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JAPANESE PROGRESSIVES SEEK SHIGEMITSU FOR PRESIDENT

Numbers in parentheses refer to appended sources.]

The depurge of wartime Foreign Minister Shigemitsu Mamoru has begun a move in the Progressive Party (Kaishin To) to support Shigemitsu for party president.(1)

First indication of support for Shigemitsu came on 18 March when Kawasaki Hideji, Shiikuma Saburo; Hayakawa Takashi; Ogawa Hanji, deputy secretary general; Kano Kinsho, vice-chairman of the Organization Committee; Horiki Kenzo; Fukagawa Eizemon, chairman of the Party Affairs Committee; and Tanomogi Shinroku held a meeting to discuss the urgent problem of selecting a president.

They agreed that the party could not continue any longer without a president, and agreed to push Shigemitsu for president. They decided to obtain the support of Secretary General Miki Takeo and other party officers and then to ask Ashida Hitoshi to negotiate with Shigemitsu.

Secretary General Miki, who showed up briefly at the meeting, is reported to have stated that Shigemitsu's war crime record should not be considered as a barrier and hinted that he would also back the former Foreign Minister if the majority of the party members supported Shigemitsu.(2) This remark contradicted Miki's view of several days before that "a war criminal is not a good choice." Miki's statement was regarded at that time as a political move to block anyone from supporting Shigemitsu.(3)

On 26 March, another group consisting of Ogawa, Nakamura Torata, Yamazaki Tsune, Tanomogi, Fukagawa, Kano, Takeyama Yutaro, chief of Information and Propaganda Division, and Ide Ichitaro, member of the Policy Committee, met in the Diet Building. Ogawa urged the group to support Shigemitsu and reported that Ashida was willing to negotiate with Shigemitsu. The majority expressed

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no objection to Shigemitsu. The group then decided that current negotiations to obtain Ishiguro Tadaatsu should be ended and that the party should expedite the selection of a president. The group also decided to report its decision to the party headquarters.

At a separate meeting on the same night, more than ten members of the Nijuichi Kai (21 Association), composed of 26 first-term members of the House of Representatives, met and also decided to back Shigemitsu. This group, which had been regarded as neutral, decided to obtain the approval of Miki and Ashida on the choice of Shigemitsu and to select the president as soon as possible. Each member present at the meeting agreed to approach Miki and Ashida on the matter.(4)

Still others supporting Shigemitsu for president are Oasa Tadao and Matsumura Kenzo, both close friends of Shigemitsu, of the former Shinsei (New Political) Club, Ando Yoshiro and Warahashi Wataru of the Shinsei Kai (New Life Society), and Owada Teiji of the former Isshinkai (Renovation Society). (1, 3) Owada is reported to have already contacted Shigemitsu on the subject.(2)

On the other hand, opposition to Shigemitsu exists among some members of the conservative faction who hope for Ashida's political comeback. There is also opposition in the renovation faction led by Secretary General Miki and Kitamura Tokutaro, chairman of the Policy Committee.

Although Miki had hinted that he would support Shigemitsu, most party members believe that the Secretary General is opposed to Shigemitsu.(2) Since the formation of the party in February, Miki's choice for president has been Ishiguro Tadaatsu.(1, 3) In a final attempt to persuade Ishiguro, Secretary General Miki is expected to confer with him sometime in late March. If this effort fails, Shigemitsu's backers are expected to demand the selection of Shigemitsu as president.(1)

So far Shigemitsu has been noncommittal on the subject. On 14 March, at Kamakura, Shigemitsu told a Mainichi Shinbun reporter that he has not been approached on the matter and that he was not the proper person to head the Progressive Party. He said that the president ought to be selected from among the party members, and suggested Ashida in view of his familiarity with both foreign affairs and domestic problems. Shigemitsu also felt that outside the party Ishiguro would be a good man to head the party.(5)

On 16 March, Shigemitsu stated that "I am not making any political commitments; my first work now is to write a book on foreign affairs."

Aside from the Progressives, Depurgees Miyoshi Hideyuki, Ayabe Kentaro, and Takechi Yuki of the old Minsei To who have remained politically neutral since their depurge, and Arima Eiji and his followers of the so-called Kojunsha Kumi (Social Activity Promotion Group) are also interested in Shigemitsu.

Ayabe is reported to be willing to surrender his constituency in the Second District in Oita if Shigemitsu runs in the general election. He also wants the wartime Foreign Minister to head the projected Nippon Saiken Remmei (Japan Reconstruction League), which will be composed of writers and financial leaders and will be formed as soon as Kishi Shinsuke and others are depurged.

Through the Nippon Saiken Remmei, Ayabe and his depurgee group, known as the "former power bloc," hope to enter politics. Dissatisfied with both the Liberal Party and the Progressive Party, Ayabe hopes to form a new party

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based on "new racialism" and economic self-support. At present, this group has not decided whether to form a separate "Shigemitsu New Party" or to consolidate with the Progressives to form a new party with Shigemitsu as president.(3)

SOURCES

1. Yomiuri Shimbun, 25 Mar 52
2. Asahi Shimbun, 21 Mar 52
3. Yomiuri Shimbun, 16 Mar 52
4. Asahi Shimbun, 27 Mar 52
5. Mainichi Shimbun, 15 Mar 52

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