

Politicians Should Battle over National Interests

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Newspaper headlines spotlight “battle over the dissolution” of the House of Representatives for a general election, rather than over policies.

Politics plays a role in providing national interests to citizens. In elections, candidates explain to voters what national interests are and get consensus. Nevertheless, political parties’ politics over government formation and lawmakers’ desire to keep their Diet seats have made the political arena a place for bargaining over private interests. Citizens have reportedly lost confidence in politics. It may be reasonable for voters to turn their back on political parties that give priority to their private interests rather than public interests.

Diet’s failure to pass government bond bill amounts to neglect of duty

The Diet’s minimum duty at present is to pass a bill to enable deficit-covering government bonds to be issued. As the bill to cover 38 trillion yen of the 90 trillion yen budget for the current fiscal year is still pending, the government has slowed down spending. The government may be able to issue up to 20 trillion yen financing bills to cover cash flow within the current fiscal year. But the problem here is the Diet’s neglect of duty.

Opposition parties that now expect to win the general election have demanded Prime Minister Yoshihiko Noda and his ruling Democratic Party of Japan to promise the early dissolution of the lower house for the election in exchange for their votes to pass the government bond bill, while the ruling party that expects to lose the election has threatened to postpone an extra Diet session for passing the bill. The Diet’s failure to pass the bill amid such bargaining amounts to the denial of the budget that has been enacted by a majority vote. Under the basic rules of democracy, even opposition parties should accept decisions that have been made by a majority. In addition to written rules, there are tacit rules that lawmakers must observe to secure their professional quality. Political parties have gone so far as to take the lives of the people hostage for realizing their respective political interests.

Lower house dissolution should be based on causes

Japan now has a mountain of urgent challenges that the Diet must tackle, including the reconstruction of diplomacy and national security over territorial issues

and the elimination of deflation before the planned consumption tax hike. The ruling party should proudly convene the extra Diet session and the ruling and opposition camps should cooperate in passing the government bond bill and a vote disparity correction bill. These actions are the duties of the political circle. Then, all political parties should specify national interests that they pursue in regard to great national challenges and allow voters to determine which party should take government. This is the principle of constitutional government.

As indicated by the previous general election where top priority was given to a transfer of power, politics has forgotten what politicians should compete for. The previous general election indicated that a political party chose to take government by offering a manifesto that attracts voters while being infeasible. Such indication has decisively led voters to lose confidence in politics. The present Democratic Party of Japan administration should take responsibility for leading to the situation. Opposition parties calling for the lower house dissolution for the general election should go beyond their criticism of the ruling party and specify national interests as their respective causes. In this respect, the time might have come for political parties to make the creation of an independent constitution the biggest issue for the general election. I would heartily welcome political parties' realignment and bargaining over the independent constitution.

Actions that are required in Japanese politics should meet national interests or causes beyond party interests or tactics. Politicians should transform their bargaining over the lower house dissolution into competition between proposals for realizing national interests as their causes. If politicians were unable to do so, they should not use the words of "for the state and people."

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