
UNIT 10 IMPERIAL DEMOCRACY AND POLITICAL PARTIES

Structure

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10.0 OBJECTIVES

In this Unit, you will be able to know:

- how political associations formed after the Restoration evolved into political parties,
- about the formation of parties and their position within the constitution,
- the relationship between political parties and the Meiji oligarchic and bureaucratic cliques,
- about the growth and decline of party government, and
- the nature of political democracy in pre-war Japan.

10.1 INTRODUCTION

Any discussion of the rise of political parties in Japan after World War-I has to start by considering the processes which led to the creation of political parties and the relationships that were formed between the parties and other politically powerful groups. This is necessary because these relationships determined the strength and limitations of the constitutional system which was developed in Japan. Thus, this Unit focuses on the reasons leading to the formation of political parties and the position these parties occupied in the state structure,

10.2 CONSTITUTIONAL GOVERNMENT UNDER MEIJI OLIGARCHY

In 1889 the Meiji Emperor granted to his people a constitution which laid the basis for a constitutional government. The constitution was drafted by the Meiji oligarchy who were profoundly anti-democratic in their thinking. The Meiji leaders distrusted the idea of a popularly elected government and thought that

such a system would lead to social and political chaos. Yet they drafted a constitutional framework under which political parties functioned. This ambiguity in the Meiji constitutional model was noted by the constitutional expert Minobe Tatsukichi (1873-1948) who wrote in 1926:

“Our constitution has developed in a manner completely contrary to the expectations of its authors. Institutionally the system of cabinets responsible to the Diet has no place in the constitution, but it has been firmly established as a customary practice.”

This customary practice took time to grow and it was only in 1924 that because of a general election a cabinet with a majority in the lower house was formed. This cabinet led by Kato Takaaki (186-1926) and known as the cabinet to protect constitutional government inaugurated an era of party governments. Thus, from June 1924 to May 1933 all the prime ministers represented the major parties in the lower house.

The questions which arise are why did it take so long for political parties to establish the principal that the majority party in the lower house has the right to form a government and why did this system last for so short a period? In looking at these questions we shall discuss the steps leading up to the formation of political parties and then the position these parties occupied in the state structure.

10.2.1 Formation of Political Parties

The accepted argument has been that the Tokugawa period was an undemocratic political structure where political power was strictly confined. Today, however, many scholars seeking for the roots of Japan's success in modernization have begun to argue that in the period before the opening of Japan by the Western powers, Japan had developed not only economic skills and institutions but had also begun to evolve a political structure in which discussion and debate was an integral element. The Shogun did not rule as an arbitrary despot but represented a depersonalized source of power which was exercised through deliberations. These were of course confined to a small section or class of society but because the exercise of power was not arbitrary modern Japan could adapt a constitutional government.

Scholars like Irokawa Daikichi seek the development of democratic ideas in the popular movements in rural and urban areas in the Tokugawa period. These movements challenged the authority of the Tokugawa state and created the beginnings of a political consciousness and the possibility of joining together to seek redress from the state. These movements were not politically successful in either bringing down the Tokugawa Bakufu or in putting forward an alternative to it. Yet, they built a tradition which was used by the Peoples' Rights Movement to press its demands for a popularly elected assembly.

The Meiji Restoration, which began a period when Japanese institutions and practices were dramatically altered, saw the building of a centralized political structure. This has been discussed earlier in Unit 10. Here it may be noted that political associations and groups were formed to demand a constitutional government. In 1880, for instance, there were over 150 local societies, such as the Kojunsha in Kochi or the Yashinsha in Gumma, demanding the establishment of a national assembly.

The Meiji state, on the other hand, preferred to create a political structure which could be closely managed and controlled and where social pressures would remain within the framework desired by the leaders. Of course there were debates and differing views. The Meiji oligarchy wanted, to, above all, preserve the sovereignty of the Emperor from being usurped by the people. However, steps to prevent the emergence of a body, like the Tokugawa Bakufu (the Bakufu had ruled in the name of the Emperor) led to a diffusion of authority among the organs of the state with none of them exercising absolute power. Thus on the one hand the Meiji state appeared to be highly centralized under an Imperial authority on the other, power was parceled out leading to considerable autonomy for each group or institution. However, the direct authority of the Emperor could be used to advantage and it was so used by different groups such as the army or the bureaucracy. We must remember here that the constitutional system functioned not to protect the liberty of the people but to protect the sovereignty of the Emperor. However, in practice to coordinate these institutions of the state, the oligarchy emerged as a powerful force.

