

# Lowering the Minimum Voting Age Has Realized

--Our Role is to Educate Students as a Citizen with Sovereign Power according to Their Level of Development

June 17, 2015

All Japan teachers' and Staffs' Union

(Zenkyo)

General Secretary

Masako Obata

1. On June 17, the bill to revise the Public Offices Election Law passed the Upper House unanimously after winning approval in the Lower House on June 4. This revision of lowering voting age to 18 from 20 will be proclaimed about a week. This change is expected to be applied to an Upper House election scheduled for summer in 2016 after a year of recognition period. This law was revised for the first time in 70 years since it had been changed in 1945, when the right of vote for women had realized and the minimum voting age had been lowered to 20 from 25. This change adds some 2.4 million new 18 and 19-year-old voters to the electorate.

In 176 out of 198 countries and regions, about 90 percent of them, their minimum voting age is set at 18 and it is done in all countries among 34 OECD countries except Japan

We, Zenkyo, are welcomed this change, and we will make a policy to fulfill the large responsibility to educate the young to participate in the election.

2. In Western countries the minimum voting age to 18 was realized in the movement against the Vietnam War and the student boycott campaign in the late 1960's, and many young people became able to participate in politics. However, in Japan as a measure for some violent students who organized violent political activities, obstructed school lessons or blockaded schools, the government banned the students' political activities by the official notice on political studies and the political engagement. This notice is called "69 notice", and was notified in 1969 by the Minister of Education, Culture, Sports, Science and Technology, which is in charge of elementary and secondary education.

We, Zenkyo, insist that "69 notice" should be withdrawn soon because it intervenes the freedom of expression and the right to express his or her view freely.

We consider it very important that democratic citizenship education in school should be given in response to this revision of the bill. .

However, what the government is trying to do is to impose nationalism on students through education. As a preparation of this revision, the Minister of Education, Culture, Sports, Science and Technology plans to partly revise the 69 notice, and to make and distribute the subsidiary materials for high school students. Furthermore, in the next high school teaching guidelines, it is considering the introduction of a new subject to acquire knowledge and culture and to learn a model behavior in order to be a responsible member of the state or society. We believe education of a citizen with sovereign power may not be the one imposed nationalism and self-responsibility on students, aiming at mal-revision of Japanese Constitution

- 3 Children have been placed under the control and excessive competition at school since their childhood, and have less time for voluntary activities, which are very important for building up his or her character as a citizen with sovereign power. Furthermore, it has impeded children's sound development on peace, democracy and consciousness of human rights. In order to educate children as a Japanese citizen with sovereign power, we should assure time for free discussion and the opportunities for children to actively participate in school curriculum.

Today in schools, many teachers hesitate to discuss politics because of intervention in education by the present cabinet, some mayors and governors, and some conservative powers. Teaching job itself requires high specialty, so academic freedom is necessary for their study. In order to educate the students as a citizen with sovereign power, the school itself should be where teachers are guaranteed their discretion in what and how they teach their students based on their research and study of teaching materials, and also where teachers and students can talk freely.

- 4 Based on Japanese Constitution and Convention on the Rights of the Child, we, Zenkyo, have promoted to make schools open to the public, which means schools where parents, teachers and local residents cooperate and participate in making curriculums best for the students. Students learn not only through school lessons but through various activities such as homeroom activities, Students Council activities, club activities and events. In the curriculums it is necessary for the students to build up their personality, to acquire the ability to analyze and

sometimes, criticize our society, and to have a responsibility to be a citizen with sovereign power. Therefore, we, Zenkyo, will continue working on citizenship education and promoting to educate students as a citizen with sovereign power in a peaceful state according to their level of development.