

The Left Hand of Darkness

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Although I live in Tokyo, my hometown is Zushi city, a seaside city located in Kanagawa prefecture. This summer, I helped in a campaign to reelect the city mayor, who was against the construction of a U.S. Navy housing complex nearby. Naturally I was against it, since it was to be built in a forest area where I used to play when I was still a little boy. I helped print pamphlets, leaflets, fill balloons, and urged people to vote saying "Please reelect the mayor."

The election was held a few weeks ago, and as it turned out an unprecedented 75% of the registered voters came to the voting booths and the mayor won by a very large margin. I was very happy. The mayor was happy. I could see that when he said these words to the crowd, "In a democracy, the righteous side always wins."

Democracy, a word made up by two Latin words; "Demos", meaning people and "Cratia", meaning rule. Added together they form the word democracy, rule by the people.

Over the centuries, the word democracy has been defined in many ways. In modern times, however, it implies that the ultimate authority in political affairs rightfully belongs to and for the people. Today almost all countries claim to be democratic. Conversely it can be said that there is no truly democratic nation ruled completely and solely by the people.

Well how about Japan you may ask? Japan is the only free-world nation where a single party has continuously ruled for over 30 years. This has led to a complacency on the part of Japanese voters. Japan's very low voting turnout is famous, a mere 40%. This means that only 40% of the voters are taking part in ruling their own land. These two facts have created a deep crevice between politics and the people.

The result is political corruption. Remember the "Lockheed" scandal a decade ago? Today we have the "Recruit" scandal. Both prove that money and politics go hand in hand in Japan today. There is probably much more money changing hands behind our backs.

What frightens me more is the fact that the Judicial branch of government is rapidly falling into the hands of right wing politicians. Yes, the Judicial branch which is supposed to impose justice over the executive and the legislative branches of government. For instance, the Supreme Court recently rejected a suit brought forth by voters in Chiba prefecture regarding the discrepancy in the weight of a single vote. You see, to put things simply, it takes 29,000 votes in certain districts of Chiba to elect a Dietman, whereas in other districts in Japan only 10,000 votes are necessary. This means that 2.9 votes in Chiba are equal to one vote in another district. The Supreme Court said this was constitutional because the ratio was less than 3 to 1.

Furthermore, the Supreme Court is contemplating revision of the constitution. The revisions would introduce a conscription system, and put limitations on free speech and expression of thought. Doesn't this sound like a revival of fascism?

If true democracy, untinted by corruption and an impartial judicial system, are the enlightened right hand of government, then what I have described to you can only be called the left hand of darkness. The corruption in political leadership, our own apathy towards politics, these can only lead to our dark political future.

So let us take action, not necessarily by demonstrating on the streets or by becoming violent, but by becoming more conscious, more responsible members of a democratic nation.

At an individual level, let us increase our voting turnout. If you are 20 years old or over, vote. When you vote, don't vote for incumbent Diet members without thinking, but for candidates who have the guts to criticize the real problems of government and strive to correct them. Not stopping there, we should constantly monitor our representatives and if we disagree with them, we should voice our opinions.

At a group level, we must do something about political apathy. Through the concept of the "Grass Roots Movement" like the successful one at Zushi city, we can change the image of politics from very dark and dull to bright and positive.

Remember, "Demos" "Cratia " means rule by the people and that we are the people. Come face to face with the dangers in politics today, as politically responsible people, as democratic people.

If what we see here is the left hand of darkness, then we the people must become the right hand of hope. The right hand that will hold high the banner of liberty. The right hand of democracy.