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New Policy Challenges in Education

Hase Hiroshi

Prime Minister Koizumi Jun'ichirō, who sees fiscal reform as his greatest political challenge, made famous the story of the Nagaoka fief and the 100 sacks of rice when he mentioned it in his first policy speech to the National Diet in May 2001. At the beginning of the Meiji era (1868–1912), the Nagaoka region was severely impoverished, prompting the lord of a neighboring province to send 100 sacks of rice as assistance. Rather than distribute the rice to the populace, however, the leader of Nagaoka sold it and used the proceeds to build a school to educate his people so that they could generate greater wealth in the future. Koizumi related this tale to make the point that Japan needs to address important long-term tasks that must not be deferred for the sake of short-term gain. The story, however, also illustrates the importance of the nation's investment in education. For many years now, we have been hearing complaints that the Japanese education system has fallen into disrepair, and unless we can clarify appropriate methods and areas for investing in education, those criticisms will continue. In short, we must change the fundamental design of the educational system.

I believe that there are two reasons why this kind of change is needed. First, the educational system has been steadily deteriorating. We have witnessed a simultaneous worsening of school violence, the bullying of fellow students, suicides that result from bullying, children refusing to attend school, disruptive behavior in the classroom, and the increasingly vicious nature of juvenile crime. To these problems we can add the growing lack of a sense of morality and public spirit among young people in Japan and the growing number of children who lack resiliency and quickly “snap.” To use Ministry of Education, Culture, Sports, Science and

Technology jargon, the lack of a “zest for living” among Japan’s youth is an increasingly grave problem.

The second reason has to do with the development of human resources, on which the nation’s very fate hangs. Having completed its process of “catching up” with the West, Japan must focus on scientific and technological creativity if it is to maintain its economic strength and international position. This calls for highly creative human resources—an area in which Japan lags behind other developed countries.

The theme of this chapter, new policy challenges in the field of education, has to do with precisely the need for this sort of radical change. I will begin by exploring the problems and the policy challenges we face, tracing their causes through an analysis of the present state of affairs. One conceivable cause is the country’s policies themselves, and I will discuss the kind of policy system that should be developed. Another cause involves the policymaking process, and I will address this mainly in the context of the role of politicians.

EVALUATING EDUCATIONAL POLICY TO DATE

Problems in School Education

Discussions of educational problems generally focus on problems having to do with the method and structure of the education being offered in schools. These include the overemphasis on the acquisition of knowledge and rote learning, which has led to a lack of emphasis on the development of creativity and humanity, and the Education Ministry’s top-down administration of school management, which has given rise to a highly administrative, standardized education. The present structure can only be regarded as stifling of individuality and maladapted to present-day educational needs.

If, however, we consider things in the historical context from Meiji times onward, it is clear that this school education policy was not always misguided. When Japan began modernizing, it lagged behind the West in every way—politically, culturally, economically, and scientifically—and to catch up with Western developed countries, it needed to eradicate illiteracy and develop a workforce equipped with a stable base of technical and practical skills by means of education skewed toward (or, as believed at the time, “valuing”) knowledge. And to ensure such a workforce on a national level, there was no alternative to standardized education. This was also in keeping with the ideal of equal education for all. We can see

the overemphasis on standardized scores that is often criticized today as a byproduct of that past overemphasis on knowledge-based education.

This type of state-led, centrally controlled education was suited to an educational system aimed at realizing the national policy of modernization. After World War II, as well, Japan maintained an educational system responsive to the economic demands of the time. As a result, the country was lauded both at home and abroad for having succeeded in catching up with the West. The problem, however, is that the educational policy and educational system that were appropriate in the past can no longer meet the needs of the present. In short, they have outlived their usefulness.

Problems of Teachers, Parents (Family), and Community

Today's educational problems are not limited to school education. Problems in this area alone cannot adequately explain why an educational policy and system consistently maintained since the 1950s began to manifest a cluster of problems all at once and in such an explosive manner in the 1980s. It is reasonable to conclude that the compounding of various factors, particularly those related to the major social changes that began to take place in the 1980s, brought about this critical situation. As one significant contributing factor, I would note the decline of the educational power of the "educators"—including teachers, parents (family), and community—since the 1980s. I believe that this decline in educators inevitably made learning less fun and brought about a weakening of the rules (an increasingly *laissez-faire* policy, letting children have their way), thus helping to cause this critical decline in the educational system.

