

Yamagata and the Taishō Crisis, 1912-1913

ROGER F. HACKETT

University of Michigan

The Taishō Crisis occurred relatively late in the long career of Yamagata Aritomo. In 1912 he had reached the age of seventy-four, and although another decade of life still lay ahead, he had declined in physical vigor and had long since drawn back from the front lines of politics. Nevertheless, in 1912 Yamagata still represented an important factor on the political scene. As a major contributor to the building of modern Japan, as president of the Privy Council, and with the prestige and influence of a *genrō*, he occupied a position from which he could impress his views on all important matters of state. The extent and the limits of that power and prestige in 1912 are revealed in the political crisis which almost coincided with the advent of the Taishō period.

From the end of November, 1912, to February, 1913, an important battle was fought in the struggle for political power.¹ Within a period of sixty days the government changed hands twice: Prince Saionji's second cabinet was forced to resign when the army's demands were rejected; General Katsura's third ministry fell after the political parties, supported by violent demonstrations in Tokyo, joined forces to attack his political methods. What began as a crisis over the government's fiscal policy was transformed into an issue involving interpretations of the Constitution and into a controversy over the principles underlying the Japanese political system. Each successive phase of this crisis seemed to absorb a larger number of participants and open up new problems. This crisis has been viewed as an open and successful challenge of the authoritarian methods of the conservative bureaucracy by the popular political parties. Without disputing that general interpretation, I would submit that the crisis takes

on much of its significance from the understanding it affords of the changing nature of Japanese political life. The crisis permits the measurement of the relative strength of major political forces in the transition of Japan from the dominance of a conservative bureaucratic government to an era of contending forces. My purpose is to examine Yamagata's part in this event and weigh his influence at the beginning of the Taishō period.

FIRST STAGE: WITHDRAWAL OF SAIONJI

The Taishō Crisis moved through several definable stages. The first may be dated from the cabinet meeting of November 22, 1912, at which General Uehara, the War Minister, presented a plan for the organization of two new army divisions. The War Minister argued, first, that in 1907 the Meiji emperor had approved the addition of four divisions, of which only two had been organized and, second, that Japan's interests in Manchuria and the maintenance of order in Korea required a larger army.

The plan was unanimously rejected by the cabinet, for the *Seiyūkai*, Prime Minister Saionji's party, had been returned in May with an absolute majority in the House of Representatives pledged to economies in government. Accordingly, Saionji had ordered each government department to reduce its budget by 10 to 15 per cent. The army had trimmed 1,950,000 *yen* from its 80,000,000-*yen* budget, but now it was insisting that this saving be devoted to the establishment of two new army divisions.² In the cabinet there were vigorous advocates of the policy of government reduction in expenditures. They argued that the navy's earlier request for expansion had been denied and that the army's demands would not only wipe out its own small savings but require additional funds which would undermine the whole plan for administrative economies.

General Uehara's repeated attempts to persuade his colleagues did not soften their attitude. But he persisted, encouraged by the knowledge that he had the firm backing of Yamagata. General Uehara visited Yamagata at his villa in Odawara on several occasions in order to make sure that the army was receiving the support of the leading elder statesman. In fact, while in the foreground the War Minister pressed for his objectives, behind this

cabinet stage Yamagata maneuvered to win over key figures to the army's point of view. He endeavored first to secure the support of his fellow *genrō* and through them to influence cabinet members. For example, on the day General Uehara presented his plan to the cabinet, two of Yamagata's political lieutenants visited Matsukata in Kamakura with the hope of persuading him to support Yamagata's position. Matsukata's response was not entirely negative. "If there is absolutely no way of postponing it" [the army's plan for expansion], Matsukata told his visitors, "one half might be put into effect this year and the other half some other year." But Matsukata added the thought that Yamagata must be held responsible for any problems arising out of the army's demands. "Since there surely will be an explosion soon," he said, "we must think of how it can be handled. At such a time, Yamagata is the only one on whom we can rely, so tell him for the sake of the nation, please keep this in mind."³

