

All-Out Struggle for Preserving and Enforcing the Japanese Constitution by Preventing its Revision

December 16, 2014

Kenji IMATANI

General Secretary

All Japan Teachers and Staff Union (ZENKYO)

1. As a result of the general election held on December 14, the former ruling coalition, comprised of the Liberal Democratic Party (LDP) and the Komei Party, is going to remain in place occupying 326 of 475 seats in the House of Representatives, with the Cabinet led by Shinzo ABE as Prime Minister. Nevertheless, while the media spoke of a “landslide victory”, the LDP lost some seats and the votes it obtained at national level account for only 33% of the total votes cast which represents less than 20% of the total number of voters. This means that ABE’s government does not stand on a strong political foundation. The election results also show the perverse effect of the current small-constituency system to distort democracy. In addition, the parties considered as forming a “Third Pole” during the election campaign 2 years ago have repeatedly split themselves or simply disbanded to form new parties, causing growing political distrust of the people. In that context, the turnout drooped to the lowest level since the end of the World War II with 52.65% (proportional representation voting). On the other hand, the Japanese Communist Party that has severely criticized and fought the policies implemented by the Abe government made a major advance from 8 seats to 21 seats in the lower house. The number of seats gives it the right to introduce a bill to the Diet. This clearly shows what some sectors of the Japanese people want. It is also significant that in all the constituencies in Okinawa, the joint candidates representing a broad “All-Okinawa” coalition opposed to the construction of a new U.S. military base won.
2. Since the dissolution of the House of Representatives all through the election campaign, Prime Minister Abe emphasized to his credit the postponing of VAT raise and his economic policy centered on “Abenomics”. However, the LDP in its election promises clearly put forward the “introduction of a first bill to amend the Constitution with a view to holding a referendum for constitutional revision”. It also underscored the continuation of Abe’s “Education Renaissance” by stating that it would embark on a review of the official guidelines for school teaching. The so-called “Education Renaissance” consists of starting teaching English in the first years of primary education, making mandatory the learning of

history of Japan, creating special or new teaching subjects including “moral education” and “civic life”, increasing descriptions about Japan’s territories in textbooks and introducing a new screening criteria for school textbooks etc. Back by a comfortable majority, Prime Minister Abe has made it clear that his government will introduce to the Diet the bills to establish a procedure for the resort to the right to collective self-defense decided by a Cabinet Meeting earlier this year and implement the pending review of the Japan-U.S. Defense Guidelines. It is also very likely that his government will accelerate its moves for transforming Japan into a “war fighting country” by amending the Constitution and a country “offering the world best conditions to the enterprises to do business.

3. The LDP and Komei Party have succeeded in conserving a majority of seats in the Diet, but it does not mean that the people have endorsed each of the policies they implemented. The strong desire of the population for another politics is seen in many proactive initiatives carried on by young people in many places in the country to manifest their opposition to the National Secrecy Protection Law and the exercise of the right to collective self-defense. The young Japanese are concerned about these problems and want to keep their hands on them. Broad-based joint campaigns against retrograde policies, for preserving peace and democracy or for defending human rights are developing with promising momentum. It is necessary to further strengthen these campaigns to confront and defeat each of the dangerous plans of the Abe government that run counter to the Constitution and democracy.
4. For the election campaign, ZENKYO decided a specific plan with the slogan “We do not go to war. Let us go to vote!!” It consisted of calling on every union member to actively participate in political debates and to achieve the goal of getting all your colleagues on your workplace to go to the polls. Over 170,000 copies of the special issue of our bulletin “Shimbun ZENKYO” were distributed around the country and were used to inform teachers and school staff and solicit them to go cast their votes. The special issue of our bulletin echoed very well the voice of children calling for peace as well the demand of teachers who do not want their students go to war again. It helped strengthen and complete the political debates and dialogues throughout the election campaign.
5. Building on these achievements, we must challenge the “Education Renaissance” that is coupled with the revision of the Constitution and demand instead a fundamental change in the education policy so as to give priority to children. This requires us to further develop joint initiatives with parents, teachers and the Japanese people. ZENKYO is now resolved to honor its commitment of “not sending children to the battlefield again” and continue to devote its best efforts to these initiatives.