



Becoming an Ugly and Dangerous Nation! The Deterioration of Japan's Fundamental Law of Education

By Nikkan Gendai

Translated by Nobuko Adachi

[The following article presents a critical responses to the proposed changes in national educational policy by Japan's new prime minister, Abe Shinzo. It is one of many appearing in Japanese newspapers and magazines in the past six weeks. The centerpiece of the Abe administration's domestic strategy is revision of the Fundamental Law of Education (also known as the "Charter of Education" (Kyoiku Kensho) or the "Education Constitution" (Kyoiku Kempo)—the basis of post-war Japanese education. This law, passed in 1947 and intact subsequently, mandated the current national educational standards, and was the centerpiece of efforts to eliminate pre-war nationalism and militarism from the curriculum. At a time of mounting discontent with Japanese education, and with a neonationalist drive to revise the Constitution to weaken or eliminate the pacifist provisions of Article 9, the Abe administration has made the Fundamental Law of Education its first target in an effort to exorcise the ghosts of Japan's World War II defeat.]

Abe has called for a "recovery of Japanese independence" (dokuritsu no kaifuku) so as to create a stronger country, militarily and politically. But what the Abe administration touts as patriotism is viewed by many Japanese, and Japan's neighbors, as nationalism or chauvinism with echoes of the era of colonialism and war that ended in 1945. Despite the popular outcry over the proposed changes to the Fundamental Law, the Liberal Democratic Party and the New Komeito Party steamrollered passage in the Lower House of the Diet with little debate on November 16, 2006. The bill was approved by the Upper House on December 15th, the same day that the Defense Agency was upgraded to become a Ministry of Defense. The two measures signal a major break with the postwar consensus.

One of the most contentious changes is the addition of a phrase saying that schools should take an active part in "... cultivating an attitude which respects tradition and culture and love of the nation and homeland ...". The problem is that the Japanese word for nation can also be interpreted as "governing system," and harkens back to phrasings of pre-war nationalist slogans. Some say that passage of this bill will radically affect the nature of education in Japan. The Asahi Shimbun warns of a shift in emphasis from the individual to the public sphere and "community spirit" in ways that hark back to the prewar order. Likewise, there are questions about how the new law will affect teachers in the classroom, and there have been protests from Nikkyoso, the left-leaning teachers' union. Nobuko Adachi.]

From Dailymail Business:

- * The rejection of the Liberal Democratic Party is the correct choice.
- * Why did the Liberal Democratic Party and New Komeito strong-arm such a bad law through the Diet?
- * Is there no one who opposes this law in the government?
- * We may need to see the resignation of the whole Diet to save the Fundamental Law of Education.

Does the government realize what is going to happen in our country with this new education law?

The following are the voices of those protecting the democracy of our nation by demanding the general resignation of the Abe Diet. The Abe regime has totally ignored the will of the people, who demand action from the government to improve the economy and the unemployment situation. Instead, the government has focused on modifying the Fundamental Law of Education which does not need changing, especially in ways which will weaken it.

This nation has taken a dangerous first step toward social catastrophe through the action of Prime Minister Abe. Yesterday, November 15, 2006, the Prime Minister pushed through a new education law at a meeting of a special committee of the Lower House of the Diet. Chief Cabinet Secretary Shiozaki Yasuhisa explained that the Liberal Democratic Party and New Komeito "passed this law after full deliberation." However, members of the non-ruling parties including the Democrats (Minshuto) who were not present at the meeting yesterday, claimed that they would keep opposing the bill in the Upper House.

Machimura Nobutaka, chief director of the special committee and a previous Foreign Minister, chided journalists saying, "We gave ample thought to the claims of the opposition, so don't go printing a headline like 'A Ramrod Vote.'" Perhaps he was feeling guilty about the decision. In any case, we know clearly which side is right.

At the main public hearing, three of the five educators present objected to the new law. Nishimura Hiroshi, Professor of Constitutional Law at Waseda University plainly stated that "This law would instill in children the social value of patriotism while rejecting other social values. This is anti-democratic."

Even the committee's own invited specialists opposed the law. In testimony before the special committee held on November 9th, Fujita Hidenori, Professor of Sociology of Education at International Christian University, said:

Do we really need to change the Fundamental Law of Education? I think it is not necessary at all. The various problems currently facing schools—such as too many suicides being caused by bullying, or required classes being left untaught—are not due to the current education law. Even if we modified the law, the social and educational problems would still remain.

Professor Fujita points to three problems with the new education law:

- (1) The law will force children to become a certain type of citizen.
- (2) Politics and the government would control education.
- (3) The law would justify social differentiation and discrimination based on differences in education.

Buying the Anti-Democratic Education Law with Hard Cash

It is criminal what the government and their supporters are doing to force this bill into law.

At a government-sponsored town meeting where testimony and comments were taken from the local populace, it turns out that the government paid ¥ 5,000 to some 65 people to ask softball questions, thus giving the appearance of a real discussion. Such a use of our taxes is criminal. They are no better than those contractors who say their buildings are earthquake-proof, but are found to be otherwise once the earth starts shaking.

In desperation, Chief Cabinet Secretary Shiozaki gave an excuse for this distribution of money saying that, "Since we asked them to attend the meeting, we paid them an 'honorarium for lecturing'." An honorarium for lecturing, indeed! They just tried to buy a law with cash.

Not only that ...

It is not good for our children's educational policy to be controlled by a politician whose view of the world is that it is all right for the strong to do something against their will.

According to one member of the Liberal Democratic Party, even some members of the administration think "This is too much." However, such an opinion can never be publicly stated under the dictatorship of the Prime Minister.

We can hear the marching of militarism behind this deterioration of the Fundamental Law of Education.

Members of the Parties Not in Power Should Stand Up and Stop the Deterioration of the Education Law

Before this country begins marching irrevocably in the wrong direction, we hope that members of the parties not in power will try to stop these changes with their all strength. Motozawa Jiro, a political critic, suggests:

The majority of Japanese do not realize that the new Education bill is very dangerous. In order for the people to understand this, every single member of the non-ruling parties should act responsibly, rejecting all further deliberations on the bill, and return to their electorates and explain to them what is going on through public meetings, or through correspondence. It is not enough to just speak at a Diet meeting. Members of the non-ruling parties have to get all citizens involved. If they say they are just the minority in the Diet, then they should all resign. Let the Diet then face dissolution, and there will be a call for a general reelection.

When these minority members offer a differing viewpoint, and risk losing their jobs by offering to resign, the people of the country will notice. As these members are quitting their jobs, they do not need to worry about being criticized for their performance. In order to prevent going back to the dark period [before World War II], I really wish they would confront the government on this issue. If we do not confront them strongly, this country will really become an 'ugly and dangerous nation.'

There are 129 members of the Democratic and Socialist parties in the Upper House.

If all of them work together, even at the risk of losing their jobs, even sheep like the Japanese people will not stay silent.

We don't want to live in times when we have no freedom, like the way things were before the Second World War.

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The translation is by Nobuko Adachi, Assistant Professor of Anthropology, Illinois State University and editor of Japanese Diasporas: Unsung Pasts, Conflicting Presents and Uncertain Futures.

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