

Chapter 5 Political Relations

In evidence to the Committee a political scientist with a keen knowledge and understanding of Japan and its people summed up the internal political situation of post-War Japan in these words:

. . . it is an extremely 'open' society, with great freedom of political expression and much often radical criticism of existing orthodoxies. Indeed, Japanese are constantly being inundated by floods of political comment from all shades of opinion. It may be regarded as the 'information society' par excellence. Constitutional democratic forms are generally closely observed, there are free elections and the Government is not unresponsive to popular demand and pressure from various sections of society.

That differences exist in some respects from other democratic societies is attributable to individual Japanese attitudes arising from its own culture and this, of course, occurs with most democratic societies. The significant factor, however, is that at the present time and under present circumstances the Japanese people have accepted democratic forms of government.

International

At the international level, opinion has been divided on whether Japan, having now established a strong economic position in the world, will be inclined to move towards greater political assertiveness. The feeling exists in countries of the East and West alike that one would be a natural consequence of the other. However the evidence shows that the Japanese are sensitive to this atmosphere and have made strenuous efforts to allay it. The post-War Constitution which emphasises pacifism has to date been supported by the Japanese people, and the statements of their leaders consistently reaffirm a wish for peaceful co-existence. Now that Japan has been accepted back into the community of nations, after many years of 'low posture' diplomacy, an important objective is the acquisition of a position of high status for Japan. This Japan is seeking to achieve by active and responsible participation in various policy-making international forums (both inside and outside the United Nations), by contributing large amounts of economic assistance to developing countries and by reaching a position of economic pre-eminence in the world at large.

From long and close association with the United States, political ties have developed between the two countries and, despite isolated setbacks such as those which occurred in 1971, the Committee believes there is an appreciation by the Japanese that their long term interests lie principally in continued close co-operation with the United States. This does not arise only from their mutual trading relations but from a multitude of close associations which have developed over a long period. Until the 1971 'twin Nixon shocks' there was continuing harmony in policies with those of the United States with the notable excep-

tion of Japan's aloofness from participation in any foreign military involvement. While it has been said that the low key political approach showed signs of change at this time in the diplomatic initiatives with China and Russia, these were not new issues which arose only at that time. It may be, however, that the Nixon shocks stimulated moves which otherwise could have been slower in developing.

The Committee believes that in the long term interests of world peace, the relationship between Japan and the United States on the one hand, and with the European Economic Community on the other, are of profound importance and should be strengthened wherever possible.

In the Asian area Japan has become more active in promoting regional co-operation, and conversely in the countries of the region there is a growing recognition of the need and advantages to be gained from closer co-operation with Japan.

Australia-Japan

In associations of trade, of mutual participation in the work of international agencies at the scientific, economic and diplomatic levels, Japan and Australia have a welcome rapport which augurs well for the future development of political relationships. Both share complementary political and economic objectives and have mutual interest in developing and developed countries of the Pacific and Asian areas remaining free and independent in a peaceful environment. This is not to say that individual interests will always coincide, and it is understandable that in seeking closer relationships neither country would wish to subordinate established ties with other friendly nations. From Australia's point of view, for example, it would be regrettable if, in the eyes of Australia's other friends in Asia, Australia-Japan relations assumed or even appeared to assume that Australia was representing Japan's interests exclusively, or if in joint activities the two appeared to be combining to form the nucleus of an association of wealthy nations. Already Australia and Japan have a number of agreements covering commerce, fisheries, civil aviation, double taxation and atomic energy, and, in looking to the future, there are a number of proposals, both bilateral and multilateral, which have already been put forward and which bear close examination, such as:

- a Treaty of Friendship, Commerce and Navigation;
- a Free Trade Area;
- a Pacific Basin Economic Council; and
- an Organisation for Pacific Trade, Aid and Development.

In 1955 Japan first proposed to Australia the negotiation of a bilateral Treaty of Friendship, Commerce and Navigation, but this has failed to evoke a positive response from the Australian Government. Japan has not pressed the proposal with any particular emphasis, but reference to it does keep recurring. From the Committee's examination of this proposal there appear to arise two fundamental differences in attitudes. For Japan, bilateral treaties of this nature have long been accepted and already Japan is party to twenty-six such agreements. Some have been in existence for more than fifty years. On the other

hand, Australia has no tradition of concluding such treaties, taking the view that it sees no real need for a treaty which would merely reproduce certain obligations contained in other international agreements to which both parties were signatories. The model for such an agreement most frequently referred to in evidence and which it is understood Japan favours is the existing treaty between Britain and Japan. A close examination of the terms of this treaty revealed that difficulties would be posed for Australia, including complex legal questions relating to Commonwealth-State relations and a variety of other aspects such as judicial procedures and internal economic matters. Nevertheless, the Committee accepts that there could with advantage be a treaty framework devised, different in character from Japan's treaty with Britain, to a specification to cover matters of particular interest to Australia and Japan. It has been suggested that such an agreement could, importantly, cover machinery for regular consultations between the parties, guidelines within which negotiations would in future be conducted, the identification of subjects to be covered, and to provide for the incorporation of agreements which may be negotiated in future. However, this view is accompanied by the important proviso that it should be clearly demonstrated that the individual interests of both parties would be preserved and that mutual benefits would result. Again the Committee feels strongly that such an agreement should not place Australia in a position of appearing in the eyes of friendly Asian countries to be subordinating their interests to those of a major economic power.

A proposal for a Pacific Free Trade Area originated amongst academic circles in Japan during the 1960s as a counter to the trading blocs which were being established in other parts of the world. This has lacked the support of some of the other proposals put forward, and to the Committee it appears impracticable at the present time given the varied levels of economic development of the countries of the region.