The oligarchy was composed of the leaders of the Meiji Restoration. These people were bound by regional ties and by the fact that they had led the country through the change from the Tokugawa to the Meiji period. The two dominant regions were Satsuma and Choshu and these regions supplied most of the members of the bureaucracy, the army, the Privy Council and the House of Peers, etc. The Meiji leaders came to be known as *genro* or elder statesman and they exercised the power embodied in the Imperial House.

The House of Representatives, created under the Meiji constitution was dominated by those who were opposed to the oligarchy. Many of these people had been members of the oligarchy but broken away. They took part in the Peoples' Rights Movement and organized political parties. The Meiji oligarchy was opposed to the idea of building up its own parties. Initially some, like Ito Hirobumi (1841-1909) and Inoue Kaoru (1836-1915) wanted to organize their own party but they were opposed by the majority.

In the period upto the promulgation of the constitution i.e. upto 1889, there were two major groups around whom the first parties were organized. Itagaki Taisuke (1837-1919) joined the Meiji government as a junior councilor but resigned in 1873 when differences arose over the question of invading Korea. Itagaki favoured the invasion plan. He and his supporters formed the Public Party of Patriots which campaigned for a democratically elected national assembly. Later he helped to organize the Self-Help Society. The Society of Patriots was renamed in 1880 and in 1881 it became the Liberal Party (*Jiyuto*).

The *Jiyuto* was a party supported by former samurai and the rural elite but the party leaders were alarmed at the escalating violence during this period of the Peoples' Rights Movement. As mentioned earlier (Unit 16), 1882-1886 was a period when violent incidents in the central part of Honshu, such as Chichibu and Kabasan occurred and the government carried out stern repressive measures. The party was consequently disbanded and then reformed as the Constitutional Liberal Party (*Rikken Jiyuto*) after the 1890 general elections.

Okuma Shigenobu (1838-1922), from the domain of Hizen, was forced to resign from the government in 1881 as amongst other things he had wanted to convene an elected assembly as soon as possible. Okuma also favoured a parliamentary

system modeled on the British system. After leaving the government he formed the Constitutional Reform Party (Rikken Kaishinto). This party drew its support from the urban middle class and propagated ideas of gradual democratic reform. Okuma also refused overtures to merge with Itagaki's Liberal Party but as the government began to suppress the Peoples' Rights Movement Okuma left the party. This party later became the Progressive Party (Shimpoto) and was the second important party.

These "peoples parties" (minto) were briefly opposed by a more conservative group which was called the Constitutional Imperial Rule Party (Rikken Teiseito). Though it did not play a politically important role, it did represent the strong conservative forces which existed at that time.

The first Diet opened in November 1890 and till the formation of the first party cabinet in 1898 the period was marked by a tussle between the parties and the oligarchic clique or hanbatsu. There were also pro-government groups which were formed occasionally. The problem faced by these two groups was that under the Meiji constitution the political parties could only exercise control by refusing to pass the budget and in such a situation the previous years budget would be continued. However, the oligarchy also could not do away with the parties as long as they accepted the Meiji constitution and they both therefore had to learn to work together. The parties could control the lower house but the upper house of Peers was controlled by the oligarchy and its supporters. This was soon realized and after the Sino-Japanese war the two groups, the political parties and the oligarchy, began to form mutual alliances.

10.2.2 Interest Groups and Political Parties

The oligarchy viewed party government as representing sectional or factional interests and it wanted cabinets to represent national interests. It, therefore, talked of "transcendental cabinets" (chozen naikaku). However, the mutual adjustments meant that there was some change in these ideas amongst the oligarchy as well among the "peoples' parties"; who also modified their anti-oligarchy positions. For instance, in November 1895, the government allied with the Liberal Party and Itagaki Taisuke [its president] was made Home Minister in the Ito Hirobumi cabinet in April, 1896. This was perceived as a major challenge to the anti-party supporters of oligarchic rule and to oppose Ito Hirobumi they rallied around Yamagata Aritomo.