Yamagata was even less successful in promoting his position with other prominent statesmen. Inoue Kaoru, the *genrō* closest to big business circles, supported the cabinet's retrenchment policy. Field Marshall Ōyama encouraged postponement of the plan. Although he later changed his stand, even Katsura initially opposed the plan. Despite this lack of support from among the ranks of the prominent elder statesmen, the army continued to press for its scheme. This in itself would seem to indicate the extraordinary political influence which Yamagata wielded. Prime Minister Saionji had known for some months that the army desired new divisions, but in the knowledge that the Meiji Emperor would disapprove he had not feared it.⁴ But now the Meiji Emperor was dead and the army, with the backing of Yamagata, felt it was time to take advantage of that fact.

After the cabinet meeting of November 29, General Oka, the War Vice-Minister, was sent to Odawara to report to Yamagata. Although it is not known what transpired at Yamagata's villa, a decision was evidently made for Yamagata to move to his residence in the capital the next day. In any event, it was on the next day that the War Minister received the cabinet's last rejection of his plan. Leaving the meeting he proceeded immediately to Yamagata's Tokyo residence to report the outcome and presum-

ably to receive approval for the next step. On the grounds that the need for new divisions was a question affecting the nation's security, thereby granting the privilege of direct access to the throne guaranteed in the Constitution, the War Minister proceeded (on December 7) directly to the palace where he submitted his resignation to the Emperor.

Prior to this bold move, and in order to dissuade the War Minister from his threat to leave the cabinet, Saionji had visited Yamagata on several occasions to seek his assistance. In each instance he had received little satisfaction. Once the War Minister had resigned, Saionji was equally unsuccessful in gaining Yamagata's assistance in seeking a replacement. Saionji's pleas were answered by strong suggestions that a compromise settlement of the two-division issue be made. Significantly, in one exchange Yamagata remarked, "This is no time for me to interfere. The only way to retain the military is to request a message from the Emperor. But while it was a different matter when the Meiji Emperor was alive, we must avoid worrying the present Emperor about such things because he is still young."⁵ Meanwhile, all army officers eligible for the cabinet post agreed not to serve. According to an Imperial Ordinance issued at Yamagata's behest in 1900, only active generals of the upper ranks were eligible.

In due course, the army's intransigence led to the resignation of the Saionji cabinet on December 5, 1912.

From newspapers and public platforms came cries against the concept of government which insulated the military from political controls and allowed a service minister to topple a cabinet in which he was a minority of one. General Uehara was publicly denounced for his rash actions; Yamagata was attacked in the press as the overthrower and destroyer of the cabinet. In one of his rare press interviews, Yamagata defended himself by asserting that "financial difficulty is responsible for the present cabinet crisis. . . ." Yamagata argued that no large additional grants from the National Treasury were being asked for and that it was not unreasonable to use the savings effected by a reduction in other army expenditures to accomplish the military expansion which "required immediate attention and could not be delayed for even a day."⁶

It seems fair to suggest that Yamagata's stand provided the real backbone of the army's stance; had he disapproved of the plan it is unlikely that it would have been pushed at that moment. Equally undeniable was the fact that legislation inspired by Yamagata cut short the life of the Saionji cabinet. But to argue that Yamagata's sole objective was to bring down the Saionji cabinet is unjustified. The later testimony of Saionji himself, as well as that of his Finance Minister, absolves Yamagata and indicates he had been prepared to work for a compromise settlement when the cabinet resigned. Nevertheless any flexibility in his support for the army's demands came too late to stave off the cabinet's resignation.

SECOND STAGE: SELECTION OF KATSURA

The fall of the Saionji ministry shifted attention from the army's demands for two divisions to the question of the military's control of the cabinet, and the means used to force its views on the cabinet majority. It was this latter question which became the heart of the political conflict and set the scene for the second stage in the Taishō Crisis. In the second stage of the Taishō Crisis, the issue over which it had arisen was overshadowed by broader and more significant questions.

