correspondents to South Korea and China. Recently, Chairman Fuwa visited Southeast Asia, and started to associate with the U.S. politician's actively. But traditional reformists are puzzled by policy like this. Party members criticize the policy of having friendly dialogues with the political leaders of Malaysia or Singapore, where communist parties are illegal.

It is admirable to build solidarity among people. The policy change would go to the direction that is easy to be understood by the ordinary parties—the conservative, a type of centralist party.

A Split with the Supporters

The third is serious; the average age of party members is now in their fifties, and the change of generations has come too late. The party has lost its influence over the youth movement—the League of Democratic Youth—or students, who once provided a lot of members and sympathies for the party. In public opinion polls, the strong support to the JCP comes only from aged people.

And also, if the party moves to the right, it will

lose the supporters who dreamed of communism or socialism. The leaders explain this policy change as part of the democratic revolution based on the "Two steps revolution" from democratic revolution to socialist revolution. But they have never replied to questions about the socialist revolution posed by "Sazanami Tsushin" and others. If they steer the party in a right ward direction, they will cut off the left, but their actual supporters are the traditional left, so they are in a quarry, and cannot steer the party so much.

In this situation, it seems that they have forgotten the principle theory of the JCP. In the past, they used Marxist economic theory and made grand designs for economic policy for a coalition government, but now they seem admit any kind of thinking as long as it opposes neo liberalism. While they criticize each policy, they don't have an overall theory to justify the criticism. Each of the members may do the good activities for the environment, but it is not the party's policy. After all, the details mentioned above have given causes for the inconsistency, because this situation came from loss of the traditional principles of the JCP. ■

Translated by Ohshita Fusae

Result of the Unified Local Elections						
(Prefectural legislature representatives)						
	this time (1999)			last time (in 1995)		
	numbers of votes	% of votes	numbers of the elected	numbers of votes	% of votes	numbers of the elected
JCP	4,279,110	10.5	152	2,461,563	6.8	98
LDP	15,285,829	37.7	1288	13,964,531	38.3	1304
Democratic Party	3,256,127	8.0	170	—	—	—
Komeito	2,715,646	6.7	166	2,433,212	6.7	160
SDP	1,371,294	3.4	94	4,164,071	11.4	282
Liberal Party	335,911	0.8	20	—	—	—
Sakigake	23,174	0.1	2	163,171	0.4	9
Minor	1,140,093	2.8	79	3,566,377	9.8	223
Ind.	12,186,855	30.0	698	9,672,921	26.6	623
Total	40,594,039		2669	36,425,849		2669
(Legislature representatives of cabinet-order designated cities)						
	this time (1999)			last time (in 1995)		
	numbers of votes	% of votes	numbers of the elected	numbers of votes	% of votes	numbers of the elected
JCP	1,092,286	15.6	120	740,746	11.9	92
LDP	1,995,682	28.6	233	1,827,743	29.4	240
Democratic Party	1,082,355	15.5	114	—	—	—
Komeito	1,143,937	16.4	132	1,030,979	16.6	128
SDP	134,513	1.9	15	791,055	12.7	99
Liberal Party	47,842	0.7	1	—	—	—
Sakigake	0	0.0	0	53,766	0.9	3
Minor	398,285	5.7	42	985,329	15.9	223
Ind.	1,088,412	15.6	122	779,369	12.6	118
Total	6,983,321		779	6,208,991		785