

Chapter 4

Unyielding Struggle for Parliamentary Democracy

—The Life of Hoshi Tōru, the Man Who Kept the Fire of the Freedom and People's Rights Movement Alive—

Era of the Han-Clique/Political Party Coalition

Around the time Komura became a cabinet member, parliamentary politics was still far from being firmly rooted in Japan, even though it had been gradually embedded in the system over the ten years since the establishment of the Imperial Diet.

Before the First Sino-Japanese War, Itō Hirobumi and Mutsu Munemitsu had had to face a series of crises of parliamentary democracy, being caught between anti-*han* clique parties fiercely resentful of years of government oppression, on the one hand, and bigoted conservative *han*-clique politicians with absolutely no understanding of parliamentary politics, on the other. The pair had managed to overcome those crises and avoid possible suspension of the constitution. They utilized all means at hand, hard and soft, ranging from dissolution of the Diet to reaching compromises with opposition parties cashing in on the mutual trust between Mutsu and the Tosa faction within *Jiyūtō*.

Once the war erupted in 1894, the Diet became filled with patriotism and gave its full support to the war effort, thus allowing the survival of the first phase of Japanese parliamentary politics. When peace returned, however, the government again had to face the challenge of managing a Diet in which anti-*han* clique parties always occupied the majority.

The cooperation between Itō and *Jiyūtō* that Mutsu had designed remained an important pillar in Japanese politics and repeatedly salvaged parliamentary politics in Japan. In particular, *Jiyūtō*'s decision to work together with the government for the cause of *Gashin Shōtan* (臥薪嘗胆, persevering through hardship for the sake of revenge to Russia) after the return of the Liaodong peninsula to Qing coincided well with the people's sentiment in those days. In 1896, *Jiyūtō* decided to cooperate in an effort to establish the Itō cabinet, and Itagaki Taisuke left the party to join the

cabinet as home minister.

This was tantamount to the emergence of a government party in the Japanese politic. This precedent was immediately adopted by the subsequent Matsukata cabinet in which *Shimpotō*, this time, collaborated with Prime Minister Matsukata Masayoshi, sending Ōkuma Shigenobu to the cabinet as foreign minister cum deputy prime minister. This was what came to be called the era of the government–opposition party coalition. Japanese politics had already entered an era of which a cabinet could not be sustained without the cooperation of at least one of the anti-*han* clique parties.

Meanwhile, leaders of the anti-*han* clique parties became convinced that it would be far more beneficial for them to “complete parliamentary politics”—that is, to command the overwhelming majority in the House of Representatives by establishing an unified party called the *Kenseitō* party through the merger of *Jiyūtō* and *Shimpotō*—than to remain fragmented and continue hoping to form partnerships with each separate *han*-clique cabinet.

At this point, the *han*-clique government had no other choice than to accept the natural result of parliamentary democracy: that the majority party in the parliament would form the government. This was just what Mutsu had once predicted as a natural result of introducing a parliamentary system.

Initially, Itō's amour propre made him believe that, by exercising his personal influence, he could muster a sufficient number of people to form his own party. Witnessing how powerful political parties had become in Japanese politics, however, even Itō had to admit that his idea was unrealistic. Anti *han*-clique parties that had been active since the days of the Freedom and People's Rights Movement had already established firm electoral bases in numerous districts. It was utterly improbable even for Itō to establish a new party that could compete with these parties. Thus Itō stepped down, passing the government to Ōkuma and Itagaki.

This by no means meant that all the conservatives of the *han*-clique had accepted the role of political parties. A particularly adamant voice within the anti-party position was Yamagata Aritomo, who confronted Itō head-on, lamenting that “a party cabinet degenerates Japanese politics into democracy against Japan's national polity.”

Second Peaceful Revolution

When the Ōkuma-Itagaki cabinet was formed, Yamagata went as far as deploring that “the Meiji government has fallen.”

At this point, Itō’s flexibility that had prompted him to pass the government to Ōkuma and Itagaki saved Japan’s parliamentary politics. Had Itō followed Yamagata’s advice instead, the government would not have had any other option than to repeatedly exercise its right to dissolve the Lower House. If that had actually happened, any incremental budget would not have been passed, which would have paralyzed all the government functions. Facing the imminent threat from Russia, Japan would have had no other choice than to return to the *han*-clique autocracy—which would have meant suspending the constitution—in order to prepare for the war with Russia.