The cabinets so far had been formed by the genro or elder statesmen and they had, alternatively nominated men from either the domain of Choshu or Satsuma. Thus-Ito was from Choshu and Matsukata Masayoshi from Satsuma. Ito attempted to form a cabinet with party support but was opposed by the hanbatsu. In June 1898 the Kenseito, a party composed from earlier party elements; was formed and this represented a new force which provoked widely different reactions from the oligarchy. Ultimately the oligarchy chose to let the Kenseito form a cabinet.

The cabinet formed by Itagaki and Okuma in June 1898 was consisted of members of the Kenseito and was the first party cabinet. This party had an absolute majority in the lower house with 244 of the 300 seats. However, in spite of the numerical strength the party was in a weak position. This was because:

- the ministers for the navy and the army, nominated by the respective services were opposed to the party,
- the party itself was formed by a merger of two groups who were divided over the question of raising taxes.

To meet the needs of military expansion the state needed to raise taxes. While the party was opposed to raising land taxes business and urban interests did not object this as long as the government followed a policy of economic expansion and greater public expenditure.

The collapse of the cabinet within four months demonstrated the fragility of the alliance formed by these political groups who came together for very specific and temporary reasons. Among the party ideologues there now emerged a view that it was necessary to cooperate with the *hanbatsu* and Hoshi Toru, of the *Kenseito*, sought to work together with the oligarchy. Yamagata, who formed a cabinet in November 1898, sought his support for an increase in the land tax. The party which had consistently opposed an increase in the land tax now bargained with the demand for nationalizing the railroads in return for which it supported the land tax bill. This bargaining represented the greater role played by the urban business and commercial interests.

The parties upto now had been dominated by rural interests and they had pursued policies which reflected rural concerns and interests. The parties while vocal in their opposition to the oligarchy also compromised when necessary. They too were split by regional and personal loyalties. For example Itagaki was from Tosa and other factions were from Kyushu or Kanto. This regional and factional rivalry prevented unity and created intense rivalry. Moreover, the parties did not have any representation in the House of Peers and also, had no control over local politics as all key officials were appointed by the government. Thus the parties, themselves split and engaged in rivalry, were faced by the opposition of the oligarchy which controlled key institutions.

The importance of urban business interests is also seen in the revision of the electoral law which lowered the tax qualification both for voters and candidates. This led to an increase in the number of eligible voters from 502,000 in 1898 to 982,000 in 1900. The revision of the electoral districts also favoured urban areas where fewer people could elect a representative thus increasing the urban presence in the Diet.

In September 1900 Ito Hirobumi formed the Friends of the Constitutional Government Party or *Seiyukai* as it was commonly known in Japanese. This represented Ito's goal which he had been arguing for that the government should form its own party and work to control the lower house. He had been opposed by Yamagata and other Meiji oligarchs; The alliance between the *Kenseito* and Yamagata had also proved to be short lived one as 'the party realized that no real concessions would be made by the oligarchy. Hoshi Toru, once he saw the futility of working with Yamagata, approached Ito and offered to work with him. Their interests coincided. The *Seiyukai*, formed by oligarchy and party elements who sought stability in politics, was to dominate the political scene till the 1920s.

Ito Hirobumi was opposed by Yamagata Aritomo whose ideas of politics differed and Yamagata's faction remained an important group within the *hanbatsu* or oligarchy. The groups now fighting for political power were the *Seiyukai*, the

Yamagata faction and the Kenseihonto which carried on the line from the Shimpoto. In 1913 Katsura Taro (1848-1913) of the Yamagata faction formed the Constitutional Association of Friends and in 1916 it became the Kenseikai (Constitutional Association) which opposed Ito's Seiyukai.

From the Russo-Japanese war onwards (1904 to 1912) political power was alternatively shared by Katsura Taro, of the Yamagata faction who led three cabinets and Saionii Kinmochi who had become head of the Seiyukai and who formed two cabinets.