Saionji's resignation was followed by a fortnight of complicated negotiations to find a new Prime Minister. In quick succession four qualified men declined the nomination. One of them, Admiral Yamamoto Gombei, turned down the offer with a pointed remark, "The Chōshū leaders are responsible for this political chaos; let them be responsible for restoring order."⁷ This allusion to Yamagata as a leader of the Chōshū faction disclosed another dimension in this political crisis—conflict between the army-Chōshū faction and the navy-Satsuma faction.

In their role as selectors of the Prime Minister, the *genrō* met almost every day. A stream of visitors called on Yamagata; he, in turn, sent messengers and went himself to consult prospective candidates. At first Yamagata took the lead in trying to persuade Saionji to remain in office—an act which would seem to lend strength to the conclusion that he had not precipitated the crisis in order to overthrow Saionji. In the search for a new Prime

Minister, Yamagata was placed in a difficult position, a predicament he summarized in the following words:

Ōyama had no desire to involve himself in the political field and Inoue had long before refused to accept, so there was only Katsura and myself to take charge of a difficult situation. However, I am now accused of having caused the downfall of the Saionji cabinet by people; some would even like me killed. Besides, I am merely a soldier not a politician. If I should take charge of the situation now it would only add confusion. Nevertheless, the continuance of the present situation without anyone to head the government was, for the sake of the late and present Emperors and the nation, intolerable. I was therefore forced, for the sake of the monarchy, to take charge of the perplexing situation with what strength remained with me.⁸

The other *genrō* had come to the agreement that Yamagata should choose between himself and Katsura. The latter, a fellow Chōshū clansman, a prominent military figure, and an intimate friend and protégé of Yamagata had twice before served the nation as First Minister. At that moment, however, Katsura was in the first months of his service to the young Taishō monarch as both Grand Chamberlain and Lord Privy Seal. If Katsura were to leave that position and form a new government, he was bound to generate fierce political opposition.

With misgivings, Yamagata recommended to the Emperor that Katsura be requested to form the next government.⁹ The announcement on December 17 that Katsura would form a new government was greeted by widespread opposition. Katsura's descent into the political arena from a position at court had the appearance of a court official receiving imperial sanction for instructions drafted by himself. Popular indignation was thus aroused by the unfair protection from criticism Katsura's appointment implied. His willingness to invoke the Emperor's power in organizing his cabinet confirmed the opposition in its attack.¹⁰ Political parties joined in denouncing Yamagata for having selected Katsura, and organized a movement to defeat the new ministry.

In the second stage of the crisis, which ended with the formation of Katsura's ministry, Yamagata had clearly exerted his great

influence. It is true that in selecting Katsura he had the support of Saionji and the acquiescence of the other *genrō*, but it was primarily his responsibility. He undoubtedly could have prevented Katsura's return to political office. He chose not to; and developments in the next stage perhaps caused him to regret that decision.

THIRD STAGE: KATSURA'S MANEUVERS

In the third stage of the Taishō crisis, Katsura took audacious steps to strengthen his position in his confrontation with the leaders of the opposition. The Diet session opened late in December just as prominent members from both its major parties, the *Seiyūkai* and the *Kokumintō*, had formed the Society for the Protection of the Constitution. Dedicated to the defeat of the oligarchy, to the primacy of political parties, and to the safeguarding of the Constitution, this organization mustered support through newspaper and magazine articles, public meetings, and demonstrations. Spokesmen of the Society stirred large meetings with shouts of "Government by bureaucracy is like government by eunuchs in China. The Japanese people . . . and the bureaucrats belong to two different races, the one destined to abide by constitutional government and the other to destroy it." The aroused listeners were exhorted to engage in a "war of political independence," and told that "the farmer should forsake his spade, the merchant his abacus, to join the army of independence."¹¹ In mid-January representatives from all areas of Japan gathered at the Imperial Hotel in Tokyo, passed resolutions and strengthened their determination to force a showdown with the Katsura government. Party leaders such as Ozaki Yukio of the *Seiyūkai* and Inukai Ki, head of the *Kokumintō*, sensed a unique opportunity to reduce the power of the bureaucracy.