Being the very first party cabinet, the Ōkuma-Itagaki cabinet collapsed due to a schism within *Kenseitō* before making any major accomplishment. But it was extremely significant that a party cabinet was formed peacefully in Japan within ten years of the adoption of parliamentary politics, even though Meiji leaders had originally claimed Japan would pursue the system of a non-partisan cabinet. A party cabinet was never materialized in Germany before World War I, which had been the model for the Meiji Constitution. Japan had accomplished, so to speak, a second peaceful revolution after the Meiji Restoration. This was possible only because of the mutual trust among the Japanese leaders. In Itō’s mind, both Ōkuma and Itagaki had been his comrades, carrying the revolution called Meiji Restoration on their shoulders together. Itō must have trusted that Ōkuma and Itagaki shared the same love for the country, albeit their political differences, when he passed the government to them.

The second Yamagata cabinet that succeeded the Ōkuma-Itagaki cabinet returned to the old reliance on partnership with one of the anti *han*-clique parties—former members of *Jiyūtō*, this time—but it too was short-lived. Meanwhile, Itō once again explored a way to organize his own party. This time, though, instead of starting up a totally new party, he established a *Rikken Seiyūkai* with former members of *Jiyūtō* as the nucleus and became

its president. One hundred and fifty-five of the 300 seats in the House of Representatives were occupied by members of this *Rikken Seiyūkai*. This was the genesis of *Seiyūkai*, the party that would play the central role in accomplishing parliamentary democracy in Japan in the three decades (from 1912 through the 1930s) between the era of *han*-clique government and the rise of militarism.

The parliamentary democracy in Japan was accomplished by Itō from the *han*-clique side and *Jiyūtō* from the anti-*han* clique parties. It was the partnership between these two that contributed to a successful termination of the *han*-clique regime. To counter *Rikken Seiyūkai*, newer parties including *Kaishintō*, *Shimpotō*, and *Minseitō* were established. These newer parties and the *Rikken Seiyūkai* formed the two mainstreams that went on to support parliamentary democracy in Japan over the next three decades.

Because the Itō cabinet this time had had to take over the government quite unprepared, just like the Ōkuma-Itagaki cabinet, it ended up being short-lived.

Katsura Tarō Cabinet

After the fall of the fourth Itō cabinet, there was no longer anyone among the Meiji Restoration elder statesmen to volunteer to bear the responsibilities of state. As a result, generational change took place that resulted in the formation of the Katsura cabinet. Komura joined this cabinet as its foreign minister.

Together with Saionji Kinmochi, who would alternately share the responsibility from that time on, Katsura Tarō, born in Chōshū-*han* in 1847, belonged to the youngest generation among the Meiji Restoration leaders. He was a career soldier with a distinguished military service record, including his service in northern Japan as a company commander during the Boshin War (戊辰戦争).

After Saigō Takamori left the government, Yamagata from Chōshū and Ōyama Iwao from Satsuma were symbolic elders in the Japanese Imperial Army, under whom Katsura from Chōshū and Kawakami Sōroku from Satsuma were the most influential generals.

Some say that the First Sino-Japanese War was Kawakami's war—in other words, that it was Kawakami who commanded all the operations

throughout the war as Vice Chief of the General Staff. Because Chief of the General Staff was the aging Prince Arisugawa Taruhito, who had led the imperial army during the Meiji Restoration wars, Kawakami was the de facto Chief of the General Staff.

According to the Meiji journalist Tokutomi Sohō, Ōyama, out of the conviction that future of the Imperial Army rested on the shoulders of Kawakami and Katsura, had deliberately assigned these two to separate lines of posts lest these archrivals had to compete with each other. Thus, Kawakami was put in charge of military operations or military command, while Katsura was assigned to posts in charge of military government or military administration. Katsura was sent to Germany twice to study military systems, and after he came back he devoted himself to the consolidation of the Japanese military system.

While both Kawakami and Katsura worked well together to support the Imperial Army, Kawakami met a premature death from overwork during the First Sino-Japanese War. Katsura survived the hardship and eventually became prime minister.

A Remote Cause of Runaway Military

Incidentally, today it is generally believed that the arbitrary actions of the military in Japan that culminated in World War II originated from the exclusive imperial right of military command under the Meiji Constitution. This issue will be discussed in more detail when we touch upon the London Naval Conference in 1930 and after. But it should be stressed here that in fact it was rather the law that stipulated the need for generals and admirals on active duty to become war and naval ministers that encouraged the arbitrary conduct of the military in the 1930s. The law has its origin in this period with the beginning of party politics.