Why did this decline in educators occur? People tend to cite standardized education skewed toward the acquisition of knowledge, but I think that argument misses the mark. Instead, I believe there are a number of interrelated reasons. One, which I will examine in detail in my discussion of the policymaking process, is the effect of the ideological conflict between the Education Ministry and the Nihon Kyōshokuin Kumiai (Nikkyōso, or Japan Teachers' Union). Another is the intelligentsia's misguided importation of liberal democracy, and particularly their emphasis on a *laissez-faire* approach not based on discipline, and on human rights without regard for coexistence. They repudiated the education—mainly moral education—carried out by parents, family, and the community as being unwarranted interference that was incompatible with

respect for the individual. In this context, the decline in educators was exacerbated by parents' lack of interest in the character formation of their children and the consequent culture of extreme dependence on schools.

EVALUATING POLICYMAKING IN THE FIELD OF EDUCATION

The policymaking process with regard to education and the actors involved in it has changed over time. We must therefore evaluate this process in the context of the respective periods in question.

Conflict between the Education Ministry and Nikkyōso

For some time after Japan was relieved of the Occupation government following World War II, the Education Ministry's top-down administrative system shaped educational policy. Prefectural and municipal boards of education were not allowed independent status, and Nikkyōso was the only opposition force. Confrontation with the ministry was especially fierce in regard to issues of school administration and the teaching staff system, such as teacher performance assessment and the senior teacher system, with Nikkyōso seeking to represent teachers as laborers. However, it never managed to be anything more than an outside pressure group that tried to exert influence on the policymaking process.

Meanwhile, the ruling Liberal Democratic Party's (LDP's) "law-and-order clique" in the Diet was the main player in policy formation, doing its utmost to come up with measures to counter Nikkyōso. Its role was limited, however, and the Education Ministry generally played the decisive policy role on all other issues. This unproductive ideological conflict within the supply side of education—i.e., between the ministry and Nikkyōso—was never supported by the public, and the mutual mistrust between these two sides left them functionally unable to cope with any real educational issues. In later years, Nikkyōso, facing a shrinking membership and beset by internal divisions, lost its erstwhile power as it sought reconciliation with the ministry.

The Emergence of the "Education Clique"

The turmoil on university campuses in the 1970s saw the emergence of an LDP "education clique" of legislators interested in education. By and large, clashes between the education clique and the Education Ministry

were limited to peripheral issues; generally, the two cooperated to gain budget allocations in a time of fiscal austerity. The education clique's main role was to oppose Diet cliques linked with other government agencies. This phenomenon was not limited to educational relations but extended to all government agencies. What we should note here is that analysis of LDP-bureaucracy leadership struggles in the policymaking process in different policy areas is meaningless. The fact is that the key struggles were between "partial governments" comprised of the respective government agencies and the related LDP cliques dealing with each specific policy issue. What is more, the Diet cliques were more interested in gaining budget funds after policy decisions had been made than they were in being part of the policymaking process. In regard to education, for example, the education clique was most keen to win budget funds for private schools from kindergarten through university. Like other government agencies, the Education Ministry strengthened its culture of upholding vested interests and, partly because of its conflict with Nikkyōso, was too timid to take the initiative in reform.

Policy Formation

Since 1952, the Central Council for Education under the Education Ministry has been active in policy formation. A new kind of policymaking process began in 1984, however, during the administration of Nakasone Yasuhiro, with the passage of legislation establishing a National Council on Educational Reform with a three-year mandate. This marked the start of educational reform led by the cabinet and the new council. The policymaking method adopted was for the council to distance itself from both the Education Ministry and the LDP education clique, exclude education scholars as far as possible, and rely mainly on industry representatives for advice. What we should note here is the attempt to shift the initiative from the supply side—the Education Ministry, Nikkyōso, and other education service providers—to the consumer side—industry and the general public, including parents. The consumer side stepped up to address reform because it felt that reform could no longer be left to the supply side. Behind this move was discontent over the fact that educational decline had already begun to spread and that educational circles were not responding to the human-resource development needs of industry or of the nation as a whole. Therefore, this revolutionary change sought to do more than simply tinker with the power structure; it aimed at a major policy shift from a controlling, standardized education to a liberalized education.