As the anti-government campaign of the parties gained momentum it received aid from within the bureaucracy itself. Resentful of the way Katsura had tied their hands by invoking imperial orders, prominent navy leaders encouraged the opposition. Count Kabayama, the senior Satsuma naval leader, criticized Katsura's leadership and defined the political crisis in such a way as to give comfort to the party politicians. "The struggle now

going on in the government and the opposition," he asserted, "is a struggle between Chōshū and the Nation."¹² Admiral Yamamoto, the strongest figure of the navy, also gave encouragement to the political opposition. Indeed, he was to play a decisive role in the downfall of the Katsura ministry; but first Katsura made strenuous efforts to counter the growing pressure.

Katsura's strategy in counteracting the opposition took two forms. One method was to attempt to separate himself from the influence of the *genrō* by persuading others that he was not dependent upon Yamagata. His decision to demonstrate his independence was really an attempt to deprive his opponents of a major weapon of attack by declaring himself a free agent. In December, Katsura called on Yamagata and told him, "Now that I am responsible for the cabinet there should be no reason for troubling you for advice on political problems. Please feel free to rest at your villa and observe the scene."¹³ In an interview with a reporter in mid-January, Katsura tried to counteract the heavy criticism of his conduct by explaining, first, that he had not sought the offices of Grand Chamberlain and Lord Privy Seal; second, that his position at the Palace and its separation from government affairs had prevented him from contributing to the solution of the crisis at the time of Saionji's resignation. He told the reporter that he now felt this situation was altered and, as he said, "the *genrō* will have nothing to say about my future proceeding, nor am I bound to any of the present political parties by any ties. I am now on a footing of absolute independence."¹⁴ Remarks such as these encouraged the belief that Katsura was either drifting away from or attempting to place himself beyond Yamagata's influence. In point of fact, the relationship between Yamagata and Katsura was not as it once had been. Katsura's generous opinion of himself, his annoyance at having been elevated to the position of Grand Chamberlain and Lord Privy Seal at the instigation of Yamagata, and one or two other incidents, had produced a change in their relations. Katsura's declaration of "absolute independence" further strained relations, but his next tactic almost severed them entirely.

Katsura's second method of building up his political strength was to form a political party. But he proceeded in a devious

manner. On the one hand he led Yamagata to believe that he could cope with the opposition in the Diet. Reassured, Yamagata responded in a letter to the Prime Minister: "Under present conditions, the attack on the oligarchy under the guise of protecting the Constitution continues . . . so that the strategy of forcing the government's downfall through popular pressure grows more menacing. The only policy which will save the country is, as you say, an 'assault on the center.' Hearing of your determination, I have no fears for the nation."¹⁵ The expression "assault on the center," referred to the device of proroguing or even dissolving the House of Representatives, or of commanding a majority vote by less scrupulous means in order to defeat the opposition in the Diet. Yet at the same time that Katsura tried to reassure Yamagata, he demonstrated his lack of confidence in handling the parties in the House of Representatives by actively planning the formation of a new party. For this move he gained neither Yamagata's sympathy nor his support; indeed the close associates of Yamagata, many of whom occupied seats in the House of Peers, resisted Katsura's invitation to join his party.

Despite such difficulties, Katsura announced his plans to form a party. With the excuse that the budget was not yet printed, he succeeded in getting a fifteen-day extension of the Diet's recess, putting off the opening of its session from January 21 to February 5. In this interval, as president of the newly named *Dōshikai*, Katsura gathered together a group of bureaucrats, dissenters from one of the two leading parties, and independent conservatives from the lower House to form his party. The formal inauguration of the *Dōshikai* did not take place until February 7, after the opening of the Diet session.

