

simple discontent of the people against the LDP, who introduced the 3% consumption tax in the preceding year. (In 1989, the LDP lost its majority in the House of Councilors for the same reason.) The Socialist Party changed its policy stance by 180 degrees, and collaborated with the LDP (who could not organize the government by itself) to create a 'strange' (at least, to those who had been watching the Socialist Party so far) alliance, together with a third partner, the *Sakigake*. It even changed its name from 'Socialist' to 'Social Democratic.' The most recent general election took place in 1996, the first under the new Election Law, which was enacted in 1994. The radical change of the Socialist Party did never increase its supporters. As of the end of December 1996, the newly born SDPJ had only 15 out of 500 seats in the House of Representatives, although the first Prime Minister of this Alliance was the party's head – Mr. Murayama.

On the conservative side, internal divisions could not be avoided, and minor parties were created one after the other. Basically, however, it has always been the LDP that kept the most numerous seats in the House of Representatives, 238, followed by the New Frontier Party (mainly consisting of the former LDP and Komeito members), 142; the Democratic Party (the moderate conservative party emphasizing 'people'), 52; the SDPJ, 15; the Sun Party (again, consisting of the conservatives who left the NFP), 10; 21<sup>st</sup> Century, 5; New Party *Sakigake*, 2; and independents, 10. The Communist Party, the only non-conservative party in terms of policy stance, kept the remaining 26 seats (as of December 1997).

The urgent need for Japan today is to reform the entire system and everybody speaks of 'reforms,' but no clear vision of how to implement them can be seen.

### 3) Social ambiguity

One of the conspicuous phenomena in social life today is 'feminization of the males' and 'malnization of the females,' particularly among the younger generations. It frequently happens that males and females, strolling around the downtown of big cities, cannot be distinguished from one another when seen from behind, mainly due to the unisex clothing and hair styles. In both home and workplace, the traditional 'culturally' assigned roles to both sexes have been withering. Women are no longer satisfied with staying at home to care for members of the family. They want to go out to work just like their male counterparts, to whom they demand to share the family chores. In 1994, the female rate of the total labor force (66.5 million) was roughly 40%, of which almost 60% were married women. Many young parents think that it is wrong to give a 'red' school bag to girls and a 'black' one, to boys, because this kind of gender 'discrimination' will nurture the stereotypical role-divisions between males and females. The result is the ever-diminishing family functions and thus many of these functions are performed by different agencies outside of the household. The most serious problem is that families do not take care of their aged members any more. It was true that caring the aged parents was usually the heavy burden of the daughter-in-law. Women, in general, were subjugated to the traditional family (*IE*) norms. It is completely understandable that some of these women began to try to emancipate themselves from these 'feudal' obligations, as their husbands were never cooperative. There were some instances in human history that the 'rational' minds designed an 'ideal' society where there was no family; children were cared collectively and the 'too weak' – aged were abandoned. With diminishing family functions, people now have to establish alternative institutions for child and elderly care. Already, some affluent Japanese elderly persons have moved to some countries in Southeast Asia where they can be taken care of by the local young girls. Given a poor infrastructure in social welfare spheres, will Japan introduce a cheap labor force from these countries?

Another ambiguity is the disappearance of a clear demarcation between health and illness. Along with the general betterment of sanitary conditions and foods on the one hand, and the development of medical technology and medicine on the other, acute and contagious diseases are almost under control, while hypertension, mental disorder, cerebrovascular and heart diseases, cancer, diabetes, and liver cirrhosis are the principal diseases among Japanese people today. Some of these diseases are the inevitable accompaniment of aging (geriatric diseases); others are closely related with one's lifestyle. Including the aged, who are mostly suffering from some kind of geriatric diseases, many of those patients are not necessarily hospitalized. Rather, they live an 'ordinary' life with these diseases. In 1995, the number of persons complaining of subjective