In this period the most important Seiyukai leader was Hara Takeshi who was to become the first commoner Prime Minister. He was a party man and helped to build the Seiyukai as an influential party with a strong organization spread throughout Japan. His political strategy was to ally with the Yamagata faction rather than work with the other political parties. Hara and the Seiyukai pursued a "positive policy". Before the Sino-Japanese war the parties had tried to limit government spending but now Hara tried to increase government spending in building railroad lines, improving harbour and communication networks. These expenditures served to channel finances to local communities and helped the Seiyukai to build up its influence. Hara also tried to build up support in the House of Peers though this policy was successful only in 1920 when some groups within the Peers came to support the Seiyukai.

Hara, while he built up the party machinery and influence, did not support the demand for universal suffrage. The demand which first surfaced in the 1910s was again revived in 1919-20 and the country witnessed large scale demonstrations all over. Intellectuals as well as labour and party leaders were active in this movement. However, Hara was doubtful about supporting this demand because he thought that this would be giving in to popular pressure. He felt that such a step should be taken gradually. This led to the dissolution of the house and general elections in which the Seiyukai emerged as the largest party. The opposition parties increased their strength in urban areas suggesting that the demand for universal suffrage was largely an urban demand.

The relationship between the Seiyukai and the Yamagata faction was not a stable and consistent one but rather marked by divergent pulls and pressures. The Yamagata faction had to rely on the Seiyukai because of its strength. It could not form an effective anti-Seiyukai coalition with elements of the Kenseibonto and other small factions. The Kenseihonto was split with some favouring an alliance with the Seiyukai while others supported the idea of working with the Yamagata faction. The balance which was struck lasted till 1912-1913 when the Taisho political crisis occurred.

The pattern of alliance and cooperation which was created in this period represents, according to some scholars, a policy of joi togo or implicit mutual understanding between two forces. This means that there was an implied understanding between the forces of the government and the political parties and they worked within this commonly accepted framework. However, it is also important to note that the oligarchy was drawn deeper into party politics and when Katsura Taro tried to break the Seiyukai domination he also formed a political party. The changes which Japan was passing through were also reflected in the loss of power of the hanbatsu. In the early Meiji period the hanbatsu had been a closed and homogeneous group which had fought for common objectives

and commanded widespread respect because of their role in the Restoration. Now this no longer held true and political power could be exercised by the political parties which could function to coordinate and reconcile conflicting interests.

Check Your Progress 1

- 1) Discuss the attitude of Meiji oligarchy towards political parties.

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- 2) How was the Jiyuto formed?

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10.3 FORMATION OF THE COMMUNIST PARTY

The period from the Russo-Japanese war onwards also marks the coming of age of the Japanese economy. The accompanying growth in urbanization and education led among other things to an increase in the intelligentsia. In 1905, for instance, there was one newspaper with a circulation of 150,000 but in 1920 one of the newspapers had a circulation of 500,000. The spread of education and political consciousness led to wider expression of political opinions. This was apparent in the growth of new political ideas about democracy and political participation.

In 1882, the Oriental Socialist Party had been formed but it was soon banned. However, socialist ideas continued to spread and study groups were formed. Finally, in 1901, the Socialist Democratic Society (Shakai Minshuto) was formed. The rise of these political groups and parties was viewed with alarm and in 1900 the Peace Preservation Law was passed to suppress their activities. The socialist parties went through a process of realignment and in 1906 the Japan Socialist Party (Nihon Shakaito) emerged as a radical force with leaders such as Kotoku Shusui who. advocated “direct action”. The party was banned in 1907 and Kotoku and others implicated in a treason trial in 1910.

The moderate socialists, like Katayama Sen formed the Japan Socialists Commons Party in 1907 but this too was banned as the government was not willing to tolerate even such moderate ideas. The impact of the Russian revolution was decisive in creating greater consciousness of class rivalry and the need for radical action to bring about an egalitarian society. In 1922 this led to the formation of the Japan Communist Party.