The Council's Influence on Policy

The policy and power-structure shifts that the National Council on Educational Reform hoped to put in place were thwarted, but its work had a dramatic effect on subsequent educational policy and the policy-making process. In terms of policy, although a shift to liberalization through the introduction of the principle of market competition that the council had wished was not realized, diversification of education also received a strong push, as seen in the introduction of the five-day school week, unified secondary schools combining middle and high school, measures enabling gifted students to skip a year, the establishment of elective courses (where students can choose from a wide range of subjects they would like to study, including either general subjects or specialized subjects) at the high school level, diversification of university entrance examinations, and the introduction of interdisciplinary-study periods (where students develop learning and life skills through classroom lessons focusing on an interdisciplinary approach to subjects). In regard to the policymaking process, through the Central Council for Education, the Education Ministry began to actively address educational reform and introduced the principle of competition to employment conditions for university professors. Basically, these reforms were undertaken in response to the four reports issued by the National Council on Educational Reform during its three years of operation.

The LDP education clique also began to take an active part in educational policy, leading the ministry in policy. For example, it was the education clique that proposed such reforms as a revision of the Fundamental Law of Education, the modification of the 6-3-3-4 system, the encouragement of smaller classes, the introduction of measures to ensure the quality of the teaching staff, and the enhancement of moral education. It is especially noteworthy that politicians took the lead in getting volunteer and other community service activities added to the curriculum, prevailing over a reluctant ministry. The cabinet, the Education Ministry, and education-clique politicians have now begun to work together to promote educational reform. Since the decline of Nikkyōso, most opposition parties have also taken a positive approach. The Democratic Party of Japan, the largest opposition party, basically agreed with the introduction of community service activities, an example that can be regarded as typical of that party's cooperative stance.

To be certain, far from all of the reforms proposed by the council were realized, since it was unable to inject the principle of free competition into education as a whole. Nevertheless, the consumer side was provided

with more diverse educational options, so that in consumers' eyes, something close to liberalized education was achieved. That achievement deserves high praise. The National Council on Educational Reform advocated a third great educational reform—the first great reform being the Meiji Restoration, and the second following the end of World War II. The work begun by the council has continued up to the present and is truly worthy of being called the third great reform. It also deserves praise as a revolutionary change undertaken not at a time of political revolution or national emergency, but during a period of relative calm.

Approach to Educational Reform Today

Above I have given a fairly positive and optimistic assessment of the National Council on Educational Reform, but in these early years of the 21st century, educational reform is still a work in progress. The framework is now in place, but the true test will be how it is understood and incorporated in the classrooms. I have already noted that the reforms introduced so far owe a great deal to the initiative of the consumer side, the general public. As the representatives of the people, politicians were sensitive to this trend and responded with their own reform proposals. In other words, the series of reforms that began with the council's work had its origin in the dysfunctional state of the supply side, and was then propelled by the subsequent response by the politicians to consumers' demands.

Politicians have begun taking a more active part in policymaking in all areas of Japanese politics in recent years. In the area of education, a new type of politician has become active, different from past members of the education clique. Unlike those politicians who were preoccupied with gaining budget funds for education and amending the tax provisions relating to education, politicians of this new breed boldly discuss and seek to put into practice educational principles and policies on the basis of their own convictions and experience. More than members of other Diet cliques, they openly proclaim their principles and policies and translate these into actual measures. The aforementioned introduction of community service activities affords a good example of this approach. Another example is a change in the conditions for licensing teachers to require practical training in nursing care. To achieve this, concerned politicians formed a parliamentary group and submitted a Diet members' bill despite the Education Ministry's opposition. The Soccer Promotion Lottery (Soccer Lottery) Law, aimed at securing funds for promoting sports

activities in local communities, also resulted from a bill submitted by Diet members. The Education Ministry had balked for fear of the harmful effect soccer lotteries might have on young people. Nonetheless, this law was in fact highly attractive to the ministry, which has had little policy funding to use freely, and its passage helped make the education clique still stronger.

