

CHAPTER XIV

THE OPENING OF THE IMPERIAL DIET

The Imperial Diet was first opened on November 25, 1890 after the Constitution had been promulgated on February 21 of the previous year. With the advent of 1889 newspapers began heatedly to discuss the matter in their editorials. All the papers were in favour of the opening of the Imperial Diet. They were full of reports of news relating to the Constitution and the opening of the Diet. On February 2, the proceedings of the ceremony with which the Constitution was to be promulgated were published by papers. According to them, newspapermen were to be ousted from the honour of attending the ceremony; however, afterwards ten representatives of the press were allowed to be present. The papers represented at the ceremony were the Jiji, the Hochi, the Nichi-Nichi, the Choya, the Mainichi, the Yomiuri, the Nihon, the Kaishin, the Tokyo Koron, the Tokyo Shimpo.

Preparations for the opening of the Imperial Diet had been made by the Government for several years. In October 1881, an Imperial Rescript was issued in connection with the opening of the Diet and the following year Hirobumi Ito was ordered abroad for the study of the Constitutions of European countries. What impressed Ito most was the Constitution of Germany, which was exercising great influence in Europe, after the Triple Alliance had been concluded. Ito met Dr. Stein of Austria from whom he learned much. Ito thought the Constitution of Germany or Austria had better be followed by Japan, as in the

relationship of the ruler and his subjects Japan resembled Germany or Austria in those days. Not only that, but the Government was then under the obligation for the following reasons to take a course different from that already followed by political parties in Japan. At that time, the Jiyuto, or Liberal Party, was mimicking the parties in America and France, while the Kaishinto or Progressive Party was trying to imitate the parties in England. Therefore, Ito thought the Government ought to find models in any countries other than America, France or England.

Bismarck was the leader in Germany and her Constitution, as well as that of Austria, naturally impressed Ito greatly. Thus, the Constitutions of Germany and Austria were made models for preparing the Constitution of Japan. Besides, Ito considered that the best type of government for Japan was the Constitution which embodied strong nationalism and the divine right of the emperor.

Hirobumi Ito, then councillor, and his party returned home from Europe in August 1883. The following year a bureau was established in the Imperial Court for the investigation of matters relating to the preparation of the Constitution. Under Ito, Ki Inoue and Kentaro Kaneko were the members of the bureau.

In 1885, the Dajokan was abolished and a Cabinet system was first adopted. Ito became Prime Minister of the first Cabinet. Early in 1888, the draft of the Constitution was completed and was presented to

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H. I. M. the Emperor by Premier Ito. Then the Privy Council was organized for the consideration of the draft. Meantime, Kiyotaka Kuroda, who was Minister of Agriculture and Commerce in the first Cabinet, became Prime Minister and Ito was appointed as the first President of the newly established Privy Council. The Emperor often attended meetings of the Privy Council. The Constitution was promulgated on February 21, 1889, the 2,549th anniversary of the assumption of the throne by the first Emperor Jimmu.

The ceremony was very imposing. H. I. M. the Emperor worshipped at the Imperial Sanctuary in the Imperial Palace and read an Imperial message promulgating the Imperial Rescript for the opening of the Imperial Diet. Then His Majesty appeared in the grand hall where he gave an Imperial edict. Hirobumi Ito, President of the Privy Council, presented the draft of the Constitution to the Emperor and His Majesty personally handed it to Premier Kuroda.

The revision of the treaties between Japan and various countries was intended by Shigenobu Okuma, then Minister of Foreign Affairs, after the failure of the previous Minister, Kaoru Inouye, in the matter. There were pros and cons in the papers regarding the question. The Yubin Hochi, the Choya, the Mainichi and the Yomiuri were in favour of the revision, while the Tokyo Nichi-Nichi, the Nihon Shimbun, the Seiron Shimbun, the Tokyo Koron and the Tokyo Shimpo were against it.

