

Japanese Teachers Stand Up for Political Freedom

The ruling Liberal Democratic Party (LDP) has conducted an on-line "survey on political neutrality in school education" on its website starting from June 25.

Stating that some teachers fail to respect from political neutrality by claiming "political neutrality of education is not possible to achieve" or "teachers should not send children to the battlefield", the Survey requests to report concrete cases of deviation from political neutrality and "specify when, where and how they have happened, who has been involved and on what matter". It is absolutely unacceptable that a ruling party calls on teachers to "denounce" people on the pretext of grasping the actual situation in education. In response to this unjust



The placard that everyone listed are marked as "let's protect education and children"

interference in education, Zenkyo, on July 19, issued a statement made by its General Secretary Ms. Obata Masako, strongly calling for immediate suspension of the survey.

On November 5, Zenkyo held a big rally at the Hibiya Open-Air Concert Hall. The meeting marked the launch of a nation-wide joint struggle to protect the freedom of education. 1,800 people,

including representatives of all Zenkyo affiliates as well as a wide range of groups and individuals, participated in it. After the rally, they paraded in Ginza and appealed to the people on roadsides, shouting "let's preserve the Constitution" and "let's protect the freedom of education".

For solving the growing poverty of children

Growing poverty as a result of widening economic inequality is directly hitting the families, the last resort for children. "Children's poverty rate" has reached 16.3%: one child out of 6 is living in poverty. Their deplorable conditions are reported from various places in Japan: "They cannot buy eyeglasses they need for reading," they cannot afford seeing a dentist for tooth carries" or "the only meal they have a day is the school lunch".

The problem of education fees is particularly serious. Even State-run university tuitions exceed ¥ 500,000 (4500 US\$) a year. In addition, transportation and living expenses come to add to the economic burden weighing on the families. Some children are forced to leave college without getting a degree while some others give up higher education because of lack of means to pay the tuition.

In order to solve this problem, it is necessary that the State allocates more money to education. It will allow to achieve smaller class-size, a demand supported by most of citizens, to make high school education free of charge as it was before, to improve State

subsidy to private schools, to extend scholarship system, etc.

Through the "Nation-wide Petition Campaign for Quality Education" that gathered in about 440 million signatures in total in 28

years, a scholarship system worthy of its name for university students has been finally realized. This is the beginning of a big step forward, even though the amount granted is less than half of the tuition fee of State-run universities and the beneficiaries account for only 0.5% of those who have contracted education loans. In order to solve many of these problems, ZENKYO is proposing to increase the education budget to a level comparable to the average level of OECD countries (1.29% of the GDP or more).



Rally before Finance Ministry for Free of Charge Education

For Guaranteeing the Professionalism of Teachers

Abe Cabinet is tightening State control on education.

The Abe Cabinet is strengthening control over education so as to train a workforce that adheres to the aims of the government and the business circles. The means used for this are very diverse and concern the content of education, school system, educational administration, teacher evaluation, training, financial incentives etc.

Regarding the content of education, the government has revised the "Official Curriculum Guidelines" to significantly increase learning contents and inculcate children with "patriotism". The revision even allows the State to control the method of teaching and evaluation of the results. For the children and teachers, it leads to additional burden and increased risk of violation of freedom

of education and academic freedom. In addition, the screening of school textbooks is being strengthened and textbooks are adopted without taking into account teachers' opinions.

At the same time, the independence of the Board of Education has been weakened: prefecture governors and city mayors may now intervene in educational administration if they want to. As a result, politicians can impose curriculum they want on schools and integrate or close schools. The education policies are decided not according to the logic of education, but to the logic of fiscal policy and politicians' interests.

The Committee on the Rights of the Children of the United Nations had recommended that Japan's "highly

competitive school environment" is "likely to promote bullying, mental disorder, school refusal, abandonment, suicide" (2010).

In 2007, the "nationwide simultaneous achievement test" (standardized achievement test) started in Japan. As the results of the test for each school is disclosed, competition among schools has intensified. Teachers are encouraged to cram students with repetitive use of past tests for improving the test results. Zenkyo is doing it utmost to put an end to this aberrant situation and realize an educational policy based on the Constitution and the Convention on the Rights of the Child.

"Education Forum 2016" Held in Shizuoka

From August 19 to 21, the "Education Forum 2016", Zenkyo's biggest annual event, was held in Shizuoka City from 19 to 21 August with overall theme of "establishment of education based on the Constitution and the Convention on the Rights of the Child". For 3 days, 5000 teachers and staff, researchers,

parents and citizens gathered in plenaries, 8 thematic forums as well as in 30 workshops in different venues including Shimizu Cultural Hall, Shizuoka University, Shizuoka Prefectural University etc. The participants discussed about how to promote learning together with children about peace, human rights,



At the opening ceremony, a symposium "Talk about Constitution and Education" was held

democracy, human dignity, equality etc. in the context of increased State control on education.

CEART Recommends a Special Dialogue between ZENKYO and the Japanese Government

Long working hours of teachers pose a serious problem in Japan. Work on holidays and overtime work are common for teachers. In addition, no allowance is paid for the additional work and as public employees, teachers have their basic labor rights restricted. The number of temporary teachers continues to increase. As a result, in different

localities, women teachers cannot take maternity leave because of lack of teachers to replace them.

