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SUBJECT: Possible Dissolution of the Japanese House of Representatives.

With the opening of the ordinary session of the National Diet on December 10, political activity is becoming increasingly brisk. While such activity is normal in Japan at this season of the year, several recent events have heightened partisan maneuvering and give promise of affecting the political situation for some time to come. The split in the Socialist Party and the resultant decrease of that party's prestige and influence is exerting a considerable effect on the overall political scene as other parties maneuver to attract sizeable segments of the Socialist following. The negotiations between the Peoples Democratic (DP) and certain "splinter" groups with regard to the possible expansion of the PDP or the creation of a new political grouping is being watched with keen interest by all political figures.

Nevertheless, while both these factors have provided added impetus to the quickening political scene, of even greater importance have been the recent difficulties suddenly confronting the Administration and the Liberal Party. While these difficulties had their beginning in the rice decontrol fiasco resulting from unmistakable blundering on the part of the Government, of greater political significance was the inability of the Government to control the House of Councillors during the recent extraordinary Diet session. The difficulties encountered there proved not only embarrassing to the Administration but advantageous to the Opposition. The success of the latter in defeating the Government on the personnel retrenchment issue demonstrated the power of the Upper House Opposition when united in common cause. In spite of the considerable pressure exerted by the Government forces, the Opposition refused to budge, thereby forcing the Government to extend the session twice in a futile effort to obtain some suitable compromise. The final spectacle of the Prime Minister compelled to accede to the watered-down compromise bill in spite of his previous vehement objections was thoroughly enjoyed by all the opposition politicians and even produced some guarded amusement among certain Liberals themselves.

Since the personnel retrenchment issue was basically unpopular to many Diet members regardless of their political affiliations, the success of the Opposition in this instance should not be overemphasized. Many Liberal Diet members passively encouraged the Opposition and were

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privately pleased over the final result. These recent difficulties of the Yoshida Administration have, however, brought to the fore renewed speculation regarding possible dissolution of the House of Representatives and the calling of a general election. Many politicians, including some high-ranking members of the Liberal Party, believe such an election should be held next spring after the effective date of the Peace Treaty. It is generally admitted that the prestige of the Government has declined considerably since the high water mark reached during the San Francisco Conference. Furthermore, it has been the feeling of many political observers that the Prime Minister would be willing to step down after the return of sovereignty to Japan. Additionally, a large number of depurgees must first gain Diet seats before they can re-enter political life on an active scale. Over and above these factors, however, is the widespread feeling that the conclusion of the Peace and Security Treaties marks a milestone in Japan's post-war history and that a national election should be held soon to gain a new mandate from the people.

In spite of these arguments, however, the Prime Minister on December 3 authorized Liberal Chief Secretary MASUDA to announce that the Government has no intention of dissolving the Lower House until its expiration date in January 1953. As explanation for this policy, Masuda stated the Government felt responsibility for coping with legislation arising from the requirements of the Peace and Security Treaties. Significantly, however, even following this announcement, Lower House speaker Joji KAIJI reiterated that he favors the dissolution of the Lower House next May or June on the grounds that it would be advantageous to the Liberal Party.

Concurrent with speculation over the timing of a national election, is the further problem of Yoshida's successor as head of the Liberal Party. While there are as yet no indications that the Prime Minister has any intention of retiring within the predictable future, most observers agree that his retention of the party's titular position beyond the next election is extremely unlikely. There appears to be little doubt that Yoshida is desirous of transferring the party reins to Ichiro HATOYAMA, when and if he retires; the big question, however, is the physical condition of the latter. Since struck with a cerebral hemorrhage last June, Hatoyama has been convalescing at his home in Otowa. Original reports to the effect that he would recover within three months have been replaced with varying pronouncements. Efforts of the drafting officer, whose last conversation with Hatoyama occurred on the day of his stroke, to interview him again have been rebuffed on the grounds that he is seeing no visitors on doctor's orders. Close friends and relatives insist that his physical appearance is excellent, but that he has some difficulty moving one arm. Whether Hatoyama will be physically able to assume the strenuous job of guiding the Liberal Party is, therefore, a moot question. It is reported, however, that close followers of Hatoyama are meeting every Tuesday to prepare for their own Cabinet

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"when the proper time comes" and that Hatoyama himself expects to make a public statement in January. The press has also recently reported a long interview between the Prime Minister and Bamboku ONO, who is generally considered the leader of the Hatoyama faction within the Liberal Party, a meeting which may be significant in view of the Prime Minister's previous reluctance to see Ono. In this connection it should be noted that the influence of Kozen HIROKAWA, Liberal Chairman of the Executive Board and leader of the anti-Hatoyama faction, has waned considerably during the past six months. There seems to be little possibility that he and his group will be able to regain their former close position around Yoshida. The back stage maneuvering by the Hatoyama faction has been very effective in markedly reducing the influence of this group in the making of party policy.

