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SUBJECT: Ex-Admiral NOMURA's Election Victory in Wakayama Prefecture

Summary

A by-election for the House of Councillors was held in Wakayama Prefecture on June 3, 1954. The two principals in the contest were ex-admiral Kichisaburo NOMURA, a conservative, and Kahachiro SUZUKI, ex-head of the Wakayama Branch of the Teachers' Union. Mr. NOMURA won in a small landslide obtaining 254,123 votes to his Socialist-backed opponent's 127,851. The issues of the campaign were clearcut. Mr. NOMURA advocated rearmament and a revision of the constitution. Mr. SUZUKI vigorously opposed these policies. Most observers attributed Mr. NOMURA's victory to his immense popularity with the Wakayama electorate and to the fact that Mr. SUZUKI was openly aided in the campaign by the Communists who are viewed with considerable suspicion by the preponderantly conservative-minded Wakayama electorate. Interestingly enough, there was little indication, from those with whom the reporting officer talked, that Mr. NOMURA's victory pointed to a strong support for rearmament in Wakayama Prefecture. It was noted that individuals are more important than issues in Wakayama politics and that it was perfectly possible for a voter to be against rearmament and for Mr. NOMURA. These observers attached little national significance to NOMURA's victory other than to suggest that it placed him in a strategic position to accept the leadership of any new conservative political movement that might develop.

Discussion

The election contest between Mr. NOMURA and Mr. SUZUKI was followed with interest by most of the newspapers in this area. Mr. NOMURA, ex-Ambassador to the United States, ex-Foreign Minister, and ex-admiral was, of course, the big drawing card. In comparison, Mr. SUZUKI was given relatively little play in the press. Originally there were three candidates entered in the election, Mr. NOMURA, Mr. SUZUKI, and Mr. Tameo SANJO, a member of the Japanese Communist Party. Mr. SANJO, while a candidate, spent most of his time campaigning for Mr. SUZUKI. He finally withdrew his name and concentrated all his efforts in Mr. SUZUKI's behalf. According to some observers, many voters suspected that "a deal" had been arranged between Mr. SUZUKI and Mr. SANJO and were therefore reluctant to support SUZUKI for fear he had come under the control of the Communists. Another factor which was said to have hurt Mr. SUZUKI's chances was the Asahigaoka Junior High School case in Kyoto.

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Page \_\_\_\_\_ of 3  
Esp. No. 430  
From Kobe, Japan

(Classification)

Page \_\_\_\_\_ of \_\_\_\_\_  
Encl. No. \_\_\_\_\_  
Esp. No. \_\_\_\_\_  
From \_\_\_\_\_

Most Wakayama voters were highly critical of the actions of the Teachers' Union in Kyoto and believed that Mr. SUZUKI, being the ex-head of the Teachers' Union in Wakayama and receiving the open support of the Communists, would concert with the Communists to provoke a similar incident in Wakayama. The decisive element in the election, however, was Mr. NOMURA's tremendous popularity with the electorate. Running in a traditionally conservative area as a native son and being a nationally prominent figure, his victory was almost assured from the beginning despite the fact he was advocating rearmament policies which reportedly did not meet the approval of a majority of voters. In a recent visit to Wakayama, the reporting officer asked about this somewhat incongruous circumstance and was told that voters in the Wakayama area place more importance upon who the candidate is than upon the policies he advocates. This fact has a direct relationship to what is known as the "political consciousness" of the voter. The more "politically conscious" he is the more aware he becomes of policies and issues in a campaign. It was pointed out that over 50% of the potential voters in Wakayama Prefecture are farmers. They are traditionally conservative in politics and are generally considered to have a rather low level of "political consciousness". It was explained that conservatism predominates in Wakayama Prefecture because of poor transportation and communication facilities and the mountainous terrain which all combine to erect obstacles to the infusion of new political ideas and concepts. This conservatism is a stable factor in Prefectural politics and can generally be counted on to give victory to the candidate who espouses it.

The campaign in Wakayama received the attention of the national party leaders in both the conservative and socialist camps. At one time or another the following conservatives were noted working for Mr. NOMURA, Kikuchihiro YAMAGUCHI, Hideo BO, Koichi SEKO and Koichi TABUCHI of the Liberal Party and Mr. ASHIDA and President SHIGEMITSU of the Progressive Party. In addition, assistance was received from such Rightist organizations as Mimbo (Civil Defense Association), the Kaikokai (ex-Army officers' organization) and the Seikoshu (ex-Navy officers' organization). Mr. SUZUKI, for his part, received the backing of the two Socialist Parties, the Japanese Communist Party, Solyo, the Teachers' Union, and other minor unions. President SUZUKI of the Left Socialist Party and President KAWAKAMI of the Right Socialist Party and several of their lieutenants reportedly campaigned on Mr. SUZUKI's behalf. Even with this apparent predominance of labor support, Mr. SUZUKI, nevertheless, lost a number of labor votes because of the outstanding record and reputation of his opponent.

Very few observers attached national significance to the outcome of this election. As Wakayama is traditionally conservative it was thought that any reasonably well-known conservative figure could have won in a contest with the Socialists or Communists. The margin of victory would probably not have been as great as NOMURA's, but it would have been a comfortable margin. The only real issue, that of rearmament, was really no issue at all, as most people who opposed rearmament were apparently content to overlook this difference with NOMURA on the strength of their deep respect and admiration for him. Frequent rumors have been heard that NOMURA will lead a new reorganized conservative movement, but the ex-admiral apparently gave no clue to his feelings on this matter during the campaign.

UNCLASSIFIED

Page 3 of 3

Disp. No. 430

From Kobe, Japan

UNCLASSIFIED

(Classification)

Page \_\_\_\_\_ of \_\_\_\_\_

Encl. No. \_\_\_\_\_


Disp. No. \_\_\_\_\_

From \_\_\_\_\_

The enclosed statistical analysis of the election results is transmitted as of possible interest. It was given to the reporting officer by Mr. Tokugoro KOYAKI, Chairman of the Wakayama Prefectural Election Control Committee. It is interesting to note in looking at the statistics that rural voters outnumbered urban voters. This is unusual in most cases and particularly so in Wakayama where it is often very difficult for farmers to get to the polling booth. Rural interest in this election can be explained by the fact that the Prefectural Election Control Committee offered rewards to farmers who voted. The Committee also hired an airplane to drop leaflets in the farming areas urging farmers to vote. The rewards consisted of various kinds of kitchen utensils. The action of the Committee in this regard was bitterly criticized by the Socialists who claimed that the Committee was guilty of playing partisan politics. The Committee retorted that it was its responsibility to get people to vote and that because of the planting season, farmers had to be reminded of the importance of casting their ballot. The Committee made no mention of offering gifts to farmers but it was learned that considerable quantities of pots and pans were dispensed to farmers at the polling booths - at the tax payers expense.

Comment

Mr. NOMURA's victory was expected by most competent political observers. While a strong proponent of rearmament, his victory in Wakayama does not necessarily mean that the majority of people there approve of Japanese rearmament. Predominant sentiment seems to be against rearmament, the feeling being that Japan is capable of only limited rearmament and under such circumstances and in view of the present international situation, such limited effort would serve no practical purpose. It is doubtful that NOMURA's victory carried much significance for national politics in terms of possible trends, etc. His triumph was compounded of purely local factors with the one issue of national import, rearmament, having very little effect upon the outcome of the election.

  
Ralph J. Blake  
American Consul General

Enclosure: Turnout of Votes in the By-Election of a Member of the House of Councillors (to Department only)

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