10.4 PARTY CABINET SYSTEM

The powers of the political parties and their ability to influence events was severely circumscribed because many important areas of political life were outside their control. For example:

- The bureaucracy and the military services functioned under the direct command of the Emperor and therefore enjoyed immunity from the control of political parties.
- In 1899 a law made the civil service examination compulsory for most government jobs.
- The Meiji constitution gave the Emperor control over the military and in 1899 only active officers could become army and navy ministers thus ensuring greater control by the military command. In 1912 the army used this power to bring down the government. The army minister Uehara Yusuku (1856-1933) resigned because of the cabinets refusal to allow the army's demand for two more divisions and the government was brought down because the army refused to appoint a successor.

In 1921 Hara Takeshi was assassinated and the cabinets formed after that had non-party members. These three cabinets were formed after Takahashi Korekiyo (1854-1936), Hara's successor resigned after seven months in office. Kato Tomasaburo (1861-1923) formed a transcendental cabinet and he was followed by Yamamoto Gonnohyoe (1852-1933) and then Kiyoura Keigo (185-1942). During the Kiyoura cabinet the Kenseikai, Seiyukai and Reform Club started the second movement for the defense of the constitution and in the general elections of May 1924 they formed a coalition cabinet under the leadership of Kato Takaaki.

In this period some members broke away from the Seiyukai and in 1927 this group joined the Kenseikai to form the Rikken Minseito (Constitutional Democratic Party). Earlier in 1925 the Reform Club had joined the Seiyukai. These two parties, the Seiyukai and the Kenseikai alternatively formed cabinets till 1932 when the Seiyukai Prime Minister Inukai Tsuyoshi was assassinated during the May 15 Incident. This period which is referred to as the period of "party rule" represented the flowering of "Taisho democracy".

By this time the genro who had been the political decision makers, making and breaking governments, had all died except for Saionji Kinmochi (1849-1940) and the political parties had expanded their power and control. Mitani Taichiro argues that six conditions made it possible for the party cabinet system to function between 1924-1932:

- i) The House of Representatives had become by 1924 the "chief arena for contests over control of the cabinet" and it was more powerful than the House of Peers.
- ii) The ideas of Minobe Tatsukichi (1873-1948), a constitutional expert, provided the ideological basis for party rule. He argued that the Imperial Diet was not an organ of state given power by the Emperor but "representative of the people". Towards this end he instituted small reforms in the selection of the House of Peers. Minobe's ideas were accepted in

the bureaucracy and his work prescribed for entrance examinations for the judicial and bureaucratic services,

- iii) The Privy Council, established in 1888, had played a decisive role and served as a defense against the growth of the power of political parties. Yamagata was the last powerful president of the Council and after 1924 its role declined. The last genro Saionji played a key role in reducing the role of the Privy Council.
- iv) There was growing accommodation between the bureaucracy and the parties and the parties were being led by ex-bureaucrats such as Kato Takaaki, Tanaka Giichi, etc. This policy was begun in earnest by Hara Takeshi who actively cultivated the party-bureaucracy connection.
- v) The judiciary, which had been anti-party, was brought under party control by establishing the jury system. Here also Hara cultivated judicial officers and through patronage won their support for the Seiyukai and for the jury system which became law in 1923, after Hara's death.
- vi) The relationship between the military and the parties was of crucial importance. The international situation with the Washington Conference 1921-22 marked a period of arms limitation and this placed a curb on the army's plans for expansion. In this context army leaders began to see the advantages of cooperating with the parties. Particularly after the death of Terauchi in 1919 and Yamagata in 1922 army leaders like Tanaka Giichi (1864-1929) cooperated actively with Hara and the Seiyukai to build a modernized and technologically superior army. Along with this they helped to increase the importance of army reservist's associations. Tanaka himself moved closer to the Seiyukai and in 1925 he became its president and remained so till he died in 1929.

Tanaka Giichi was not the only one to arrive at an accommodation with the army. There were others also but many opposed these moves and generals like Uehara Yusaku and his faction wanted to keep the army non-partisan and preserve its independence. As part of this they also advocated a policy of continental advance. These oppositions were kept under control and were to surface only later in 1930s when a controversy arose over the London Naval Treaty. These conditions together made it possible for the political parties, according to Mitani Taichiro, to function till 1932 but once these conditions began to change party government became impossible.

10.5 DECLINE OF POLITICAL PARTIES

Various factors contributed to the decline of political parties and in this Section we will deal with some of these factors.