We should note here that for members of today's education clique, unlike the Diet cliques associated with, say, construction or agriculture, education is not an issue that is usually tied to votes or fund-raising, except in connection to kindergartens. For this reason, the education clique is shaped by members' individual convictions and interests rather than support groups in their constituencies. Also, many of the clique's key members have served as minister of education and have subsequently remained actively interested in educational affairs. Few members fit the mold of the core members of other Diet cliques: politicians who have headed the relevant division of the LDP's Policy Research Council, served as director and chairman of the relevant Diet committee, and been parliamentary vice minister of the relevant ministry. Thus, the education clique is a loose grouping with no hierarchy or unwritten code, and its members are relatively unlinked by interests. For this reason, it also has fewer members and less cohesive force than other Diet cliques. This is not unrelated to the education clique's comparative weakness when it comes to campaigning. Moreover, from the perspective of the Education Ministry, the field of education is fairly well insulated from politics and there is little policy overlap with other government agencies, so very few issues require liaison with other agencies. As a result, the ministry has seen no need to cultivate its own Diet clique.

In terms of members' backgrounds, the present members tend to come from the Mori and Etō-Kamei factions of the LDP, and many have been involved with education, especially physical education and sports. There are now few second-generation Diet members or former members of the Waseda University oratorical society—two traits that were prominent among the members of the education clique in the 1970s and 1980s.

It strikes me that the type of politician found in the education clique today is well suited to carrying out reform, since reform means breaking down vested interests; politicians with particular interests may have a great store of specialized knowledge, but because of their ties to vested interests they find it difficult to undertake reform. And in fact, the politicians now active in the field of education have begun to put forward a variety of proposals for educational reform. Before turning to the role

politicians should play in political reform more broadly, I would like to summarize the direction of educational reform that my colleagues and I have envisaged.

APPROPRIATE EDUCATIONAL POLICIES FOR A NEW AGE

In promoting educational reform, we need to articulate the framework of a policy system in which individual policies can be clearly identified. Unless we do, it will be difficult to carry out prior and ex post facto evaluation of both individual policies and the reform package as a whole. Here, I will discuss the policy system in terms of two axes. One is the vertical axis of time, which expresses the changes in an individual's school record with advancing age, from kindergarten through elementary, middle, and high school and on to university and graduate school. This is the school record axis. The other is the horizontal axis of place and space, which expresses an individual's relationships with the educational actors and forums that impact on him or her—family, community, and industry. This can be called the societal axis. In the relationships between the two axes, we see that as individuals age (school record), they deepen their connections first with family, then community, and finally industry; as each set of connections deepens, the earlier ones weaken. This is the relationship between the school record axis and the societal axis.

Educational Reform Proposals—The School Record Axis

The aim of future educational reform is to develop highly creative human resources. This is essential if Japan is to continue developing as a nation based on scientific and technological creativity, the necessary condition for maintaining its economic strength and international position. This means aiming to maximize people's skills and individuality. The goal should not be an educational system designed to mass-produce human resources with uniform skills, as in the catching-up period, but one that seeks to develop human resources equipped with a highly creative "new" scholastic ability, defined by the Education Ministry as the ability to identify and solve problems by oneself. As specific policies to this end, I propose rethinking the present 6-3-3-4 single-track school system and replacing it with a multitrack system. The main points of this proposal are summarized below.

Expansion of the Elective Course and Credit-System High Schools

Multitrack education can be advanced through the expansion of the elective course, which allows students to choose among general and specialized subjects, at the high school level and of credit-system high schools. The elective course in particular can be expected to result in schools that seek to accentuate their own distinctive characteristics. We should expand the number of such schools so that there is at least one in each school district.

Expansion of Unified Secondary Schools

Originally, unified secondary schools—those combining both middle and high school—were designed to eliminate the ill effects of high school entrance examinations, but they led to the emergence of “entrance-exam elite” schools. To strengthen the multitrack system, unified secondary schools should offer diverse special features. Some might be “elite schools” for students intending to go on to university, while others might concentrate on English education, on science education (giving credits for university-level courses, for example), on physical education, on the arts, on “human education” (i.e., paying attention to providing education in keeping with individual students’ rate of progress over the six-year period), or on the thorough provision of a basic education.

Rebuilding of Elite Education through Unified Secondary Schools

In connection with the expansion of unified secondary schools, it is necessary to rebuild elite education so that it once again reflects its original aim of developing able human resources that contribute to and are respected by society. Nowadays, the so-called elite are thought of as no more than clever people skilled at getting their own way. We must nurture leaders of society endowed with public spirit if we are to build a society replete with the volunteer spirit, in which good citizens and good neighbors are respected. This is critical to the development of a mature civil society, constituted of citizens who can voluntarily and independently rise to meet the challenges facing them, without relying on the government.

