

Japan

Neue Regierung, alte Probleme

In Japan ist vergangene Woche das neue Kabinett der Öffentlichkeit vorgestellt worden. Die Märkte haben prompt reagiert: weiterer Kurszerfall des ohnehin schon schwachen Yen und ein stagnierender Nikkei-Index, Wirtschaftsbarometer der zweitgrößten Volkswirtschaft der Welt. Für die negativen Reaktionen der Finanz- und Börsenmärkte hat vor allem die Nominierung des zwielfichtigen Finanzministers Miyazawa gesorgt. Der Jurist, dessen Vater und Großvater bereits Abgeordnete waren, kann auf eine lange Karriere in der Finanzbürokratie Nippons zurückblicken. Schon im Zweiten Weltkrieg war der heute 78-jährige Beamte im Tokioter Finanzministerium. Zweifellos verfügt Miyazawa, der als einer der wenigen Politiker fließend englisch spricht, über eine langjährige Auslandserfahrung unter anderem als früherer Premierminister des Landes. Dennoch ist seine Ernennung als außerordentlich problema-

tisch zu bewerten. So ist zu fragen, was Miyazawa denn tatsächlich als Ex-Finanz- und Premierminister geleistet hat. Die Bilanz fällt negativ aus: Als Finanzminister war Miyazawa nach dem Washingtoner Plaza Abkommen 1985 für die viel zu lang andauernde Niedrigzinspolitik verantwortlich, die eine massive Welle von Aktien- und Grundstückspekulationen auslöste und den bis heute andauernden Zusammenbruch der „Finanzblase“ 1991 verursachte.

Daneben ist auch Miyazawa in die letzten schweren Skandale und dunklen Affären der LDP Regierungspartei verstrickt. Die „Recruit“-Bestechungsaffäre in den 80er Jahren, in die nahezu die gesamte Führung der LDP verwickelt war, hatte ihn zum Rücktritt als Finanzminister gezwungen. In seiner Zeit als Premierminister hat er es abgelehnt, in klarer Weise zu der „Sagawa-Kyubin“-Affäre Stellung zu beziehen, bei der es um kriminelle Kontakte des

früheren Ministerpräsidenten Takeshita zu Vertretern der japanischen Mafia ging. Damals deckte Miyazawa Takeshita, der jetzt auch wieder im Hintergrund die Fäden bei der Ernennung von Premier Obuchi gezogen hat.

Wie soll ein Vertreter des alten Systems eine Finanzkrise bereinigen, für deren Ausbruch er mitverantwortlich gewesen ist, und deren Ausmaß immer gigantischere Dimensionen annimmt? Amerikanische Experten der US-Finanzbehörde haben errechnet, daß der Schuldenberg der Banken auf 1000 Milliarden US-Dollar zu schätzen sei und nicht auf 500 bis 600 Milliarden, wie bisher vermutet. Die genaue Feststellung der faulen Kredite läßt sich nicht mit Sicherheit kalkulieren, weil viele Banken ihre Zahlen noch nicht offengelegt haben aus Furcht vor unvorhersehbaren Konsequenzen. Um den Schuldenberg abzubauen, müßten die Steuerzahler zehn bis zwölf Prozent des gesamten BIP

aufbringen. Ob die von der Regierung inspirierte staatliche Überbrückungsbank die notwendigen Kredite zur Sanierung der Banken überhaupt ausreichend zur Verfügung stellen kann, gilt als fraglich.

Miyazawa, ein Anhänger von Keynes, hat kurz nach seiner Ernennung teils widersprüchliche und verwirrende Aussagen zur Sanierung der Wirtschaft gemacht. Zum Beispiel erklärte er kurz nach seiner Ernennung im Zusammenhang mit der von Premier Obuchi angekündigten Steuerentlastung von mehr als 6 Billionen Yen zur Ankurbelung des Konsums, es sei überhaupt nicht klar, wann welche Steuer in welchem Umfang gesenkt werde. Der ebenfalls von Obuchi angekündigte weitere Nachtragshaushalt von mehr als 10 Billionen Yen wurde von Miyazawa überhaupt nicht mehr angesprochen, was zeigt, welche Konfusion und Uneinigkeit in den Reihen der neuen Regierung herrscht.