Yamagata grew increasingly uneasy about Katsura's attitude and actions. Disturbed by reports that the influence of the *genrō* was to be reduced, distressed at Katsura's excessive self-confidence, he was dismayed by what he heard of his scheme for handling the Diet. He was informed that Katsura planned to prorogue or dissolve the House of Representatives if an impeachment petition was forwarded to the Emperor, and if a no-confidence motion was introduced he would allow it to pass and have the cabinet resign. In the latter case, he calculated that the *genrō*, now in-

cluding Saionji, would be forced to request him to remain in office, for it was Saionji who had encouraged him to leave the Palace and re-enter political life. Upon hearing this scheme, Yamagata demanded to know who was behind it. Katsura denied he was seriously proposing such a course and reaffirmed his loyalty; but Yamagata's doubts were reinforced, and he must have agreed with the words in a letter from a conservative colleague: "The present political crisis must disturb you in many ways and it must be a disappointment to see Prince Katsura form a new political party. While Prince Katsura grows apart from you and listens more to Gotō and others, their plans will not keep his policy from failing. Then he will try to shift the blame to you. . . ."16

FOURTH STAGE: KATSURA'S DOWNFALL

The meeting of the Diet on February 5 was the beginning of the fourth and climactic stage in the Taishō crisis. While Katsura's lieutenants were busily trying to swell the ranks of the *Dōshikai*, the anti-government leaders continued to develop their strategy for defeating Katsura by gaining the support of an aroused populace through meetings in Tokyo. A major trial of strength seemed inevitable. "That political changes such as have not yet been witnessed in the country are pending, no Japanese publicist doubts" were the opening words of an editorial, which then went on to speculate, "the fight between the holders of power and the competitors for it is waxing warmer every week. It looks now as if no quarter would be given or taken, as if the nation had grown weary of resorting to compromises as the easiest way of solving a difficult situation and as though it were bent on the final overthrow of oligarchy and the establishment of genuine representative government."¹⁷ The presence of over a thousand police in the vicinity of the Diet building on February 5 indicated that the deliberations were not going to take place in the spirit of harmony and conciliation; the feeling of an inevitable clash had grown stronger on all sides.

The opening speeches of the Diet were strictly routine. The Prime Minister outlined the administrative and financial policies of the government; no mention was made of the army's demand

for two new divisions, the issue that had initially precipitated the crisis. The Finance Minister indicated that the cabinet planned to follow the preceding year's budget. There was nothing radical in these speeches, no issues of importance had been raised. But policies and plans were no longer the opposition's point of attack. There were now the larger issues of political philosophy and on these the battle was joined.

A spokesman of the *Seiyūkai* rose not to question the Ministers but to inquire why the Imperial Rescript delaying the opening of the Diet had not been countersigned by either a Minister of State or the Lord Privy Seal. Furthermore, why had not previous Imperial Decrees resorted to by Katsura been countersigned? And who requested the Emperor to issue these rescripts? Katsura's explanations did nothing to satisfy the opposition and the resolution of no-confidence was introduced which read in part: "Prince Katsura Tarō, has, in receiving his appointment, frequently troubled the Sovereign [for rescripts] . . . abused his official power to raise a private party, suspended the Diet in a wanton manner, just at the point of its opening. . . . He is acting against the true principal of the Constitutional Government and putting obstacles in the path of the country's administration. . . ."18

The opposition had made its move and it was followed by charges and countercharges amid growing disorder and frequent interruptions. Katsura was accused of never having committed a constitutional act and employing the throne as a shield to hide behind. Before the resolution could be put to a vote, Katsura acted. At 3:20 P.M. an Imperial order was issued suspending the Diet for five days.

During the interval both sides organized themselves for the next encounter. Katsura formally inaugurated the *Dōshikai* at an impressive gathering at the Imperial Hotel on February 7. Eighty-one members of the Diet and all of the Ministers of State came to hear Katsura make his stand. In his remarks he claimed experience with political parties on the basis of having formed coalitions with parties during his previous ministries. Sound constitutional government, he admitted, required the organization of parties and the proper moment had arrived to form a new

permanent party. Other speakers attacked the conduct of the opposition parties and a *Seiyūkai* defector chided his ex-colleagues for introducing a no-confidence motion. Meanwhile, mass meetings elsewhere in Tokyo addressed by the opposition leaders in the Diet generated an enthusiasm and an excitement which foretold danger.

