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Trends. The Economic Psychology of Conflict: A Japanese "Secret" Approach

Editor

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How to reassure other governments, private investors, speculators, and "the markets" that the worst is over? That stock prices and the yen will soon be increasing in value? That if necessary, banks will be closed or consolidated, banking debts resolved, domestic demand whetted, and domestic financial and economic systems restructured? Is there an international psychology that can be set in motion to induce support for Japanese economic initiatives?

There is a way to induce such an economic psychology--if Liberal Democratic members of parliament like Keizo Takemi are to be believed. Takemi and his like-minded colleagues seek to prevent even the appearance of political conflict in choosing a successor to Ryutaro Hashimoto as the new party leader and Prime Minister. According to Takemi, to prevent the appearance of conflict, the decision-making process must be secret, hidden from view. The more open the process becomes, the more "confusion" in the currency markets, in all the Asian markets.

But isn't this approach fraught with problems? First, why wouldn't a secret process be interpreted as having no bearing on the degree of conflict or as indicating even more conflict than usual? Second, why wouldn't overt conflict--among candidates, their supporters, adversaries, detractors, even if the candidates must pretend that they are not seeking an office but are being forced to take it by some of "the people"--suggest the kind of healthy democratic process that is associated with the healthiest economy in the world? And third, could a secret process even be effected in a globalized mass media context of sophisticated information gathering and analysis and of real and bogus leaks?

To Takemi and his colleagues, the true secret is that secrets operationally defined as "opaqueness of political and economic process" do not reassure the players within the new global economy. (See Fine, G.A., & Holyfield, L. (1996). Secrecy, trust, and dangerous leisure: Generating group cohesion in voluntary organizations. *Social Psychology Quarterly*, 59, 22-38; Hays, K.K. (1987). The conspiracy of silence revisited: Group therapy with adult survivors of incest. *Journal of Group Psychotherapy*, 39, 143-156; Kristoff, N.D. (July 15, 1998). Who will lead Japan? Kingmakers will decide. *The New York Times*, <http://www.nytimes.com>; Raack, R.C. (1970). When plans fail: Small group behavior and decision-making in the conspiracy of 1808 in Germany. *Journal of Conflict Resolution*, 14, 3-19; Zonis, M., & Joseph, C.M. (1994). Conspiracy thinking in the Middle East. *Political Psychology*, 15, 443-459.) (Keywords: Economic Psychology, Economics, Japan.)