The Government resorted to every means to stifle opposition views and many papers were suppressed. For instance, the To-

kyo Shimpo was suppressed on June 28 and September 10, in 1890 the Nihon Shimbun on August 6 and September 7, and the Seiron July 23 and August 31, as well as about ten papers in other districts, for their editorials against the revision of the treaties.

On the whole, the papers, which opposed the revision, as it included clauses against the dignity of Japan, were generally welcomed by the public, who also held the view that the revision should not be effected until the Powers agreed to more satisfactory terms. Among these papers were the Nihon Shimbun and the Tokyo Nichi-Nichi.

The progress of the negotiations for the revision of the treaties was known only to the members of the Cabinet, but the contents of the new treaty which had been under negotiation between Japan and Great Britain were published by the London Times and immediately cabled to Japan by Reuter. In this draft there was a clause allowing a certain number of foreign judges to deal with cases involving foreigners. This was the very point on which the Government was blamed by the public.

Even among the Cabinet Ministers, Minister of Communications Goto, Minister of Agriculture and Commerce Inouye, President of the Privy Council Ito, and many others resigned their posts in protest against the conclusion of the new treaties. Shigenobu Okuma, then Minister of Foreign Affairs, was attacked by an assassin on October 18, 1890, on his way to the Foreign Office. A bomb was thrown at his carriage and his left leg was so severely wounded that it had to be amputated. On October 24 the whole Cabinet resigned and the treaty revision was suspended.

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A paper with a slogan of democracy appeared in 1890. It was the Kokumin Shimbun, or People's Journal and was owned and edited by I-ichiro Tokutomi. Mr. Tokutomi is still the editor and proprietor of the journal and is a member of the House of Peers. He is regarded as one of the most successful journalists.

There are papers in Japan known by the editors' names and subscribed to by the readers because of the editors' views. The Kokumin is one of those papers. The Yorozu, started by Shiroku Kuroiwa in 1892, was also famous by the name of Kuroiwa, the proprietor and editor. It was due to his death several years ago that the Yorozu began to wane in influence and it has recently been sold to a certain merchant. The Nihon Shimbun, established by Minoru Kuga in 1889, was also a paper which enjoyed popularity on account of the name of the late Mr. Kuga. The Nihon Shimbun was reactionary opposing the extreme Europeanization of this country.

After the death of Gen-ichiro Fukuchi and Yukichi Fukuzawa, newspaperdom was for some time under the personal influence of Minoru Kuga, and I-ichiro Tokutomi. Kuga was a typical gentleman and was a journalist with a noble character. Tokutomi had a wide knowledge of the world. He is a graduate from the Doshisha University, a Christian school, and was the first Christian editor in Japanese journalism. When he came to Tokyo from his native place in Kyushu, he published a book entitled

"The Future of Japan", and it was widely read as the book covered all the problems confronting Japan and contained the young author's farsighted views on Japan's future.

In 1887, Tokutomi published a magazine named "Kokumin no Tomo", or "People's Friend" after the model of an English journal on politics and literature. It immediately obtained fame throughout the country. Then Tokutomi became ambitious to issue a daily. So he made Wagoro Fukuda, one of his friends, enter the Kyoto Nippo, a certain paper in Kyoto, and study practical journalism. Thus, he was making thorough preparations for the issue of his paper.

After its appearance in 1890, the Kokumin soon became a household daily. Tokutomi carried out novel plans in every column from time to time. The Kokumin illustrated news and those illustrations made up what was missed by reports. The paper worked hard to gather news from all directions, literary, religious and commercial, in addition to political circles. Interviews with famous men of the day were one of the Kokumin's features. They made a column named Tea Cups. Credit must go to Tokutomi for his attempt to make editorials as short as possible and pick up their subjects from the current events.

The Kokumin was not so refined as the Tokyo Nichi-Nichi, or so hard as the Nihon Shimbun, or so dry as the Choya Shimbun. On the staff of the journal were such famous writers as Rokwa Tokutomi, Aizan Yamaji, Koshoshi Miyazaki and Sansha Takekoshi.