It was in 1901 that the Yamagata cabinet revised the administrative regulation so that ministers and vice ministers of the navy and army must be selected from among high-ranking admirals and generals on active duty. It is believed that this revision aimed to prevent such anti-Yamagata ex-military officers as Tani Tateki and Miura Gorō from becoming naval/war ministers. Whether this conjecture is justified or not, it seems undeniable that Yamagata, apprehensive of imminent domination of Japan's politics by

political parties, applied this revision in order to make the military a sanctuary that the party cabinet could not touch.

Prior to this revision, in 1898 when the Ōkuma-Itagaki cabinet was formed, Yamagata had expressed his wish that “at least war and navy ministers should transcend political parties.” Kawakami Sorōku, who had earlier lamented that a “party cabinet is harmful to the nation’s grand design,” also attempted to obstruct the formation of the Ōkuma-Itagaki cabinet by preventing war and naval ministers from the military from joining the cabinet. This indicates that the idea of sabotaging a party cabinet by refusing to send military ministers into government, as practiced in 1930s, had already existed from the very beginning. In the face of the deadlock, Emperor Meiji himself had to order War Minister Katsura and Naval Minister Saigō Tsugumichi of the former cabinet to stay in office to launch the Ōkuma-Itagaki cabinet.

It was during the second Yamagata cabinet which succeeded the doomed Ōkuma-Itagaki cabinet that Yamagata enacted the above regulation concerning war and naval ministers. As such, Yamagata’s intention seems to be self-evident.

Because of this revision, it had become virtually impossible to form a cabinet without the approval of the military. As political parties grew more powerful, they became highly critical of this law. In 1913 (2nd Year of Taishō), the law was revised to allow admirals and generals on reserve duty to assume the ministerial posts. Because the power of the military remained formidable, however, no one who was not on active duty had ever become war or naval ministers. After the February 26 Incident (2.26 事件) of 1936 was settled, the law was revised back to its original wording.

Any system can be abused as long as there is a will to do so. Particularly when such a powerful institution as the military is granted a privilege, there is nothing that can stop its abuse except for its own self-restraint.

Throughout the Meiji, Taishō, and early Shōwa eras, however, the Japanese military oftentimes had failed to exercise such self-restraint. After the February 26 Incident in 1936, particularly, the military’s conduct can be described as tyrannical—certainly far worse than simply “failing to restrain itself.”

By 1936, the minister of war, instead of the prime minister, had the real power in forming a cabinet. Unless the Imperial Army appointed the war minister for the next cabinet, the cabinet itself could not be formed. And it gave the army unlimited power to meddle in politics. The army conditioned its participation in the cabinet by interfering in the general policy of the cabinet, and even in the selection of other cabinet members. If these requests from the military were not granted, the appointed war minister would refuse to join the cabinet, blocking the formation of the cabinet. In short, by this time, the cabinet had no other choice but to accept all the demands from the military, even those having to do with policies and personnel.

In retrospect, this dominance by the military was totally attributable to Yamagata's stubborn determination to reject party politics. In this sense, Yamagata accomplished his original objective—the end result of which delivered fatal blows to Japan's parliamentary democracy thirty to forty years later, and devastated the country as a consequence.

Civil Service Appointment Ordinance

Another measure that Yamagata took to restrict party politics was the enactment of the Civil Service Appointment Ordinance (文官任用令) of 1899 (32nd Year of Meiji).

Before this ordinance was enacted, government offices could freely appoint anyone for the posts of *Chokunin-kan* (勅任官, an official appointed by the Emperor), today's equivalent of a high-ranking government official who has passed the national civil service examination. Consequently, the Satsuma-Chōshū oligarchy had been able to appoint whomever they wished to government posts.

From the perspective of party members who had long been out of the government, they suddenly became eligible to be appointed to assume various government posts, driving them to aggressive office-seeking.

Against this backdrop, the Civil Service Appointment Ordinance stipulated that all government officials must pass a national examination. A similar system is still in use in Japan today.

The merits and demerits of this system are still controversial. Had it not been for this ordinance, Japanese bureaucracy would have resembled that of

the United States today. Internationally, however, the U.S. bureaucratic system stands out alone as a peculiar system, while systems of other Western countries are more or less similar to Japan's. While opposition parties were bitterly disappointed and reacted violently at that time, it is still premature to evaluate whether the Civil Service Appointment Ordinance was a bad system or not.

