

**Noda Effectively Declares Defeat by Tolerating Unlawfulness**

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Prime Minister Yoshihiko Noda made a wrong decision again.

As a government advisory panel failed to give recommendations on the revised demarcation of electorates for the House of Representatives by the February 25 deadline, the present demarcation of lower house electorates was left unlawful. Such situation regarding the electorate demarcation is unprecedented, although Chief Cabinet Secretary Osamu Fujimura on February 22 said no legal provision would limit the prime minister's right to dissolve the lower house to hold a general election. Hirohisa Fujii, who chairs the Tax Commission of the ruling Democratic Party of Japan, said on February 24 that no election could be held in the situation. This is a reasonable opinion.

**No agreement on seat reduction and thorough reform**

Both ruling and opposition parties must be held responsible for the abnormal situation that resulted from the legislature's delinquency. More fundamentally, however, the Noda administration and the DPJ's leadership should be blamed for their misjudgment on the matter.

The confusion over the lower house electorate demarcation has come as the three different relevant measures -- (1) the correction of vote-value disparity, (2) the reduction of legislature seats and (3) the thorough election system reform -- have been discussed without being put in order sufficiently.

The first measure is designed to put an end to the state of unconstitutionality and must be implemented immediately. Therefore, it should be easy for political parties to reach agreement on the measure. In fact, the ruling DPJ and the Liberal Democratic Party as the opposition camp leader have agreed on a plan to cut the number of single-seat electorates by five by revising the demarcation to end the unconstitutional vote-value disparity. But the measure has been combined with the second and third one, making it difficult for political parties to produce any agreement.

Lawmakers may have to enact their painful, substantial legislature seat reduction in an excuse for passing a consumption tax hike. In order to promote the consumption tax hike that the DPJ had denied for the last general election, the DPJ can no longer withdraw a proposal in the DPJ manifesto for reducing the number of lower house proportional representation seats by 80. The DPJ thus pursues a trade-off between the anti- and pro-manifesto measures. The substantial reduction of

proportional representation seats is a matter of life or death for New Komeito and other small political parties. They may never accept such reduction easily. The legislature seat reduction reveals contradiction and limitation.

If the thorough election system reform is added to the first and second measures for discussions, each party may have to take into account whether they could survive, making it even more difficult for political parties to reach any compromise. Why has the Noda administration complicated the situation? The administration looks as if it might have combined the three measures in an apparent bid to prevent any agreement from being reached.

#### **Hurry up to cut five single-seat electorates**

Some people say the current situation where Prime Minister Noda cannot dissolve the lower house under the present unlawful electorate demarcation means that he would not have to dissolve the house, allowing the administration to stay longer. Don't be foolish! Leaving the powerless DPJ government to remain for one year and a half until the expiration of the four-year term for the present lower house lawmakers would amount to Japan's suicide and would not benefit Mr. Noda himself, because any prime minister lacking the right to dissolve the lower house cannot be expected to have any strong leadership. Mr. Noda has in effect chosen to become a lame duck by leaving the unlawful situation intact.

Acknowledging this point, former Prime Minister Shinzo Abe, of the LDP, effectively offered "dissolution through talks" of the House of Representatives on February 25. Mr. Noda should accept the offer. Specifically, the DPJ and LDP should shelve the substantial legislative seat reduction and thorough election system reform and take leadership in enacting a bill to cut the number of single-seat electorates by five to end the unlawful situation, allowing the prime minister to dissolve the lower house at any time. Unless the prime minister is ready to dissolve the key chamber of the legislative branch, politics may lack tensions and grow complacent. Such situation would be hateful for voters.

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