

Fukuda: Limited Resources Mean An End To Growth

The following is excerpted from Japanese Prime Minister Takeo Fukuda's opening speech to Japan's parliament Dec. 31. The speech is a polemic against economic growth and a direct attack on these Japanese business leaders and politicians who have stressed the need for high-technology growth in order to free Japan from its dependence on the United States. The Japanese Trilateral Commission's speech bares a marked resemblance to U.S. Trilateral Commission member Jimmy Carter's "Fireside Chat" call for "conservation" for a "permanent energy crisis," and unity and sacrifice by the American people.

Era of Change

Three years ago I stood at this podium as Minister of Finance and stated that the time had come for great and clear-cut changes to be made in the running of the country's economy.

In January of the following year, 1975, as director-general of the Economic Planning Agency, I stated that it was a time when the government, business and individual households, should all cast away the dream of a return to high growth and recognize the need for a radical change in our way of thinking about the nation's economic life.

That was when our economy was, as a result of the so-called oil shock, in the throes of abnormal inflation, and our society was in a crisis situation of great social confusion.

However, it was not only in response to this crisis that I expressed myself in that way. It was out of a sense of deep apprehension about whether, in this age of limited resources, Japan could really continue on the path it had come.

In the 30-odd years since the end of World War II, the world has attained remarkable economic growth and prosperity, aided by peaceful conditions and advances in science and technology. This led to the emergence of the so-called mass-consumption society, with its philosophy of "Let's produce, consume and throw away."

During these years, humanity has been looting nature's precious resources, so that we are now at a point where some of them are expected to disappear from the face of the earth in the not too distant future. Moreover, with the expected doubling of the present world popula-

tion by the early part of the 21st century, it is clear that the demand for natural resources will be far greater than at present...

Spirit of Cooperation

Reflection on the history of the human race impresses on us the fact that the advance of material civilization has created unlimited desires. But, as I have already mentioned, resources are limited. Resolving these mutually conflicting propositions — desires are unlimited, resources are limited — represents the fundamental task facing us in today's world.

This problem involves more than the material aspect. It involves a rethinking, so to speak, of the life style of people, of the very mode of modern civilization.

A society in which the people have become accustomed to rapid growth and drunk with their prosperity, one which is supported by a mood of "All is well if only goods and money are plentiful and I'm all right," must now be relegated to the past ...

I have received strong requests for substantial tax cuts, which I have given serious consideration. However, upon considering the limitations on natural resources and the international environment concerning this problem, I have come to the conclusion that we should switch over from our former way of thinking oriented toward large expansion of consumption to one oriented toward improving the quality of the people's livelihoods...

Of fundamental importance to our nation's foreign policy is the Japan-U.S. relationship which has sustained postwar Japan's prosperity and security. Whether in politics, economics, or security, our relations with the United States are singularly important...

There is no change whatsoever in my government's basic policy for firmly maintaining the Japan-United States Security Treaty. At the same time, it is only natural that we should endeavor to build up a foundation of our own defense capability...

In order for Japan to ride out these stormy days, I also appeal to the people of the nation to shun the trend of the times, marked by greed for material gain and selfish desires. Through the solidarity of our people, which transcends differences of generation and social status, let us endeavor to create on Japanese soil a truly stable and civilized society worthy of the trust and respect of all the countries of the world.