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## ENGLISH TRANSLATION

Election campaign at the Berlinale

# With banner, sash and megaphone



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Election campaign in front of the Berlinale palace: City council Kazuhiko Yamauchi from Kawasaki, Japan

By Florian Güssgen

**It happens like this in Bavaria. Also in Nordrhein-Westfalen. There, the CDU and SPD can nominate every clown in town – and he gets elected. A film about the stamp dealer’s bizarre turn in his career shows that in Japan, it’s also dependent on the Political parties, and less on individuals.**

It was an important election for the Liberal Democratic Party (LDP). In fact, it was a critical one. The party held a one-seat majority in the Kawasaki city council. It had to be defended, at any cost. The problem was finding the right candidate. Someone was needed who would win the 2005 election, but who wasn’t allowed to make any demands of his own. Someone destined to fall into obscurity two years later and in no way conflict with the local powerful “sensei”. He should be an outsider who would be cooked up as a star and afterwards would be dropped. That’s what the LDP found in Kazuhiko "Yama-san" Yamauchi from Tokyo. Yamauchi was 40 years old, received a final degree from the prestigious University of Tokyo and sold stamps and coins on the Internet. He had zero experience in politics, and did not even sympathize with the LDP. He liked the Prime Minister Junichiro Koizumi, but that was it.

A few months later, Yamauchi was elected to the city council. He won the election with only 1000 votes, but anyway, he won.

### **From zero to hundred**

From zero to one hundred? From being a nobody to suddenly becoming a distinguished member of the city council? How is this possible? Kazuhiro Soda, 36, a Japanese filmmaker living in New York offers some insight. He directed a no-frills documentary about this election campaign, without music or narration. He was simply present with his camera. The result is "Campaign", which premiered last week during the section forum at the Berlinale. Subtitled "An Inside look at J-Democracy", Soda gets his point across—that politics are not dependent on a few powerful individuals, as it is sometimes perceived in the United States. In fact, it’s the party’s system, values and mechanism that affect the outcome. One does not become powerful because he succeeded in

convincing the citizens, but because he won the party over and complied with it. In Japan, that's the way it has been for the last 50 years, in fact, that's how long the party has been in power almost without interruption. This is not necessarily reprehensible. This political determinism is a typical occurrence in many democracies, including Germany. Every clown in town can be nominated for the CDU in some constituencies of Bavaria, or for the SPD in some districts of Nordrhein-Westfalen. And they always win. Only the party is important. Yamauchi is the clown in Soda's documentary.

### **Success with banner, sash and megaphone**

Yamauchi is a terrific entertainer because he takes his case seriously. However, this somewhat awkward man, with his friendly and exaggerated body language and the impish smile in his eyes somehow becomes the embodiment of the comical and absurd sides of an election campaign. For instance, he stands in front of a subway station with a sash and megaphone and approaches the passers-by with set phrases about reforms and changes. He promises kindergarden positions to citizens that apparently do not care. He promises a kiosk owner to amend the sewer system. His party seniors teach him the best way to nod. They set up an election campaign headquarter in complete seriousness. Despite all his earnestness, it is clear that Yamauchi is unable to connect with the others. Nevertheless the LDP, the engine of the political machinery, makes him a winner by nearly 1000 votes from 40.000 citizens. But anyway.

### **The Bohemian of the Tokyo University**

"Campaign" tells a good story. It's 120 minutes of pure entertainment while offering an inside look at the Japanese democracy and its mechanism. It is a fundamentally different film than D.A. Pennebaker's fascinating "War Room", which documented Bill Clinton's election campaign for presidency. "War Room" dealt with the advancement of an individual and his charisma inspiring the electorate. It dealt with the power of the player. In contrast, "Campaign" shows the power of the system with more modest instruments than Pennebaker. Because Soda's film offers educational value, it will be showed by number of public European TV networks such as ZDF, BBC or TV2 in October this year. In 2008 in the year of the presidential election, "Campaign" also will be broadcast on PBS, in the United States.

"Campaign" is not only a funny film, but the behind-the-scene stories are also interesting. The director and the candidate Yamauchi are actually friends. It's especially entertaining to watch them promote their own film. For example, Yamauchi stood with a banner, sash and megaphone in front of the Berlinale palace at the Marlene Dietrich Place, repeating Japanese election phrases to the filmgoers, always with his impish smile. Or they promoted their story in a coffee bar in the Sony centre at the Potsdamer Platz. Then Soda told us that Yamauchi was actually quite a bohemian at Tokyo University and was a leftist in the past. He lived in a dormitory where people met for drinking and partying. Thus, Soda was surprised when he heard from a mutual friend who had seen an election poster with Yamauchi's portrait in Kawasaki, running as a candidate of the conservative LDP. Soda felt he had to film it. Barely five days after getting the message, he had begun to film. Alone, without any financial backing.

### **Daily allowance of Member of Parliament**

It becomes a bit more serious when it's about the future of the present candidate. No, he didn't accomplish much during his term in the office, Yamauchi acknowledges. Yamauchi says it was due to the bureaucracy and that's why he will not run for office again. This summer he will be a father, and then he will begin looking for a job. Perhaps he would write a book, he says, about democracy in Japan, about his experiences, and about the blatant disconnection that exists between the financial risks that a candidate is expected to take, and the rate of daily allowance. "The daily allowance might be higher" he laughs.