In 2014, ZENKYO sent to the CEART an allegation on non-observance by the Government of Japan of the provisions of the ILO-UNESCO Recommendation concerning the Status of Teachers, 1966, about this two issues. In January 2016,

it received an Interim report from the CEART that recommends negotiations and consultations between ZENKYO and the government. ZENKYO has several times asked the Ministry of Education, Culture, Sports, Science and Technology to hold consultations but The government has failed to reply to Zenkyo's request so far.

More than 1,000 Zenkyo members gathered in Okinawa, resolved to preserve peace in Okinawa.

Okinawa is the only place in Japan where a fierce ground battle took place during the Asia - Pacific War. After that battle that took 200,000 human lives, it was placed under the administrative authority of the United States, with a concentration of 70% of the US military bases deployed in Japan. The Japanese and U.S. governments are now constructing a new US military base there, in Henoko district. Voices of anger are rising not only from Okinawa but from all over Japan.

Following the "Okinawa Solidarity Tour" in July 2015, Zenkyo held a mass rally in Okinawa in December 2016, with more than 1,000 teachers including young people from all over the country. As preparation for this event, seminars had been organized in various places to learn about the actual situation of



Osprey placed at the Futenma airport located in the middle of the city area

the damage by the US military bases in Japan. On the following day of the rally, the participants met with the local residents involved in the anti-base campaign and toured the old battlefield in Okinawa.



Young teachers learned anti - base campaign at Takae, Okinawa

Six Years After the Great East Japan Earthquake Study trip to Fukushima



Entrance of underground aisle which is covered with wild grass

Every year since 2012, Zenkyo has organized a study tour to the areas hit by the Great East Japan Earthquake. In November 2016, the tour visited Namie, Futaba, Okuma Towns in Fukushima where residents were forced to evacuate due to the nuclear

plant accident.

Big bags filled with soil, sand and debris, containing large amounts of radioactive substances from decontamination work, were piled up as the previous year but their number has considerably increased. Houses,

inhabited for more than 5 years had become the habitat to wild animals. Cultivated lands had transformed in the wild fields. The devastation seen in the difficult-to-return areas, still highly radioactive, was beyond imagination.

The government has stopped allocating special reconstruction budget on the pretext that 5 years had passed since the nuclear accident. It is gradually lifting the evacuation order in contaminated zones on the ground that radiation dose has dropped below 20mSv. It is also aiming to restart one after another the nuclear power plants currently stopped for safety control.

We are opposed to the restart of existing nuclear plants. We demand the reconstruction of victims' life and livelihoods, continuation of special care provided to children and secured opportunities for education.

2016 World Conference against Atomic and Hydrogen Bombs in Hiroshima

2016 World Conference against Atomic and Hydrogen Bombs was held in Hiroshima and more than 10,000 people including 93 overseas representatives from 27 countries participated in it. Ten teachers from 9 countries in the Middle East and Africa, invited by the Massachusetts Institute of Technology's project called "Oleander Initiative", for promoting peace education in the

Middle Eastern countries, participated in the Conference.

They learned about the realities of atomic bombing as well as citizens' movement for the abolition of nuclear weapons. Zenkyo organized the "Teachers Forum for Peace" with delegates from the Philippines and



Teachers Forum for Peace: 4 overseas delegates and 83 Japanese teachers participated August 5 Hiroshima City

Guam to exchange views with Japanese teachers.

Exchanges with Overseas Trade Unions

ZEZENKYO was invited to attend the national congresses of three foreign trade unions from 2016 to 2017.

At each meeting, we learned that neoliberal educational reform was being implemented in many countries of the world, affecting

professionalism of teachers and their unions.

ZENKYO is planning to organize an international symposium on the theme of teacher policy in February 2018.



Representative of ZENKYO participated in a demonstration march held during the SNES-FSU convention, Grenoble, March 31, 2016

A High School Education to Initiate Children to Full-fledged Citizenship High School Education Symposium 2016

ZENKYO held a high school education symposium in Aichi Prefecture on 28th and 29th January. Professor Tetsuhiko Nakajima of Nagoya University gave a lecture on "High School Education for Developing Consciousness of Citizenship in All Youth". He said: "knowledge is power" but today knowledge is understood as "a means to get good scores in exams". As a result, "learning has lost its significance and become a penance". The next "Curriculum Guidelines" aims at "standardizing the meaning of knowledge" emphasizing the importance of what students can do once they acquire knowledge. This will not encourage the students to

learn. On the contrary, it will make them lose motivation to learn. Professor Nakajima emphasized that the thinking process and the significance of understanding something are important.

After the lecture, a symposium was held by high school students, their mothers and teachers. They discussed about what political education should be at high school in Japan, as it is the second year since the right to vote is granted from 18 years of age. Some 3rd-year students said, "We simulated voting procedure at school, but it did not tell us how we should choose candidates in an actual election. It is boring." Some parents said: "School should offer as

many opportunities as possible for exchanging views among children". Here are some major opinions presented by the participants: "We should make effective use of simulated voting as a knowledge"; "When we are done with simulated vote casting, we should simulate how to make representations to our politicians".



High School Education Symposium 2016, Nagoya, January 28, 2017