Experten rechnen damit, daß durch die neuen Anleihen und neuen Schulden die Staatsausgaben weiter steigen werden, um die Wirtschaft zu beleben. Wie das ganze Unternehmen auf der Einkommenseite finanziert werden soll, bleibt ungeklärt. Die Steuergeschenke an die Bürger werfen die gleichen Fragen auf: wie sollen die dadurch im Staatsbudget entstandenen Lächer gestopft werden? Woher werden die Steuergelder kommen, um die Darlehen der staatlichen Überbrückungsbank zu finanzieren? Die neue Regierung wird in den kommenden Wochen und Monaten vor einer innenpolitischen Zerreißprobe stehen. Jedes Zögern und Hinausschieben der Probleme könnte die Japan AG und die gesamte Weltwirtschaft in eine schlimme Rezession stürzen.

Patrick Hein

Caught in a Campaign Issue

The controversy over U.S. President Bill Clinton's nomination of James Hormel as the new Ambassador to Luxembourg has burst into a full-blown Campaign issue for the upcoming November Mid-term elections

When U.S. President Bill Clinton nominated 65-year-old James Hormel for the post of American ambassador to Luxembourg last fall, the matter seemed overwhelmingly simple. Hormel, a businessman from San Francisco and heir to the Hormel meat packing fortune, brought along qualifications only few others could match. His credentials were so impressive that the *New York Times* even judged him overqualified for the job. The road thus seemed perfectly paved for Hormel to become the new American ambassador to Luxembourg, had there not been one last hurdle - the fact that Hormel is openly gay. And this hurdle, neither Hormel nor his democratic supporters have been able to overcome yet.

Backed by a handful of conservative fellow Republicans, Senate Majority Leader Trent Lott, himself a fervent partisan of the ideology of his party's religious right wing, has spearheaded the anti-gay crusade against Hormel by using his power as Majority Leader to prevent the Senate from voting on Hormel's appointment. Although the Senate Foreign Relations Committee, which has to approve a candidate first before the full Senate can vote on him, passed Hormel's nomination with a 16 to 2 vote last November, the issue never made it to the Senate floor because of the opposition of three Republican Senators.

Hormel's nomination put on hold

Judging Hormel's sexual orientation and advocacy of gay rights as inadmissible, they placed a hold on the full Senate vote; a measure that blocks the regular voting procedure. The only one who can override such a hold is Majority Leader Trent Lott, who has, however, shown no intention of doing so. Lott not only shrugged off a letter signed by forty-two Democratic senators supporting Hormel's nomination and requesting that he schedule a confirmation vote, but he also chose to ignore voices from within his own party, demanding that he finally agree to let the Senate vote on the issue. An issue, which at first glance seems too trivial to even attract the Senate's full attention. Filling an open ambassadorial position

to Luxembourg certainly does not range among the top priorities of the U.S. Senate. Even Trent Lott would agree with that.

But that's not the real issue. The real issue is that the congressional mid-term elections are coming up in November and that the Republican senators around Lott have turned the controversy over Hormel's nomination into a highly publicized campaign issue. In an interview on *CBS Face The Nation* TV show, Lott wholeheartedly likened homosexuality to alcoholism and kleptomania and later even went on to invoke the Bible in calling homosexuality a mortal sin. By condemning homosexuality on religious grounds and engaging in an unforgiving anti-gay rhetoric, Lott seems to cater to the conservative religious right, which constitutes the GOP's strongest voter base and which, if mobilized for the November elections, might help him and his fellow conservatives secure their reelection.

Internal divisions

Not all Republicans are convinced though that Lott's anti-gay agenda will bear fruits during the mid-term elections. The Hormel issue has cast conservatives against moderates, who are afraid the GOP's current homophobic discourse may alienate their less conservative voters and cost them their seats in Senate. Concerned about his reelection in the district of New York, which houses a powerful gay community, Republican Alfonse D'Amato was the first one to stand up for Hormel. In a letter to Lott, he condemned the Majority Leader's opposition to Hormel as an injustice which he as a Republican and member of Lincoln's party is embarrassed to be associated with. Republican Senate candidate Matt Fong shares similar feelings with regards to Hormel and his own election in November. In an effort to appease his party's powerful religious right while at the same time trying not to fend off the moderates whose votes he will need to beat his Democratic opponent in November, Fong declared he shared Lott's feelings about homosexuality but that he didn't think Hormel should be discriminated against merely because of his sexual orientation.

While support for Hormel has grown stronger over the months, conservative advocacy groups headed by The Traditional Values Coalition, and the Family Research Council, have embarked on a zealous mission to dig up critical information on Hormel that might justify their attacks. And the justifications they unearthed are plentiful. At the core of their attacks a videotape shot during the 1996 Gay Freedom Day Parade in San Francisco, on which Hormel appears to be laughing at the performance of the Sisters of Perpetual Indulgence, a local gay street theater which features gay men dressed as nuns.

