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America Bashing

A book entitled *The Japan That Can Say No** has been a best seller in Japan with sales exceeding 1 million copies. It seems designed to belittle America in the eyes of Japanese. The two authors of the book are highly placed. Shintaro Ishihara is a powerful member of the ruling Liberal Democratic Party. Akio Morita is chairman of Sony, the large electronics conglomerate that recently purchased Columbia Pictures.

The authors find many reasons to criticize America. An example that both authors emphasize is Japanese leadership in semiconductor chips. Ishihara, the politician, makes some statements that seem inaccurate and inflammatory. He states that Japan is at least 5 years ahead of the United States in manufacture of megabit chips. My informants tell me that at worst certain facilities in the United States are only a few months behind their Japanese counterparts. On the basis of this erroneous estimate of Japanese primacy, Ishihara writes, "If . . . Japan sold chips to the Soviet Union and stopped selling them to the United States, this would upset the entire military balance." The book was published about 1 year ago and so does not reflect more recent events in Europe and in the Soviet Union. However, even at that time the remarks were neither well judged nor conducive to U.S. trust of Japan.

Each of the authors contributed separate chapters to the book. Morita, while also critical, is more accurate in his statements. He does allow himself a questionable remark: "The time will never again come when America will regain its strength in industry." An answer to that one is that never is a long time and the behavior of people after a crisis is different from that of people in the pre-crisis mode.

In a chapter entitled, "The decline of an America which can only see 10 minutes ahead," Morita points to the mergers and acquisitions craze in the United States and the short-term time horizons of institutional money managers. In contrast, the time horizon in Japan is stated to be 10 years. He notes that it is fashionable in America to call the service industry the business of the future. But information alone produces nothing.

Morita points out that for an industry to be successful it must display three kinds of creativity. First is the basic creativity to make inventions. Second is creativity in product planning and production. Third is creativity in marketing. An example cited is the transistor radio. Sony early obtained a license to use the transistor that was invented in Bell Laboratories. At that time, the device was only applied to hearing aids. Sony developed the necessary transistors and successfully mass-marketed new radios.

Morita's comments about American companies' personnel policies are worthy of serious consideration. He notes that executives feel free to lay off employees when declines in cyclical demand occur. In contrast, the policy of major Japanese companies has been one of long-term employment. He wrote that people do not work for wages alone. Work has more meaning that just subsistence. "A Japanese worker has a sense of mission in holding his job for a lifetime."

He is also critical of another chasm between management and workers. He points to class distinctions and writes that in the United States engineers wear white collars, stay in their offices, and seldom show up in factories. They want to tell the workers what to do rather than donning factory blues and showing them. In Morita's company all workers wear the same uniforms both in the office and in the plants. On the occasion of the 20th and 25th anniversaries of the establishment of Sony America, Morita and his wife visited all of Sony's plants, gave talks, had dinners with employees, and shook hands with all of the workers on all three of the shifts.

Morita is critical of some Japanese stationed in the United States for not participating in community affairs. He counsels them, "When in Rome do as the Romans do." A criticism that Morita makes of Japan is its lack of generosity with respect to foreign aid. He points out that in terms of contributions to nonremunerable foreign aid versus gross national product, Japan places last among 18 developed countries.

We are now witnessing enormous and rapid changes in post-World War II relationships. Ultimately the focus of change will shift to the western Pacific. The book by Ishihara and Morita may represent a step in that change.—PHILIP H. ABELSON

*See *Congr. Rec.* 135, E3783 (14 November 1989).