If Hatoyama's physical condition does not permit his assumption of the presidency of the Liberal Party, some political observers believe that Taketora OGATA, recent depurged, may well be Yoshida's successor. For many years the chief editor of the pre-war Asahi Shimbun and rated by the late Hugh BYAS, veteran New York Times correspondent, as the ablest editor in Japan, Mr. Ogata possesses a favorable background as a replacement for Yoshida. During the war Ogata was Minister Without Portfolio in both the Koiso-Yonai Cabinet (July 22, 1944-April 7, 1945) and the Higashikuni Cabinet (August 17, 1945-October 9, 1945), also serving as President of the Imperial Rule Assistance Association Youth Corps and President of the Government Board of Information during the last days of the war. In a long conversation with him at the home of the drafting officer, Ogata indicated that he was an admirer of Hatoyama, but that he had serious doubts whether Hatoyama would be physically able to return to political life. He declared that Yoshida desired by all means to turn over the party reins to Hatoyama when he retired. In Ogata's opinion the Government should call for a national election next spring before the tide of public opinion turns too much against the Administration. Ogata was openly critical of most of the present Japanese politicians, terming them "second raters" who have little or no ability.

In physical appearance Ogata is a large man of rather impressive bearing. While sparing in words, he listens intently to discussions around him. He appears to be in vigorous health and anxious to return to politics; in his sincerity and frankness he is reminiscent of Hatoyama.

From the standpoint of Prime Minister Yoshida, Ogata's background is such as to make him a strong candidate in the event that Hatoyama is physically unable to re-enter politics. Though he was a State Minister in the Koiso-Yonai Government, he was not a prominent member of the Cabinet. He was known to be cool toward General TOJO and the militarists. His inclusion in the Higashikuni Cabinet stamps him as a middle-of-the-roader untainted with blatant militarism or ultranationalism. Further, it is well-known that he was appointed

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President of the Board of Information in an effort to quiet public festiveness over the distorted and unrealistic war information statements put out heretofore by that bureau. Ogata himself laughingly termed it the "Board of Misinformation". Above all, through his purge as an officer of the Imperial Rule Assistance Association Youth Corps, Ogata has been aloof from the factional maneuverings within the Liberal Party and thereby offers strong possibilities as a candidate who would be acceptable to the various conflicting groups within the party. Finally, he cannot be held responsible for any acts of the present Administration taken at the prodding of the Occupation.

Regardless of the Prime Minister's assurances that he has no intention of dissolving the House of Representatives, it is apparent that the present Administration is more than a little tired and aware that it has lost some of its lustre. The difficulties it encountered in the last Diet session are not likely to be mitigated during the ordinary session which has just begun. Rather, the Opposition is planning an all-out campaign to unseat the Yoshida Government. Some of the bills scheduled to be submitted are of vital importance as budgetary and legislative measures essential to the implementation of the peace settlement. These include the Organizations Control Bill, the Anti-General Strike Bill, Anti-Monopoly Law and Trade Associations Law Revision Bills, as well as those for repaying foreign debts, reparations projects and indemnification of Allied war losses.

The announcement of Liberal Chief Secretary Masuda has not materially quieted the speculation regarding Diet dissolution. Practical politicians point out that even if the Government planned to dissolve the Lower House, it could not openly disclose its intentions until the time was ripe. Otherwise, the entire political situation would be thrown into confusion with irreparable damage to the present Administration. These observers believe that the Yoshida Government will have a good chance to win a general election next spring, though perhaps with not the same overwhelming majority as at present. In their opinion this does not mean that the electorate as a whole positively supports the Liberal Party, but that the objective situation at that time will still be favorable to the Government due chiefly to the lack of a strong opposition. Whether the same situation will prevail a year from now is debatable.

While it is difficult to predict the outcome of the present political situation, indications are that as of now Yoshida does not wish to call for a national election immediately after the effective date of the Peace Treaty. The events of the next few weeks, however, in particular the success of the Government's legislative program in the Diet, may well be the decisive factor. If further Diet difficulties are encountered, it may force Yoshida to call for a general election in the hope that the Liberal Party has little to lose in view of the weak opposition parties and everything to gain. Other factors involved in such a decision are, however, the personal plans

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of Yoshida and the physical condition of Hatoyama. The return of the latter to active politics in the near future may presage the end of the present Administration, whereas his continued illness may be instrumental in persuading Yoshida to try to continue in power until January 1953.

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