Charges against Hormel

To the Family Research Council and other religious right extremists this is evidence enough that Hormel is offensively anti-Catholic and unsuited to be sent off to a 97 percent Catholic country. By refusing to condemn the theater group shortly after the videotape had been circulated to members of the Senate, Hormel only rekindled the fire and further attracted the wrath of the religious right, who was now arguing that an anti-religious ambassador could not accurately represent their inherently religious country abroad.

The Traditional Values Coalition for its part has done just as thorough of a job in garnering charges against Hormel. In a painstaking effort to discredit Hormel, they made a list of every book in the San Francisco Public Library collection that was named after him and went on to blame him for some pedophilia-related works present in this collection. What they chose to ignore however, is the fact that Hormel was not involved at all in the purchasing decisions and consequently should not be blamed for those books.

Adding to the Hormel debate is a series of newspaper ads sponsored by the Family Research Council and counter-attacked by the Human Rights Campaign, an organization that supports gay issues. Christians who speak against homosexual behavior are motivated more by love than hate argue the full-page newspaper ads which the Family Research Council ran in some of the most important U.S. newspa-

pers, such as the *New York Times* and the *Washington Post*. In the same ads, Trent Lott is quoted saying that homosexuality is a sin, but that instead of trying to mistreat homosexuals or to treat them as outcasts, people should try to show them a way to deal with that. It almost seems ironic that the same Trent Lott chose to demonstrate his loving concern for the gay ambassador nominee by refusing to schedule a confirmation vote on his nomination and thereby depriving Hormel of the fair hearing he was entitled to.

In response to the conservatives latest attempts at decrying homosexuality, the Human Rights Campaign fought back with another series of ads which solicit acceptance of homosexuality and aim at depicting gays as loving children and parents. It is exactly this kind of advocacy of a gay lifestyle which the extreme right has declared its enemy. Hormel opponents are concerned that gay activists such as the wealthy ambassadorial candidate himself might actually succeed in normalizing homosexuality in the eyes of the public thereby leading traditional American family values astray. In light of those concerns, conservatives have charged Hormel, a philanthropist who has donated money to a wide variety of charitable causes, of using his wealth to promote the gay cause. Some were even worried Hormel might abuse of his ambassador position to push the gay cause abroad in his host country Luxembourg.

Looking at the current state of affairs, they need not worry though. Majority Leader Lott has gone out of his way to protect a country where, as the *Washington Post* put it, homosexuality is unknown. The fact that Luxembourg officially welcomed Hormel's nomination, didn't seem to bother Lott too much. Neither did he seem impressed by the pressures of a growing number of Senators who all joined in requesting that he override the holds placed on Hormel's nomination and schedule a confirmation vote. Confronted with those pressures, Lott simply contended that there was not enough time in the remaining Senate calendar to schedule a vote and that it was more important to focus on the fiscal 99 spending bills instead. Since Lott was the only one who could have brought the Hormel issue to the Senate floor and since he refused to do so before Congress will go into recess,

there are only two options left for Hormel.

President Clinton could either name him to the post during recess, or he could wait until Congress reconvenes after the mid-term elections and start the whole nomination process over again. In case of a recess appointment, which is a procedure that allows the president to make appointments when Congress is not convening, Hormel would only be allowed to serve as American ambassador to Luxembourg until the end of the next congressional term. Hormel's second option isn't much more appealing. If Clinton decides against a recess appointment, Hormel's destiny would be lingering over the Washington skies until January at the earliest, since Congress won't convene between October and January due to the mid-term elections. Not only would Hormel's nomination be stalled for another couple of months, but he would also have to pass the Senate Foreign Relations Committee again before his nomination could be finally confirmed by a full Senate vote.

Clearly an election issue

It would be interesting to see how long the Senate would take to vote on Hormel's nomination after the mid-term elections. It is likely that Hormel's nomination merely came at the wrong moment - a moment when the GOP needed votes and the religious right seemed like the suitable bed fellow. How else could one explain the full-page ads, the zealous muckrakers from the religious right and the internal divisions the Hormel case has caused the GOP? Surely, the U.S. Senate does not perceive its diplomatic relations with Luxembourg as important enough to justify such extravagant measures as an end in itself. But if votes are at stake, it seems as though even matters related to an inconsequential postage stamp of a country - as Luxembourg was portrayed in the U.S. media - can grab the Senate's full attention. What remains questionable though is whether the Hormel issue would have raised as much controversy during a non-election year.

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