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## Japan: Tanaka's heritage

Intereconomics

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The worldwide inflation, currency uncertainties and balance of payments worries, together with the tightening of supplies and soaring prices of essential foodstuffs and raw materials, which would previously have been considered inconceivable, have brought about a situation in which import tariffs, quota restrictions and certain other obstacles to trade have little impact on the flow of commerce. To open markets more widely can still help to secure close economic integration in the world and to increase the supply and lower the prices of the goods which are subject to international competition. But in the present situation it is much more important to prevent a relapse into protectionism such as threatens in some countries which try by this means to burden others with their inflation and balance of payments problems. For most industrialised countries it is even more important to preserve their safe access to essential raw materials and sources of energy.

At the coming world negotiations in the framework of GATT the entire system of rules governing the international trade will have to be adjusted to conform to the changes in the world economy which have already taken place and are still to be expected. It remains to be seen whether GATT will manage to balance the divergent interests of its 83 members, which account for about 85 p.c. of world trade, without getting involved in bitter confrontations and conflicts. kw.

#### *Japan*

### **Tanaka's Heritage**

The Japanese Prime Minister's, Kakuei Tanaka's, resignation after less than two and a half years in office was taken by the population without great surprise. By this step Tanaka deferred to an increasing pressure exerted on him by the public which accused him of having misused his official power for his personal enrichment. Besides the massive reproach with corruption, Tanaka's resignation may be traced back primarily to economic causes.

After more than two decades of an unprecedented economic expansion which made the former developing country one of the world's leading industrial nations, Japan has fallen into a crisis which seems to be far more threatening than those facing any other of the industrialised countries. Prices are increasing at a record rate of 26 p.c. The trade unions, which demand compensation for the rapid deterioration of their members' purchasing power, paralyze the areas of industrial concentration by strikes that take place at ever shorter intervals. Enormous wage increases which are usually soon outpaced by new

waves of price rises, drive many enterprises into their financial collapse. Since the Bank of Japan's policy of credit restriction has proved its inability to curb inflation, long overdue investments into the country's hopelessly underdeveloped infrastructure have to be suspended. For the current year a negative growth rate is expected for the first time since 1945.

So Tanaka's decline may well be taken as a symbol for the present decline of Japan's economy. In view of the recession and inflationary strains of hitherto unknown dimensions wide parts of the population have to resign themselves to a substantial deterioration of their standard of living. At present there are no signs indicating a fundamental economic recovery during the tenure of office of Tanaka's successor, Takeo Miki. ch.

#### *Iceland*

### **My Fish — Your Fish**

Since Iceland arbitrarily extended its fishing limits to a 50-mile radius, the waters of this enlarged zone have been the scene of the so-called cod war. German and British trawlers in particular have come up against the Icelandic fishery protection service. Late in November, for instance, a German trawler, the *Arcturus*, was fired at by an Icelandic vessel, boarded and taken to an Icelandic port where the skipper had to face court proceedings.

Who has the right on his side? That is a question which is not easy to answer. The German Government regards the Icelandic action as contravening international law as the International Court in The Hague has conceded to Great Britain and the Federal Republic the right to fish in the disputed waters. For Iceland, on the other side, the main consideration is apparently that one of its principal sources of income is threatened; and for lack, to date, of a basic worldwide convention on fishing limits at sea Iceland understandably does not feel bound by the decision of the Court in The Hague. The UN Conference on the Law of the Sea which was held in Caracas in the middle of last year might have resolved this complex of problems; but the views on rights of sovereignty are too far apart at present to allow the problem to be solved at an international conference.

Much can be said on either side of the fishing dispute, but piratical actions, boycotts, etc., ought to be avoided. Such acts can ultimately only harm the citizens of the countries involved — by reducing earnings or raising the prices charged for tightening supplies. It is to be hoped that bilateral negotiations will bring a return to orderly conditions in the use of the resources of the sea. iwe.