A Wizard Mutsu Munemitsu Cultivated

On the anti-*han* clique parties side, it was Hoshi Tōru who exercised the greatest influence on the political situation in this period.

Hoshi had once been offered the post of foreign minister in the Yamagata cabinet. Hoshi devoted his energies to the formation of the succeeding Ito-*Rikken-Seiyūkai* cabinet, in which he served as minister for communications and transportation. Hoshi was not from a samurai clan; in fact, he was the son of an impoverished family at the bottom of society. It was extremely rare in those days (and still is today) for such a person to be promoted that far.

Because Hoshi's life was in itself the history of Japanese parliamentary politics in its infancy, let me review some aspects of political development around that time by tracing the footsteps of Hoshi.

Hoshi Tōru was a wizard that Mutsu Munemitsu cultivated. It is no exaggeration to say that there would have been no Hoshi if it had not been for Mutsu. Hoshi was Mutsu's protégé, and as some once said, "Hoshi is normally a tiger, but in front of Mutsu he becomes a tamed cat."

Hoshi's father was a plasterer who failed at his job because of heavy drinking; eventually he abandoned the family. Hoshi's older sisters were sold to a brothel in Shinagawa in payment for the family's debts. Hoshi's mother worked as a maidservant to support the family, with the still-nursing baby Tōru tied to her back. She became so tired and hopeless that she once thought of throwing the baby into a pond. Being at a loss as to what to do, she consulted with a fortuneteller by the name of Hoshi Taijun, who took pity on her and offered to marry her. Hence, baby Tōru became Hoshi Tōru.

Hoshi Taijun himself had been living a destitute life, earning his living by giving sailors moxa treatment or by fortunetelling in Uraga. Riding the

boom caused by the opening of the port of Yokohama, he was able to open his own clinic in Yokohama, which somewhat helped stabilize his living. At this point, Hoshi Taijun adopted Tōru's two older sisters, too, and, moreover, decided to support Tōru's decrepit father, the former husband of his wife. Hoshi Taijun was indeed a kind-hearted man.

Hoshi Tōru remained as a man of haughty arrogance throughout his life. It is not hard to imagine that his arrogance stemmed from his inferiority complex which he had borne during his upbringing. Also, having come from a non-samurai clan, he had no aversion to monetary affairs. In later years, this allowed him to lavishly pour money he had obtained from vested interests into political maneuvering, thus earning himself a bad name as a politician contaminated by money scandals.

Yet Hoshi was able to stay away from the aristocratic vice of pretention and self-indulgence. On the contrary, he maintained a strong aversion to these bad habits throughout his life. Rare for a Meiji Restoration leader, Hoshi hardly sought pleasure in demimonde.

He married a daughter of a tatami mat maker in order to ensure good relations between his mother and wife, which was one of numerous considerations that he showed to his family. This can be attributed to his experiences at the bottom of society and to his warm-hearted stepfather, who had taught Hoshi the value of human kindness.

Aspired to follow in his stepfather's footsteps, Hoshi initially became a live-in student under a practitioner of Western medicine. When he began his studies, he displayed an enormous talent in English. In no time, he became an expert in English, thanks to his perseverance, and took a job as an English teacher. It was around this time that Hoshi enrolled under the banner of Mutsu. He began to accompany Mutsu everywhere he went, including Wakayama and Kanagawa. Hoshi was only 24 years old when he was appointed director of customs at the port of Yokohama.

Subsequently, with the help of Mutsu, Hoshi was sent to Britain to study. He became the first Japanese to be certified as a barrister. Upon returning to Japan, Hoshi launched his own legal office, earning quite a fortune in no time.

Hoshi joined *Jiyūtō* in 1882, which was a natural course for him to take. Because he had no *han*-clan backing and Mutsu, his only protector, had been

imprisoned at the time, Hoshi's prospects for success as a government official were extremely dim. Even if he had become a government official, he would not have served out his time, given his ferocious antipathy and hatred against lineage and elites.

Even after he joined *Jiyūtō*, Hoshi remained as the most radical advocate for the annihilation of the "spurious party" *Kaishintō*.