10.5.1 External and Internal Factors

The decline of the influence of political parties was created both by the changing international situation and the domestic pressures which strengthened the hands of the militarists. Externally the economic depression added to social tensions in Japan and the increasing strength of Chinese nationalism pressed on Japanese interests. In China Chiang Kai-Shek was gaining strength and Japan felt that her

interests in Manchuria were threatened. The Washington system which had created a framework for cooperation and adjustment among the major powers was being undermined and Japan further felt that her interests were not being sufficiently protected.

The strength and influence of the army was expanding and this was happening at the expense of the political parties. The creation of Manchukuo showed the independence of the military. The internal situation was further complicated by the agricultural depression and the feeling that economic policies were benefiting the rich and big business.

These developments generated widespread criticism and debate. Criticism was directed against the weakness of political parties and their corruption. But much of the debate was concerned with the crisis facing the nation and how it could be resolved. In May 1932 the parties lost the post of prime minister and by 1941 they had no place in the cabinets. The rapid decline and end of party rule was a product of these internal and external changes. The decade witnessed the rise to power of a new business elite as well as civilian and military bureaucracies and it also saw tensions in trying to build a national policy.

In 1926 there was a depression in the domestic economy and this was followed by a bank crisis in 1927 which forced the government:

- to carry out retrenchment in the government,
- to return to the gold standard, and
- rationalize and mechanize industry.

The situation worsened with the 1929 depression as incomes dropped and unemployment rose. The burden was felt with great severity in the rural areas and was further complicated by a bad harvest in certain areas in 1931.

The failure of the government led by Hamaguchi Oschi (187-1931) of the Minseito and its failure at the London Naval Conference (Japan did not want to accept any restriction on the tonnage of its navy but was forced to accept it) led to the assassination of Hamaguchi in 1930. The importance of right wing groups in politics and their terror tactics came to dominate the coming years. These groups were an expression of the sense of crisis that many felt the nation was facing and of the dissatisfaction with the policies of the political parties. Even though they were condemned many praised their actions as selfless and in the interest of the nation.

It was in this climate that army officers led the Kwangtung army and provoked the Manchurian incident in 1931 because they thought Japan's interests in Manchuria were being threatened. Manchuria became an independent state, Manchukuo, in September 1932 and though the League of Nations condemned the take over, the cabinet led by Wakatsuki Reijiro (1866-1949) was unable to do anything about it-rather many of its members supported the army. Inukai Tsuyoshi (1855-1932) who succeeded Wakatsuki was president of the Seiyukai and he was the last party prime minister. Inukai's attempt to negotiate with the Chinese and the worsening economic climate in Japan created a climate ripe for terrorism and he was assassinated on May 15, 1932.

The next cabinet came in a period perceived as one of national emergency and it was formed by Admiral Saito Makoto who was chosen by Saionji - the last genro. The cabinet was supported by the parties in the hope that they would recover their position but he was followed by Admiral Okada Keisuke in 1934. The parties failure was due to the increasing influence of the bureaucracy and the military. The bureaucracy, particularly the Home Ministry carried out programmes to revitalize the economy and so its influence on the people increased.

The military also benefited from these developments. Army planners were now alive to the importance of the socio-economic strength of the country and that in case of war they had to mobilize all the power and resources of the country. They, thus were concerned with “national mobilization”. To carry out many of these aims the government began to establish agencies which cut across the traditional boundaries of the ministries. In 1935 the Cabinet Research Bureau brought together experts from both the military and civilian services. These new links worked to the disadvantage of the parties.

The decline of party importance was reflected in the lack of new recruits from industry and bureaucracy. The old leaders were being assassinated and there were no new ones coming. The Seiyukai, because of its opposition, declined drastically and in the February 1936 general elections it could get only 176 members elected losing 126 seats. Gordon Berger argues that the period between February 1936 and July 1937 was marked by intense pressures to change the Meiji political settlement. The function of resolving conflicts and reconciling competing interests had been performed by the political parties but now they lacked the power to do this. In this situation other groups sought to build institutions and mechanisms which were to carry out this function.

