

The Economic Weekly

A Journal of Current Economic and Political Affairs

TWELFTH YEAR OF PUBLICATION

June 25, 1960

Volume XII—No. 26

Price 50 Naye Paise

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Crisis in Japan

THE tragic thing, from America's point of view, about the Japanese storm over the Security Treaty is that immediately, at least, the right lesson from it have not been learnt. The cancellation of the invitation ('postponement' is really a rather meaningless euphemism) to President Eisenhower must have understandably enough piqued him personally, apart from being a national humiliation to the United States. All the same his mild outbursts — with pretensions to being an 'interpretation' of the events in Tokyo — will not be helpful in the formulation of a new American policy towards, not only Japan, but the whole of the Far East.

Mr Eisenhower has tried to take comfort from two delusions. One is that the entire storm against the Treaty as well as against Mr Kishi and his conservative coalition was Communist-engineered; the second is that only a voluble 'minority' was associated with the long and sustained demonstrations which culminated — if they have culminated at all — in Mr Hagerty being rescued by helicopter. Actually, the degree of Communist influence in this more or less spontaneous explosion against the Kishi regime is negligible; and many of the Socialists and Social democrats involved have an intolerance of Communists which is as lively as their hatred for Mr Kishi. Whether or not the people whose protests and demonstrations succeeded in turning the U S President from the very threshold of Tokyo are a 'minority' of the population is, strictly speaking, an unprofitable argument. The material point is that they only too obviously represent a considerable section of articulate Japanese opinion, which cannot safely be disregarded either as belonging to a minority or to agents of Communism.

The fact is that the factors which underlie the crisis in Japanese-American relations are very much the same as those which the U S policy of trying to fit democratic policies and practices into the needs of its own anti-Communist military alliances has engendered in several other countries. (Mr Eisenhower might have suffered equal humiliation in Seoul during his recent tour if Dr Rhee had not fallen already.) There is a dangerous impression at large, as a political commentator points out in a British weekly, that 'the West is prepared to forgo its own political principles in placing all its confidence in parties or regimes that chiefly serve its military convenience. This has played a major part in the Japanese crisis.

The Treaty itself has, of course, been a genuine cause of concern and worry to many thinking Japanese. The essential point of the issue has been neatly brought out by cartoonists who have shown Mr Eisenhower as sponsoring the Treaty in the determined spirit of 'Never again a Pearl Harbour!', and the Japanese resisting it with the resolve that never again would there be another Hiroshima. The U-2 incident has not failed to play its part in the building of this resistance. The Japanese have learnt from this that the existence of U S bases in Japan could easily embroil Tokyo in a nuclear war, and the fear of such an eventuality is understandably acute. It has been further sharpened by Mr Khrushchev's warning that Russia would take retaliatory action against any country - which lent its bases to American serial adventures.

THE ECONOMIC WEEKLY

104, Apollo Street, Fort, Bombay
Telephone : 253406
Annual Subscription : Rs 24
Foreign 40s or \$ 6