The feud between *Jiyūtō* and *Kaishintō* dated back to the establishment of the latter. In terms of passing on the tradition of the Freedom and People's Rights Movement, the establishment of *Kaishintō* was tantamount to forming a new sect. *Jiyūtō-shi* (History of *Jiyūtō*), edited and supervised by Itagaki Taishuke, had the following to say about *Kaishintō*:

In launching *Kaishintō*, its founders felt a little guilty about *Jiyūtō*. That was why Kōno Togama, a leader of *Kaishintō*, had to justify the move to Itagaki by characterizing *Kaishintō* as a detached force of *Jiyūtō*. Because *Jiyūtō* is an incorruptible protector of justice and a friend of the poor, rich people do not feel comfortable with the party. Because it makes much of the young and energetic, the elderly and the realists do not care much for *Jiyūtō*. *Kaishintō* was established, according to Kōno, in order to prevent these potential supporters from abandoning *Jiyūtō* by pooling them in the detached force named *Kaishintō*. Kōno said that they intended to integrate this detached force with the main force in the future. In response, Itagaki reproved Kōno to his face, saying, "*Kaishintō* intends to hound us out, and snatch all of our games. I will say there is nothing more cunning than that." Kōno was at a loss for words.

After this showdown, *Jiyūtō-shi* continued to criticize *Kaishintō* and stated that *Kaishintō* started denouncing *Jiyūtō* as being vulgar and radical, and, consequently, the difference between the two, which had originally been only marginal, grew wide apart."

Hoshi's Lonely Battle to Keep the Freedom and People's Rights Movement Alive

Although *Kaishintō* claimed to be moderate and decent, Hoshi found its former samurai-clan members, whom he thought to be smug and elitist, utterly incompatible with himself. Even Mutsu, whose aversion to Ōkuma was well known, grew somewhat weary of Hoshi's tireless attack on *Kaishintō* and had to restrict Hoshi, saying, "Do you really think that we can do without collaborating with *Kaishintō* in the days to come?"

In 1884, when Itagaki decided to dissolve *Jiyūtō*, which had been dormant for quite some time, Hoshi alone vigorously gave public lectures all over Japan in order to revitalize the party. In May, he invested his own funds to publish the illustrated daily *Jiyū no Tomoshihi* (自由燈, The Light of Liberty). It would not be an overstatement to say that the dissolution of *Jiyūtō* in October of the same year was timed to take advantage of Hoshi's detention for insulting government officials. Hoshi sent a telegram from his prison cell opposing *Jiyūtō's* dissolution and instructed *Jiyū no Tomoshihi* staff to dispose of his estate to sustain the daily even after the dissolution of the party.

In October 1885, when Hoshi was released from his prison term, he found the *Jiyūtō* faction in utter distress. Former members of the party even evaded seeing Hoshi when he visited them. Given this situation, Hoshi decided to resurrect the Freedom and People's Rights Movement by regrouping scattered former members who had fallen on hard times and withdrawn from society. So as to emphasize his resolution to ignore minor differences for the sake of the unity of the group, Hoshi renamed his daily *Tomoshihi Shimbun* (燈新聞), removing the word *Jiyū* from its original name.

This turned out to be the starting point for the movement to unite parties under common interests. Triggered by the unequal treaty issue, the movement intensified after 1887. It was solely due to Hoshi's efforts that the fire of the Freedom and People's Rights Movement was kept burning. And it was the small stream of the movement that Hoshi had protected which later became the mainstream in Japanese politics including *Rikken-Jiyūtō*, *Kenseitō*, *Rikken-Seiyūkai*, and, eventually, *Jiyu-Minshutō* (自由民主党, Liberal Democratic Party) after World War II.

Meanwhile, Hoshi was fighting a solitary and lonely battle, though some were watching closely over his battle. One day, Itō privately said to Mutsu,

“There is nobody more bighearted and daring than Hoshi outside the government. I consider him a great man. Would you introduce me to Hoshi because I wish to make him work for me.” In response, Mutsu advised Itō, saying:

I could easily introduce you to Hoshi, but I am afraid that meeting him will not be beneficial to you. Hoshi cherishes people’s rights as the supreme cause, and he shoulders the expectations of tens of thousands of people with whom he is committed to live and die. It would not be oblique for him if, for some reason, he should betray you, a new acquaintance with whom he does not share the political conviction.

Hearing this, Itō was strongly impressed by Mutsu’s insight. Meanwhile, Hoshi marveled, “Mr. Mutsu is the person who really knows me.”