On the day Katsura addressed the inaugural meeting of his new party, he sent a message to Odawara. He asked Yamagata, as President of the Privy Council, to mediate the impasse in the House of Representatives. After stiffly replying that "the function of the President of the Privy Council is to respond to the summons of the Emperor and not mix in the political turmoil,"¹⁹ Yamagata did admit that his position as an Elder Statesman required him to assume some responsibility. News reaching him from the capital of the latest developments caused him anxiety, so he offered to go to Tokyo. But in the end Katsura never accepted this offer; he resorted to other means.

Katsura invited Saionji to his residence and appealed to him, both as leader of the *Seiyūkai* and as an esteemed veteran statesman loyal to the Emperor, to have the no-confidence motion withdrawn. In his wily manner, Katsura reminded Saionji of how he had, six months before, joined in urging Katsura to enter the court and how in December, he had encouraged him to assume the prime ministership. He went on to speak of precedent for requesting Imperial authority to break deadlocks in the Diet. Saionji was clearly placed on the defensive, but in the face of this pressure and the unchanging attitude of his party associates, he declined to recommend that the motion be withdrawn.

Katsura had anticipated the rejection and had prepared his next step. Saionji was now called to the Palace, where the Emperor told him of his deep concern over the troubles which occurred in the House of Representatives while the Court was still in mourning for his late father. He asked that Saionji make every effort to settle the dispute and relieve his anxiety. It was made clear that the "troubles" referred to the no-confidence motion. Again Katsura had resorted to the ultimate political weapon: the Emperor's request had placed Saionji in a most difficult position. But if Katsura thought the deadlock was broken he must

have been shocked by the next day's developments.

Katsura's desperate political maneuvers had alienated far too many. His use of Imperial authority had aroused violent sentiments favoring an end to arbitrary oligarchy; his frantic efforts to build support through a new political party had antagonized conservative bureaucrats; his trickery had angered Yamagata. On the one hand he acted more arbitrarily and arrogantly than the senior oligarch; on the other, he strutted as a political party leader without an effective party. "He has ruined constitutional government," shouted the opposition; "he has surrendered to popular government," cried the bureaucrats. To these opposing opinions was now to be added, in the actions of Admiral Yamamoto, the indignation of the navy-Satsuma faction. As a loyal subject, Saionji believed he had no choice but to accede to the Emperor's wishes. But his party followers were not prepared to bend to Katsura's request; they felt that Saionji's resignation was all that was called for and that the no-confidence resolution introduced in the House of Representatives should not be withdrawn. *Seiyūkai* members were strengthened in their determination by another development.

Early on the morning of February 10, the day the Diet was to reopen, Admiral Yamamoto, en route to discuss the political situation at the Court, suddenly changed his mind and went first to Katsura's residence. In a short but explosive meeting, Yamamoto accused Katsura, as well as Yamagata, of bringing about a "national calamity" and then shamefully shifting responsibility to Saionji.²⁰ Yamamoto thereupon advised Katsura to resign. The latter denied that he had brought disgrace to the nation; acknowledged that he might have made a mistake in applying pressure on Saionji, but protested that he had no great attachment to the prime ministership and would be glad to resign. Having drawn this statement from the Prime Minister, Yamamoto moved on quickly to call on Saionji. He found Saionji at *Seiyūkai* headquarters in a meeting with some two hundred Diet members involved in a discussion of the position their party should take. Saionji had already informed the Palace that he was resigning as head of the party, and he was now admonishing his colleagues not to be swayed by momentary feelings and think carefully of

the decision to be made. He explained that he must obey the Emperor; he encouraged caution; but he did not demand agreement. When Yamamoto arrived to inform the party men of Katsura's willingness to resign, he immediately strengthened the position of the majority present who were determined to have the party adhere to a policy of open opposition. In these circumstances, the decision was taken not to give up or in any way modify the fight to defeat Katsura.

