

**DPJ government in death throes—A snap election is the only way out**

**Koichi Endo**

Sixteen House of Representatives lawmakers of the Democratic Party of Japan (DPJ) who are believed to be close to DPJ kingpin Ichiro Ozawa have formed a group called “Association of Accountability for the DPJ-Led Change of Government” and asked to withdraw from the formal parliamentary group of DPJ lawmakers. These rebels, who were elected on a proportional representation system, are chanting combative slogans like “The Kan government has no legitimacy.” However, they will remain in the fold of the DPJ even as they strive to deliver on the pledges which the party made (and reneged on) under its manifesto for the general election in 2009. Yoshikatsu Nakayama, parliamentary vice-minister of economy, trade and industry, and Jin Matsubara, a member of the House of Representatives, have also called for a return to the 2009 manifesto as the DPJ’s original ideal. However, they apparently plan to do nothing more.

**The rebels have no guts**

This rebellion baffles me. Prime Minister Naoto Kan’s victory in the party leadership election last September meant the defeat of the faction that upholds the manifesto as sacrosanct, as Kan favors a policy shift away from the manifesto. DPJ lawmakers who wish to return to the manifesto as their original ideal should have no option but to quit the DPJ and create a new party of their own. But they apparently have no guts to do that. It’s a shame to see such DPJ members cling to their party even as the political bubble that catapulted the party into power is deflating.

Enter Kazuhiro Haraguchi, the former minister of internal affairs and communications: I recently witnessed a classic Haraguchi maneuver. In an article carried by a monthly journal, he asserted, “The Kan government must be toppled.” He proposed to divide the DPJ into two parties—one would comprise a group of politicians calling for a return to the ideal that underlay the change of government (in short, this would be a group of people who uphold the manifesto as sacrosanct and can be dubbed as DPJ-A) and the other would be a group of people who support the prime minister and can be dubbed as DPJ-B. After making this seemingly admirable declaration of farewell to the DPJ, Haraguchi backpedalled once a chorus of calls for Kan’s resignation had started to grow. “That chorus is outrageous. I feel sorry for Mr.

Kan,” he commented. What a shallow mind he has.

Speaking of a shallow mind, former Prime Minister Yukio Hatoyama, who fostered public distrust in politics by making a series of *frivolous* remarks, had words of admonition for the dissenting voices within the party: “We must not tear down the DPJ with a *frivolous* attitude and merely say, That man is evil, let’s expel him. ” It is unclear whether Hatoyama was warning that if the anti-Ozawa faction forced to discipline Ozawa, a former party leader embroiled in a financing scandal, the DPJ would disintegrate, or Hatoyama was merely expressing nostalgia lamenting the ongoing disintegration of the party, of which he is a co-founder. Anyway, most voters’ reaction would be: “You have no right to say that.” That Hatoyama is one of the culprits for the impending implosion of the DPJ is apparent to everybody except himself.

### **Clinging to power is an act of shame**

The DPJ is in a terminal state. The situation is so dire that Prime Minister Kan referred to the possibility of dissolving the House of Representatives for a snap election by saying, “I assure you that I will call an election when the moment of decision on the consumption tax comes” (February 19). This comment appears to be an attempt to brush aside calls for his resignation from within his own party. Rather than hinting at a snap election in June (when a proposal for social security and tax reforms is scheduled to be worked out), he should immediately call an election to seek a new mandate. That is because the DPJ is in no position to propose to raise the consumption tax rate, after having won the 2009 general election on the back of its manifesto, which put the consumption tax issue on the back burner. It is an act of disrespect for the principle of constitutional government to allow an inept government to enact a budget that turns on the money spigot without the necessary revenue.

It is not just the Kan government that is in its death throes. The whole of the DPJ as a governing party is breathing its last breath.

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