

Does Abe's Upset Win Go against Public Opinions?

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As former Prime Minister Shinzo Abe won the presidency of the Liberal Democratic Party in a runoff with Shigeru Ishiba who had been a top runner in the first round of voting where delegates of local LDP chapters cast votes along with LDP national lawmakers, the result was criticized as brushing off local votes or public opinions.

Such criticism naturally comes from some media organizations known for their persistent anti-Abe campaigns. But it is not acceptable for local LDP leaders to offer their resignation in protest to the LDP presidential election result. LDP members should cool down their temper.

Respect given naturally to national lawmakers' judgment

Under the LDP's presidential election rules, local chapter delegates and Diet members cast ballots in the initial round of the election. If no candidate wins a majority of votes, top two contenders face a runoff where only Diet members participate as voters. National lawmakers' will is eventually respected in this way under the LDP rules. Under the representative democracy, priority is naturally given to will and judgment of elected national lawmakers. In Japan that has adopted the parliamentary cabinet system, such presidential election rules for a responsible political party are very sound.

But there is an opinion that Diet members should have supported local chapter voters' will shown in the initial round of the election and voted for Ishiba. Another opinion says that Abe should have withdrawn from the runoff. However, these opinions are close to recently growing arguments for direct democracy, which emphasize referendums. A direct democracy trend, where greater priority is given to residents or rank-and-file party members rather than to national lawmakers, amounts to a first step to degrade democracy to mobocracy. Some LDP members' support for such stupid opinions indicates their degradation.

Politicians do not have to cater to public opinions. If politicians were to end up with reflecting the so-called public opinions, the representative democracy would not only become non-functional but also become unnecessary. The reflection and consolidation of public opinions represent the essence of democracy. At a time when residents-oriented politics and the respect of public opinions have become dominant slogans, or gone nearly out of control, priority should be given to the consolidation rather than to the reflection.

After seeing Ishiba gaining dominant support from local LDP chapter delegates, LDP Diet members chose to make a different decision. The result should not be trivialized as a mere politics typical to national lawmakers. Even if national lawmakers had elected Ishiba as new LDP president in a manner to cater to local opinion, a new LDP leadership could not have been expected to take strong initiatives. I am not necessarily defending or supporting Abe. I would have reached the same conclusion even if the positions of Abe and Ishiba had been reversed. The final LDP presidential election result indicates no institutional defect. Taking local LDP chapters' opinion as important, new LDP President Abe named Ishiba to the key post of party secretary general. This is a wise choice. The LDP should endorse the presidential election result and the appointment of Ishiba, and prepare itself to win government back from the Democratic Party of Japan.

Noda gives priority to DPJ unity by dismissing a cabinet minister

After being reelected president of the ruling DPJ, meanwhile, Prime Minister Yoshihiko Noda retained Azuma Koshiishi as the party's secretary general and dismissed Jin Matsubara as chairman of the National Public Safety Commission in a cabinet reshuffle designed to emphasize the unity of the ruling party. Matsubara has remained critical of a controversial human rights rescue bill that the DPJ has promoted. The dismissal has nothing to do with the consolidation or reflection of public opinions. Its objective is nothing more than the party's unity. That's OK. Since the secretary general is as pivotal as the party president, Koshiishi should not flee from debate with his LDP counterpart Ishiba.

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