Long before the one o'clock opening, crowds had begun to gather outside the Diet building to shout against the government and demonstrate their support of the opposition. As the crowds swelled and became more boisterous the police maintained order with some difficulty. When information reached the crowds that Katsura, because he had received no answer from the *Seiyūkai* to his demand that the no-confidence resolution be withdrawn, had again suspended the House, they became unmanageable. Mass rioting quickly spread from the environs of the Diet Building to other parts of Tokyo. Enraged mobs stormed the residences of cabinet ministers, demolished pro-government newspaper plants, overturned and burned police boxes. After several people had been killed and widespread damage had been caused, military reinforcements were called out to quell the disturbances. Many hundreds were arrested and by midnight the great city was quiet; the eruption had died down but Katsura was doomed.

At the height of the riot Katsura had met with his cabinet in an extraordinary meeting in the Diet Building. He informed his ministers of his desire to resign and his decision to inform the Throne. On February 11 the Katsura government fell, ending the shortest ministry in Japan's history. On the thirteenth when the Diet reconvened, the *Seiyūkai* leaders, amid cheers and applause, triumphantly voted to suspend the Diet until a new cabinet had been formed.

With Katsura's resignation, the crisis moved to the end of its last stage. Yamagata had anxiously observed these events from his villa at Odawara since Katsura had never called him to the capital for his advice. When he heard the news he remarked, "it was as if Katsura hanged himself in his private chamber."²¹ When Yamagata finally arrived in Tokyo it was not to rescue Katsura

but to select his successor. Seeing Katsura at the Palace, Yamagata expressed his displeasure with the events of the previous days adding, "I regret that you have been so impetuous."²²

The finale of the Taishō crisis was the selection of Admiral Yamamoto Gombei as the next Prime Minister. This was a natural selection since Yamamoto had supported the *Seiyūkai* in defeating Katsura and was assured that the party would support his ministry. For Yamagata it was not the most desirable choice, but after the startling developments of the previous forty-eight hours and also because the Admiral had been favorably considered in December by the elder statesmen before Katsura was ordered to form a government, he was prepared to accept his nomination.

CONCLUSION

As the political atmosphere, which had been so highly charged for over sixty days, was neutralized and the Taishō crisis passed into history, varying interpretations of its significance were expressed. One contemporary claimed that "one of those crises has been reached in Japan's history which mark the end of a political period."²³ Manifestly all the major components of Japanese political life had become involved in the crisis: the Emperor, the *genrō*, the civil and military bureaucracy and factions within them, the popular political parties and a large segment of the population of Tokyo. Bureaucratic power, seen first in the army's demand which led to the downfall of the Saionji cabinet and then in Katsura's brazen use of Imperial authority, was successfully challenged by popular political parties. Public opinion, aroused by party leaders determined "to safeguard the Constitution" had never been so successful in destroying a cabinet. Katsura was the main target, but resentment was directed against arbitrary bureaucratic control, most frequently associated with Yamagata's political behavior.

So Yamagata was the symbol of the ill which the removal of Katsura was expected to cure. The political parties which had fought to limit the authority of the bureaucracy had reached their greatest strength. The opposition had maintained with success that there were limits to the use of Imperial orders under a Constitutional Monarchy. United action against the forces mus-

tered by Katsura enabled the anti-government parties to surmount the arbitrary use of bureaucratic power. This success gave the parties new confidence and foreshadowed the day they would control political power independently.

Yet their victory had not been unconditional. It was a Satsuma admiral interested in curbing the political power of the army who became the first minister. Although supported by the *Seiyūkai* and moderately sympathetic toward it, Yamamoto was by no means an adherent of the principle of party government. Because of this the unity of the two major parties which helped to defeat the government was destroyed. Ozaki Yukio left the *Seiyūkai* accusing the party of having sold out to the Satsuma faction which, hand in hand with Chōshū oligarchs, had long blocked political progress. One newspaper friendly to Ozaki Yukio declared, "Fifty days shouting and hustling has resulted in a comedy of submission to the bureaucrats. . . ." ²⁴ The Taishō crisis, in the last analysis, represented a skirmish rather than a decisive battle in the campaign for the inauguration of party cabinets. Five years were to pass before that campaign would be won.

