

More Mature Party/Policy-Oriented Politics and Governing System Reform : Toward Realizing Politics Capable of Making Decisions (Summary)

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I. Background and objectives of this proposal

In the 2009 general election, which was the fifth general election held under the new voting system (the “single-seat proportional representation system”), for the first time in post-war Japan there was a transfer of power between the two major parties. This historic change marked a turning point in postwar politics. This new system, which combines small, single-seat constituencies and large proportional-seat representation districts, was introduced as part of the political reform that had been implemented in the 1990s to create a system in which it is easier for regime change to occur, with a view to realizing party/policy-oriented politics. Now, two and a half years since the historic change of the governing party, it is necessary to review the political reform of about 20 years ago, to identify problems in the current system.

In line with people’s expectations, the Democratic Party of Japan accomplished a change in government by defeating the Liberal Democratic Party in the 2009 general election. Despite the transfer of power, however, people now have less trust in government; indifference to politics and a sense of frustration over the uncertain future have also been increasing, particularly among the younger generation. Some risk factors for economic decline, such as low growth rates and falling government bond prices, are primarily owing to the deterioration of governing ability. We can say that this very politics, which is incapable of making decisions, is the biggest risk to our country.

It is crucial that Japan realize a political system that is capable of making decisions, and foster leaders with strong voices and the energy to act. As well, Japan should leverage its strengths to increase its international presence. Domestically, we need to do away with all sorts of vested interests and push ahead with structural reform, to create an economic society that can meet the needs of the times. It is also necessary to redistribute the financial burden in social security and other areas, eliminating inter- and intra-generational disparities. To address these tasks, strong and persuasive leadership is required more than ever before.

To realize politics capable of making decisions, we propose the following seven actions.

II. Seven actions toward realizing politics capable of making decisions

1. Enacting a political party law to strengthen political party abilities and governing functions

- Political parties act in line with their party platforms, which set forth political philosophies, visions and basic national policies, and strengthen party abilities and governing functions toward policy planning and implementation. To facilitate this, a political party law should be enacted as soon as possible.

2. Implementing the next general election under a voting system in which the greatest vote value disparity is less than 1.5:1, as the first step toward realizing the one-person, one-vote system

- Diet deliberations and decisions should be considered legitimate only when the numbers of eligible voters per Diet seat are the same. As the first step toward realizing a one-person, one-vote system, the next general election should be carried out using a voting system in which the greatest disparity in weight of votes among electoral districts for the House of Representatives is less than 1.5 to one. For Upper House elections as well, the one-person, one-vote principle should be employed. We urge lawmakers to promptly hold active discussions on revising the allocation of seats.

3. If the disparity is not rectified, the Supreme Court should declare such elections unconstitutional and void

- The Judiciary should fully exert the checks and balances function, instead of leaving to the Legislature the issue of ensuring equality in the weight of votes, an essential element of representative democracy. If a flaw in the electoral system is not rectified by the Legislature, the Judiciary should hand down “unconstitutional and void” rulings against the results of such elections.

4. Allowing Internet use for voting and campaigns; lowering the voting age to 18

- It is essential to lift the ban on Internet use for election campaigns and to introduce online voting, in order to increase political awareness among the public and increase turnout among young voters. The Internet can reduce the costs of gathering information and voting. The right to vote should be granted to all Japanese who have reached the age of 18.

5. Promptly establishing the 9th council on the electoral system

- The 9th council on the electoral system should be established promptly, to discuss drastic reform of the electoral system. Not only politicians, who are directly affected by a voting system, but also participants from all levels of civil society should take part in discussions on reforming the electoral system. It is also necessary to design a new system from an overall perspective, regarding division of the roles of the upper and lower houses.

6. Creating a national strategy office to bolster the Prime Minister's leadership

- Reorganize the current Cabinet Secretariat and create a national strategy office that will play a central role in addressing key domestic and foreign policies. The Office will develop and decide basic budgeting policy, as well as budget allocations to key policy measures and to ministries and agencies.

7. Expanding the Cabinet's power to take part in Diet management; increasing opportunities to amend cabinet bills

- As for cabinet bills, it is important to empower the Cabinet to take part in the process of scheduling deliberations in the upper and lower houses, in order to ensure well-planned deliberation schedules and facilitate Diet proceedings. It is also necessary to increase opportunities for amending cabinet bills after they have been submitted to Diet sessions.

III. Conclusion

Japanese politics must change. The sense of crisis regarding this matter is probably shared among many people in Japan. As Fukuzawa Yukichi says in his book "An Encouragement of Learning," published 140 years ago, "We will have this kind of government if the people are this way."¹ In other words, the problems of politics or politicians lie with the Japanese people themselves. As citizens, each of us must fulfill social duties and make sure our voices are reflected in public policies through voting and other actions.

To realize politics that implements policy measures selected by the public, it is essential that people have a high interest in social issues and appropriately exercise their right to vote. The mass media, which still have significant influence in the molding of public opinion, should play the role of government watchdog in a sound way, without placing too much weight on reporting political situations.

¹ Fukuzawa Yukichi "An Encouragement of Learning" (1872)

Quote from the phrase in the Section 1, saying "...there must be a harsh government over stupid people. It is not that the government is harsh; the stupid people have invited this misfortune upon themselves. Conversely, it is reasonable that there should be good government over good people. Therefore in Japan, too, we will have this kind of government if the people are this way."