This is another episode from which one can detect the scale of Itō as an individual. Compared to the standard among politicians and other leaders in Japan today, the level of intellectual dialogue between Itō and Mutsu is admirable.

Hoshi Tōru, Speaker of the House

Although Hoshi was once again arrested for violating the code of publication, he was released in 1889 on a general pardon at the occasion of the promulgation of the Meiji Constitution. He was also able to regain his lawyer’s license.

Hoshi happened to be travelling abroad during the first general election, in which he had his proxy run instead, but he was elected to the House of Representatives in the second general election. Partly thanks to Mutsu’s indirect maneuvering, Hoshi was elected to Speaker of House of Representatives. Taking advantage of this position, he remained thoroughly ruthless toward the cabinet of Matsukata, who had shamelessly interfered in the second general election. Hoshi’s House of Representatives passed a cabinet impeachment bill, which, under normal conditions, would necessitate the dissolution of the House of Representatives—but nobody wished for another election. No new budget proposal of the Matsukata cabinet passed the House of Representatives, forcing the government to be abused freely by

opposition parties throughout the Diet session. In the end, Matsukata resigned from the prime ministership.

To replace the Matsukata cabinet, a so-called Meiji Restoration Builders Cabinet was formed with Itō Hirobumi as prime minister and Mutsu Munemitsu as foreign minister to face Hoshi's House of Representatives. Hoshi conspired with Mutsu to pass the last military budget proposal in order to prepare for the imminent First Sino-Japanese War, while maintaining a tough face vis-à-vis the government on the surface.

While Hoshi was steadily making necessary arrangements within the House of Representatives toward revision of the unequal treaties—which was the next and ultimate concern of Mutsu—he was expelled from the House for a trifle that could hardly constitute a reason for expulsion. At the background was hostility against the arrogant and insolent Hoshi, particularly among members of *Kaishintō*, where he had countless enemies. Also, although this should be counted as one of Hoshi's virtues, Hoshi's open support of the government's military budget and pursuit of revision of the unequal treaties, based on his own convictions about national prosperity, defense, and independence, gave other anti-*han* clan parties, which bigotedly believed they were there to oppose whatever the government had proposed, a convenient excuse to expel Hoshi.

Breakup of *Kenseitō*

During the First Sino-Japanese War, he was dispatched to Seoul as legal advisor to the Korean government. Then he was appointed Japanese minister to the United States in Washington, D.C. for two and a half years from 1896.

When *Jiyūtō* and *Shimpotō* merged to form *Kenseitō*, giving birth to the Ōkuma-Itagaki cabinet, Hoshi returned to Japan against instructions from the foreign ministry, believing that his time in Japanese politics had finally come. Members of the former *Jiyūtō* faction within *Kenseitō* negotiated with Ōkuma to appoint Hoshi to foreign minister. Ōkuma was apprehensive of Hoshi, however, and would not give in. Seeing that negotiations were deadlocked, Hoshi resorted to a drastic action.

Prior to the *Kenseitō* party convention scheduled for November 1, 1898 (31st Year of Meiji), Hoshi made his move. First he had the former *Jiyūtō*

faction within *Kenseitō* propose the dissolution of *Kenseitō*. Next he convened an extraordinary party convention among only former *Jiyūtō* faction members on October 29, just three days before the scheduled party convention, in which participants decided on the dissolution of *Kenseitō*. Immediately after this, Hoshi held the inaugural convention of the new *Kenseitō* established by former members of *Jiyūtō*. Since the party headquarters had belonged to *Jiyūtō*, belongings of the former *Shimpotō* faction were removed from the building and piled up on the roadside. Members of the former *Shimpotō* faction were naturally furious and rushed to party headquarters, only to be driven off by tens of desperados in kendo (Japanese fencing) protectors armed with wooden swords.

It certainly led to the fall of the Ōkuma-Itagaki cabinet.

Rikken-Seiyūkai

Now again Hoshi was in sole command in working out a collaboration with the Yamagata cabinet that replaced the Ōkuma-Itagaki cabinet. Hoshi had no other choice but to side with the government this time because he had just high-handedly expelled former *Shimpotō* members from *Kenseitō*.

Given the international situation of the time, facing the southbound advance of Russia, it was only natural for Hoshi to render the government every cooperation he could muster. In retrospect, we can see that it was the military expansion plan drafted by Hoshi, in the course of which he made great compromises with the Yamagata cabinet, and the land tax increase plan to support it that finally made Japan financially ready for the Russo-Japanese War. In fact, it is believed that Hoshi decided to align with Yamagata because Itō had advised Hoshi to do so, saying, “At this point, it would be beneficial for you to gain the trust of both the government and people by cooperating with the government.”