10.5.2 The National Defence State

The plan to make Japan a “national defence state” (kokubo kokka) ready for a total war was put forward by sections of the army and bureaucracy. However, their attempt to make the Cabinet Research Bureau the supreme body overriding the ministries could not materialise due to the strong reactions. The next government saw a period of some cooperation between business and military and it was known as “tie-up finance” at that time. In this the political parties were totally excluded and even when politicians joined the cabinet they had to resign from the party.

The cabinet of Prince Konoe Fumimaro (1891-1945) carried out measures to implement the new economic policies to strengthen the economy and in this they faced a dilemma for in the depressed economic situation any taxes necessary for development would be an unwelcome burden on the people. They could use government parties to mobilize the people or stress the demands of the security of the state or they could just suppress any dissent.

In 1937 Japan went to war with China and many of its leaders felt this as an opportune moment to crush Chinese nationalism but internally it allowed the government to mobilize the people and reduce opposition. The cabinets used this solidarity to continue with their policies but with the war draining resources it became impossible to implement the economic plans. Now the conflict between various elite groups intensified and Konoe was succeeded by Hiranuma Kiichiro

and then by the short lived Abe Nobuyuki cabinet. This cabinet was also brought down by the lower house where there was a growing sentiment against the established parties.

The trend for reform of the domestic political order was dominated by the army's search for political allies and finally they settled on Konoe Fumimaro who outlined a new order which would overcome the deficiencies of the Meiji state and be able to create a "national mobilization state". On 26 July 1940 the government led by him adopted an "Outline of Basic National Policies" which was to create a controlled economy and a politically loyal population. The government carried out its expansionist policies with greater determination as the fear of economic blockade was ever present.

On 12 October 1940 the Imperial Rule Assistance Association (IRAA) was created and this was to serve as the political party of the new order. While political parties were dissolved, the IRAA failed to become a new political party - rather it became an agency for government's mass mobilization. In effect the various measures to create new institutions to serve Japan as an expanding power did not succeed and the old institutions and ministries established under the Meiji government continued. The Second World War was used to build uniformity of opinion and stifle dissent but according to Gorgon Berger they failed to create a new totalitarian order. Political competition was as present under the cabinet of General Tojo as it had been earlier. The decision to surrender in 1945 marked the collapse of this system for the political elites had to seek the direct intervention of the Emperor who had remained insulated from the political system.

Check Your Progress 2

- 1) Account for the growth of Socialist ideas in Japan.

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- 2) What were the six conditions that made it possible for the party cabinet system to function between 1924-1932.

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- 3) State the reasons for the collapse of party cabinets in Japan.

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10.6 LET US SUM UP

The rise and fall of party government in modern Japan is a complex affair but it is important to note that the constitutional government built by the Meiji oligarchy, was fundamentally opposed to party government. In this hostile environment political parties and their supporters deriving their strengths from native traditions as well as Western ideas built a system in which they could exercise some power. This they were able to do by compromising with the Meiji oligarchy.

The Meiji oligarchy also found that within the constitutional framework to run the country they had to work in concert with the political parties. Thus party governments did not take radical measures but worked within the Meiji system.

The socialist and later communist parties and other radical groups were unable to build a widespread mass movement. Yet, they did function and were able to express the longings of the people who were undergoing the problems created by industrial development.

The military because of its independence from Diet control and its perceptions of Japanese security interests gradually undermined the democratic process and brought down party cabinets which did not subscribe to its views. But it too could not impose a truly totalitarian order and even during its heyday political competition went on. It is because of this that the nature of Japanese “fascism” is very different from what occurred in Europe. Whether Japan witnessed a period of “fascism” is highly debatable and most Western scholars do not subscribe to this view (Sec Unit 23). This is not to say that the system was not democratic and that Japan was not indulging in militarist adventures abroad. Finally, it should be noted that the party system was integrated into the Meiji structure and it did allow competing interests to negotiate their competing demands.

10.7 ANSWERS TO CHECK YOUR PROGRESS EXERCISES

Check Your Progress 1

- 1) Base Your Answer on Sec. 10.2
- 2) Refer to Sec. 10. 2

Check Your Progress 2

- 1) Refer to Sec. 10.3
- 2) Base Your Answer on Sub-sec. 10.3.1
- 3) Refer to Sec. 10.4