

Japan's premier in overture to Europe

by Uwe Parpart

At the start of a nine-day European tour which took him to West Germany and Berlin, as well as to the Brussels headquarters of the European Community (EC), to Paris, London, Rome and the Vatican, Warsaw, and Budapest, Japanese Prime Minister Toshiki Kaifu arrived at the Cologne-Bonn airport on Jan. 8, accompanied by Foreign Minister Nakayama, Cabinet Secretary Fujimoto, and a group of parliamentarians and economic experts from the ruling Liberal Democratic Party (LDP). The *tour de force* made Japanese as well as European observers quick with their analysis: that the trip was essentially an exhibition put on for the benefit of the Japanese television audience, in view of the upcoming Feb. 18 elections to the lower house of Parliament. An apt Japanese expression was quickly found: *Hapobijin*, a pretty girl who flirts in eight different directions, and ends up with nobody. These images were evoked primarily because even though they were not part of the original itinerary, a visit to London (and then also Rome, as the capital of another big EC country) had become necessary because of the urgings which Mrs. Thatcher had made in Tokyo.

But after a two-hour discussion with West German Chancellor Helmut Kohl, and a speech by Prime Minister Kaifu at the public luncheon in Schaumburg Palace, most of the cynical commentaries disappeared. At the working meeting with Kohl, Kaifu laid out his concept of an economic power triangle—U.S.A./EC/Japan—which must also create a new order of economic ties to the countries of the Third World, and in which, in view of the economic development tasks facing Eastern Europe, the relationship between the Federal Republic of Germany and Japan would have a special role. This relationship should, as soon as possible, take on concrete forms, through frequent official as well as unofficial contacts between himself and the chancellor; a further advantage would be Kaifu's understanding of and interest in the situation in Germany, since for many years he has been the chairman of both the Parliamentary Japan-Federal Republic of Germany Friendship Group, and of the equivalent group for Japan and the German Democratic Republic (G.D.R.).

Such very new accents from a Japanese prime minister don't go down too well in London and New York. For example, last fall U.S. Treasury Secretary Nicholas Brady informed Japanese Finance Minister Hashimoto that Japan

could best help Eastern Europe by working indirectly, through international financial institutions (i.e., the International Monetary Fund). And in England, the Japanese economic newspaper *Nihon Keisai* (Nikkei) picked up rumors that the Germans and the Japanese wanted to divide the Eastern European market between them.

In his luncheon speech, and later in the afternoon in his speech in Berlin at the Japanese-German Center, Kaifu took up the question of German unity: "You, Mr. Chancellor, have shown strong confidence and have undertaken great efforts to achieve this goal [of overcoming the division of Germany]. . . . I am full of admiration for the sublime endeavors of your country to work toward a state of peace in Europe, in which the German people, in free self-determination, can regain their unity."

In his Berlin speech, Kaifu spoke directly about Eastern European problems and proposed an initial plan for Japanese economic aid for Poland and Hungary. The immediate aid planned will be \$1.95 billion, allocated for technical help, emergency food aid, a contribution to the Polish currency stabilization fund, Export-Import Bank credits, etc. Already in February, a Japanese "Survey Mission on Economic and Investment Environment" will travel to Poland and Hungary, to make available more detailed plans. The extension of such an economic aid program to other countries, including the G.D.R., is envisaged. Kaifu stressed again the necessity to intensify, as fast as possible, the direct ties between Western Europe and Japan, in view of the tasks at hand in Eastern Europe.

The foreign policy context

At the end of his speech, Kaifu took up the more general aspects of the world political situation, for which he was immediately reproached by sections of the English and American press, for taking an aloof position toward the Soviet Union: "In spite of dissipating ideological antagonisms and the shift in emphasis from confrontation to dialogue and cooperation in general in East-West relations today, the international situation remains opaque and fluid, and the Soviet Union still is a military superpower. Deterrence and balance of power continue to be the underpinnings of world security." And he wants to see the Soviet Union's "new thinking" applied also in the Asian Pacific area, including to the question of Japan's northern territories, which are still occupied by the Soviets, before a long-term improvement of Soviet-Japanese relations is possible.

Following his Berlin speech, Kaifu was asked by the East German communist party newspaper *Neues Deutschland* whether, during his visit to Berlin, a talk with G.D.R. Prime Minister Hans Modrow were planned. Kaifu replied that he had telephoned Modrow on Jan. 5, and learned that Modrow would not be in Berlin because of the Comecon conference. But the real reason was, that, in agreement with Chancellor Kohl's office, a visit to Berlin had been ruled out.