Given Yamagata’s aversion to party politics, however, the Hoshi-Yamagata partnership was nothing more than a matter of convenience, utterly incomparable to the partnerships between Itō and Mutsu, and Mutsu and Hoshi. Therefore, it was only natural for the newly established *Kenseitō* to keep its distance from Yamagata and propose a partnership with Itō.

Kenseitō leaders at first had hoped to invite Itō to become party

president. But Itō held fast to his wish to establish a completely new party. Consequently, on August 25, 1900, the founding of *Rikken Seiyūkai* was declared.

In his declaration of this new party, Itō once again stressed the spirit of the Meiji Constitution, which he himself had drafted—that is, that cabinet members were to be appointed by the Emperor, not by the political parties. While some former members of *Jiyūtō* complained that compromise of this magnitude was tantamount to total submission to Itō, Hoshi had the following to say in his August 27 speech: “Now that Lord Itō has decided to throw himself into our party, let us welcome him open-heartedly. This is the best way to complete parliamentary politics in Japan. Certain words in Lord Itō’s declaration are nothing but trifles.”

It took Hoshi’s high caliber to enable the foundation of *Rikken Seiyūkai*. Hoshi also said in later days, “If a political party continues to expand its powers, it will be able to form a cabinet,” which was soon proven to be correct. Although both Mutsu and Hoshi had relied on the flexibility of Itō, they both chose to take a realistic step toward the remote goal of accomplishing a parliamentary democracy in Japan, which was far beyond the imagination of Itō. Itō, on his part, kept on acquiescing to the progress made by Mutsu and Hoshi as each step unfolded. It was through these steady processes that parliamentary democracy in Japan was eventually accomplished.

Hoshi’s Legacy

Although Hoshi initially joined the Itō-*Rikken Seiyūkai* cabinet, he was forced to resign on suspicion of bribery. In light of the political situation in those days, however, this was just part of temporary political bargaining. Hoshi’s political influence within *Rikken Seiyūkai* had already become so enormous that nobody dared to challenge him. Had Hoshi survived, it would most certainly have been he, instead of Hara Takashi, who formed the first genuine party cabinet in Japan.

Conventional history books describe Hoshi as a champion of bribery and corruption. Both in terms of their upbringings and their aggressive dispositions, Hoshi appeared to share a lot in common with Tanaka Kakuei, the plutocratic prime minister in postwar Japan. Both of them uninhibitedly

and shamelessly manipulated Japanese politics with the power of money and the force of numbers they had bought with money, totally free from the shyness or pretentiousness of high society gentlemen.

In contrast to Tanaka who left a huge private fortune, however, all Hoshi left were heavy debts. Still, Hoshi's words and deeds were unforgivable from the viewpoint of the Japanese people in those days when the tradition of the code of the samurai still lingered.

Hoshi was stabbed to death in June 1901 (34th Year of Meiji) by Iba Sōtarō. Iba, son of an Edo swordmanship instructor, was a reputable gentleman with good education and social status, someone who did not appear suspicious when he approached Hoshi. Iba had long loathed Hoshi, who was, in his judgment, "polluting Edo's samurai culture." But it was a speech by Hoshi that Iba had read five days earlier that made him decide to kill Hoshi.

In this fatal speech, Hoshi criticized the traditional Confucius teaching and stressed the need for educational reform, stating, "It is inevitable for a person of promise to have, at the same time, a flaw or two. It is not wise to discard anybody with a flaw and enumerate in textbooks only histories of those who might have been clean and spotless but totally idle." This was a naked confession of Hoshi's life-long conviction, and, in that sense, it can be regarded as Hoshi's verbal will. But it made Iba greatly indignant because, in his eyes, it was a prescription to "demoralize students all over Japan."

On June 2, 1901, in the same month that Hoshi was assassinated, the Katsura cabinet was formed. Komura would soon join the cabinet as its foreign minister. The Katsura cabinet was not a party cabinet.

After Hoshi's assassination, his obsession for parliamentary democracy was succeeded by Hara Takashi of *Rikken Seiyūkai*. Hara, like Hoshi, was a disciple of Mutsu, and Hoshi had pinned his hopes on Hara.