Business initiative, without active government assistance, has been responsible for the establishment of a Pacific Basin Economic Council, and this has arisen from the activities of the Australia-Japan Business Co-operation Committee, which first met in 1963. The aims of this Council are the promoting of increased commercial knowledge and understanding within countries of the Pacific area. This has been useful in bringing together businessmen from the five economically advanced countries of the Pacific—the United States, Canada, Japan, Australia and New Zealand—and in promoting mutual understanding of the commercial needs of the countries concerned. This initiative is commended. However, the Committee's main concern is to see established a more formal association between governments—but not exclusively so—with a broader scope of activities and one which embraces the developed and less developed countries of the Pacific. This is not to say that the objectives of this Council are incompatible with those of a more comprehensive, officially-sponsored organisation.

It is, therefore, in the consideration given by a group of academics both in Australia and Japan to an organisation covering matters of

trade, aid and development in the Pacific area that the Committee finds itself in greatest accord. Consistent with its objectives, its sponsors have given their proposals the title of Organisation for Pacific Trade, Aid and Development (OPTAD). Proponents of OPTAD see it as being similar in structure and function to the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development, but oriented towards the Pacific. Such an organisation would draw its strength and influence from its independence, its fact-finding role and its ability to discuss dispassionately the implications of various economic issues confronting Pacific nations. OPTAD would provide a forum for multilateral intergovernmental discussions of trade, aid and other economic matters of concern to the Pacific area. Such multilateral discussions are consistent with the views of the Committee, as in this particular set of circumstances they reduce the danger foreseen in bilateral negotiations of neglecting the interests of other countries. OPTAD would also help increase mutual understanding between Pacific nations and promote contact between senior personnel of different countries. However, the Committee reiterates its view that any negotiations leading to the establishment of an OPTAD must include the developing countries of the Pacific from the outset. Not only would this reduce the danger of such an organisation being regarded as a 'rich man's club', but also one of OPTAD's most important functions would be the promotion of multilateral aid to the developing nations of the area.

The Committee recommends that the Government become officially associated with and support consideration of the establishment of an OPTAD-type organisation. Such a scheme should lead to increased co-operation and understanding in the Pacific Basin and provide some counterbalance to the strong trading position of the European Economic Community. It further believes that a comprehensive and multilateral association of this nature would be favourably regarded by Japan.

Ministerial Committee

In recent years there have been frequent visits of Australian Ministers and officials to Japan, but the decision in 1971 to establish a ministerial-level committee between the Japanese and Australian Governments marked the foundation of a unique association, indicating a strong desire by both sides to establish machinery at a high level to examine trade and related matters of mutual concern in both bilateral and multilateral areas. This committee is to meet annually.

The first meeting of the Ministerial Committee was held in Canberra on 12 and 13 October 1972, with the Japanese delegation of five Ministers led by the Japanese Foreign Minister and an Australian delegation of eight Ministers led by the Australian Foreign Minister. The wide range of subjects discussed indicated the value of this form of co-operation between the two countries and opened the way for yet wider ministerial and official contacts than have already taken place in earlier years. It is hoped that subsequent meetings will continue to have the wide ministerial representation of the first meeting, and to be regarded by both sides as being of the highest significance as a forum in

which closer political as well as economic matters can be frankly discussed.

Immigration

A number of witnesses who had personal associations with Japan referred to attitudes towards Australia which they had found to be based on criticism of Australian immigration policy. The Committee endeavoured to obtain evidence of specific cases, but from only one witness was it able to obtain details. Other comments appeared to be reflections of attitudes and feelings the witnesses obtained in their contacts with Japanese people. Several who had spent considerable time in Japan had, while they were there, endeavoured to track down concrete evidence of cases, but had been unable to do so. However, the Committee accepts that these attitudes are real and present an unfavourable image of Australia in Japan today. At the same time it believes that it is former, more restrictive Australian policies which are most clearly remembered and which have left a legacy of resentment in some quarters. It also believes that current criticisms relate, in the main, to the issue of business and tourist visas.

The question of business and tourist visas was, therefore, pursued at some length and, as with general immigration policy, the conditions applying to their availability have been relaxed considerably in recent times. By a reciprocal visa agreement between Australia and Japan which took effect in February 1969, fees for visas of all kinds were abolished; for company executives assuming posts in Australia and members of their immediate families, and for business visitors, visas are made available with a minimum of formality for a period of up to four years from the date of issue, valid for any number of visits to Australia during the four-year period; tourist visitors and persons in transit may be issued visas free of charge for any number of visits during a period of one year without renewal of the visa. Some criticism was made of the need for business and tourist visitors to obtain visas at all, but the Committee believes that if, for valid administrative purposes a need can be demonstrated, there should be no serious objection to their being required in view of the ease with which they may now be obtained and the conditions applying to them.

Advice was tendered of the measures now being taken to make conditions of entry into Australia more widely known in Japan. Pamphlets printed in English and in Japanese are freely available from the Australian Embassy and other Australian offices in Japan. From official Japanese sources the Committee has been assured that at the official level Australia's current policies are understood, accepted and do not present problems. The Committee would hope, therefore, that the moves now made by the Department of Immigration to disseminate information freely in Japan will overcome criticisms arising from past policies and bridge what has been, the Committee believes, a communication gap on current policies.

As a general observation, the Committee readily recognises the right

of any country to determine its own immigration policy and notes that the policies maintained by many other countries are more stringent than those of Australia.