Yamagata's part in the Taishō crisis was an important one from several points of view. He alone among the elder statesmen gave support to the army's demands which led to the collapse of Saionji's cabinet. He was most responsible for the selection of Katsura, which aroused fierce political hostility. In both developments the extent of Yamagata's influence was patently great; but in the next two stages of the crisis the limits of his authority were equally clear. Yamagata was not able to affect the political maneuvers Katsura chose to make: freeing himself from *genrō* pressure; inaugurating a new party; and invoking Imperial power to attempt to defeat the attack of the parties in the House of Representatives. Yamagata disapproved of these tactics but he was unable to modify or halt them.

Thus, through the Taishō crisis we can see both the strength and weakness of Yamagata's political influence. The crisis did represent a stage in the slow course toward responsible party government, and conversely, a weakening in Yamagata's ability to reverse that course. But the claim that Yamagata and other

genrō had been consigned to oblivion was to prove hollow. In the immediate resolution of the Taishō crisis the role and the importance of the *genrō* was comparatively unharmed. It was premature to suppose that Yamagata and the elder statesmen had been sidetracked from the main line of political power. Although the nature of the crisis foreshadowed the open and more equal contest between the major political forces in the 1920's, the development of more genuine parliamentary government would again be retarded by the declining but still considerable political influence of Yamagata Aritomo.

NOTES

1. A good general account is found in Kyoguchi Motokichi, *Taishō seihen zengo* (Tokyo, 1940).
2. Shinobu Seisaburō, *Taishō seijishi* (1951), I, 143.
3. Tokutomi Iichirō, *Kōshaku Yamagata Aritomo den* (1934), III, 808-809; in letter from Hirata Tōsuke to Yamagata of November 23, 1912.
4. Oka Yoshitake, *Yamagata Aritomo* (Tokyo, 1958).
5. Quoted by Kyoguchi, *Taishō seihen*, 216, note 1.
6. Interview with *Jiji Shimpō* translated in Japan Weekly Chronicle, December 12, 1912, 1075-1076.
7. Quoted in *Yamagata den*, III, 817-818. Yamamoto reportedly was successful in dissuading Matsukata from considering the office for the same reason.
8. *Yamagata den*, III, 818-820. This analysis comes from Yamagata's own "Taishō seihen ki" ("Notes on the Taishō Crisis"), which is frequently quoted in Tokutomi's biography.
9. Many of Yamagata's closest political friends had warned him against favoring Katsura. Cf. *Yamagata den*, III, 821-822.
10. The navy, resentful of the army's behavior in November, refused to cooperate in the formation of the cabinet. Admiral Saitō, Katsura's choice for Navy Minister, declined to serve unless he was given assurances that the navy's construction program would be fulfilled. When Admiral Saitō refused to accept even a compromise proposal, Katsura secured an imperial order forcing the navy to join the government. Matsushita Yoshio, *Nihon gunjin hattatsu shi* (1938), 356-357.
11. Quoted in the *Japan Weekly Mail (JWM)*, January 4, 1913, p. 5.
12. Quoted in *JWM*, February 8, 1913, 165.
13. Quoted in *Yamagata den*, III, 827.
14. Interview with *Jiji Shimpō*, translated in *JWM*, January 15, 1913, 54-55.
15. Yamagata to Katsura, January 14, 1913, in *Yamagata den*, III, 833.
16. Letter from Takasahi Chikai, Governor of Osaka Prefecture, and member of the House of Peers, dated January 18, 1913; reprinted in *Yamagata den* III, 840-841.
17. *JWM*, February 8, 1913, 172, quoting editorial of *Japan Daily Mail* of February 3, 1913.

18. *JWM*, February 15, 1913.
19. *Yamagata den*, III, 853-854.
20. Shinobu, *Taishō seijishi*, I, 167.
21. Takekoshi, *Prince Saionji*, 278.
22. *Yamagata den*, III, 871.
23. *JWM*, February 15, 1913, 202.
24. *JWM*, February 22, 1913, 218, quoting views appearing in the Japanese press.