

## COMMENT

# Learning Curve Kicks In as We Imitate Japanese

*Contrary to Inflammatory Remarks by Some, Major Business Decisions Are Not Based on Xenophobia*

Some of the losers in the Sumitomo/Green Line battle have charged that xenophobia is the reason for the public outcry against foreign competition. They specifically blame an anti-Japanese sentiment for the County Transportation Commission's suspension of the Sumitomo contract.

It is not news to anyone that there are xenophobes in both societies. The percentage of people in Japan who hate foreigners might even be higher than in the United States. We are all too well aware of a pervasive criticism of American intellect and work habits there.

However, it is also true that generally, and specifically in this case, business decisions in either nation are not based on those extremist opinions.

In fact, Sumitomo itself has been a

successful bidder on earlier County Transportation Commission contracts.

The difference between those earlier contracts and this one is that our local learning curve has finally kicked in. There is more philia than phobia at work here: We so greatly admire what they have accomplished that we are finally following suit. What's embarrassing is that it took us so long to figure it out.

We have observed that the Japanese take care of their own. They subsidize key industries; they funnel money into research and development.

We have not been taking care of our own. We have been letting our own workers twist slowly, slowly in the wind while we espoused a philosophy that is powerful in theory, i.e., bringing down trade barriers makes for a healthy

world economy.

It's a philosophy that only works for the American economy if other countries stop their own protectionism. We have been clinging to a thread of hope that they would do so for about ten years. It's long past time to stop hoping.

Since we do not have enough clout in the world to effect such a radical shift, what is left for us to try is that which has made other countries successful. We should follow the example of the healthiest economies in the world—all subsidize industries they consider important.

And that is what we are doing by insisting that cars be built here in Los Angeles County on land probably owned by the County Transportation Commission. The LACTC should also subsidize research and development

work in the area of transportation; other successful economies would do so.

At last count there were 313,000 workers in the unemployment lines in the county, and that doesn't count the underemployed or those on welfare. Our economy is in serious jeopardy, and we have no choice but to begin to build it, to protect our families, friends, and colleagues.

With the gas tax money we voted last June, we can foster a transportation industry of our own and create long term jobs for many people at the same time we build a mass transit system. We already have the factories, the engineers and the workers.

It doesn't take much effort to see that the decision to suspend the Sumitomo contract is more xenophilia than xenophobia.

## - LETTERS -

portation system. Everyone thinks transit is a great idea—for the other guy. Joe Citizen wants transit to be available so his neighbor will use it and stay off his freeway.

Unfortunately, assertions that light rail systems can decongest roadways are lies.

The Southern California Rapid Transit District lost 96 million boardings between 1985 and 1990. Boardings began declining the day the 50-cent bus fare created by Proposition A was terminated. The funds that made this fare possible were diverted to the Los Angeles rail system.

The Blue Line attracts somewhere between 8.8 and 11 million boardings per year. It costs the residents of Los Angeles County only \$877 million in new capital and \$38.6 million in new operating expenses to reduce local transit use by millions of boarders.

Your editorial concerning Nick Patsouras' plan to create a Los Angeles transportation industry (Jan. 20) misses the point. The way to maximize local benefits from local taxes is to repeal transit-related sales taxes and leave these revenues in the pockets of the residents who earned them. The consumer expenditures that would result would create jobs dedicated to the products people want most.

It is bad enough that Los Angeles is taxing itself to build a rail system that serves us all less well than the status quo. The residents of Los Angeles will be much worse off if we follow the advice of Nick Patsouras and the Downtown News, because we'll be building this white elephant as expensively as possible.

James E. Moore II

### Blue Line a White Elephant

Dear Editor:

The residents of Los Angeles County have twice voted to tax themselves to provide a regional trans-