Improvement of Class Management

In addition to improving schools themselves by expanding unified secondary schools and credit-based high schools, measures at the classroom level will encourage multitrack education. Specific steps include encouraging small classes of 20 or so students for major subjects and the

promotion of team teaching, as well as allowing gifted students to skip a year and spreading the system of study based on students' actual mastery of subject matter (the latter two being modes of study that emphasize individuality).

Measures to Promote Effective Secondary School Reform

As we implement the above-noted proposals for the promotion of multitrack secondary education emphasizing individuality and skills, there are a number of points that will require attention. First, to overcome the negative aspects of a multitrack education, which is characterized by early decisions regarding students' career paths, students must be allowed to change their career paths partway through. Second, switching from the 6-3-3-4 system to a 5-4-3-4 system represents only another kind of single-track system and is meaningless. Third, freedom to choose among schools is an important component of the multitrack system, but it is necessary to draw the line at the kind of liberalization based on the principle of market competition advocated by the National Council on Educational Reform, which could create conditions in which schools might go broke at any time. Nor can I support a voucher system, since schools would fail unless they attracted a critical mass of students. Still, the competitive principle as generally understood is essential, and further study should be given to such potential measures as allowing the achievements of highly motivated teachers to be reflected in their salaries, creating an appropriate system to allow the removal of problem teachers, enhancing the system of continuing training for highly motivated teachers, adjusting the funding given to schools on the basis of performance, and in this connection, establishing an independent body to evaluate schools' performance.

University Entrance Examination Reform

Reform of university entrance examinations, which at present are skewed toward the regurgitation of knowledge, is essential to the expansion of unified secondary schools. For this reason, we should study such measures as setting up an independent evaluation body to assess which universities are attempting to attract creative human resources through imaginatively designed entrance exams and scaling budget allocations accordingly. And in view of the tendency to rely too heavily on written tests in order to minimize costs and time requirements, we should also consider providing grants for the expansion of "admissions office" entrance exams, which emphasize essays and interviews.

University Reform

In recent years, national universities have attracted increasing criticism for not living up to their original goal of transmitting research findings to society and for failing to turn out enough useful human resources. I cannot discuss national university reform in detail here, but I would like to emphasize the need to remove the internal and external controls on national universities and to restore their vigor by making them independent administrative corporations. The ills associated with overregulation—the inflexibility of the higher-education budget and the difficulty of accessing external sources of research funding, for example—are widely acknowledged. There is an urgent need for measures such as allowing national universities to set their own budget priorities, or shifting the initiative for university administration from the faculty council to an executive council headed by the president.

To facilitate this, we should consider establishing a system of external evaluation and budget prioritization based on such evaluations, as well as the full-scale introduction of fixed-term contracts for faculty. Thought should also be given to devising a system whereby budget funds can be provided in accordance with national policy priorities, as by strategically allocating funds to key institutions in fields of research considered likely to develop on a global scale or to be globally competitive. However, it would be difficult to devise such a system if national universities were fully privatized. For this reason, too, converting national universities into independent administrative corporations is desirable.

University-Industry Collaboration

Strengthening collaboration between universities and business will also lead to university reform. There is an urgent need for more technology licensing organizations to match industry needs with university research findings. We should also reform the university personnel system so as to promote university-industry joint research and enable professors to serve concurrently as company directors. In this connection, universities should be encouraged to develop the ability to launch their own business ventures.

Educational Reform Proposals—The Societal Axis

The aim of educational reform in regard to the societal axis is to improve the educational power of family and community in order to deal with bullying, refusal to attend school, and other aspects of educational decay.

The basic intent of this revival of societal educational power is to enhance children's sense of morality and public spirit, to give them a sense of the significance and joy of learning, and to equip them with a "zest for living" through greater collaboration among family, community, and school.

Revival of the Educational Power of the Family

Such phenomena as the spread of the nuclear family and the increase in two-income families has created a situation in which the disciplining of children, traditionally undertaken chiefly by the family, has become inadequate. Strengthening services that target parents, such as child-rearing courses, counseling, and the establishment of public consultation centers, is important, but the involvement of and follow-up by the community as a whole are also necessary. Welfare officers, who can be described as the community's public volunteers, are doubling as juvenile officers, but we need to put in place dedicated juvenile officers so as to strengthen support for young families and take other measures to keep nuclear families from becoming isolated from the community. We should also consider a system allowing older people and younger married couples to help one another, as through the use of "eco-money," currency used only within a local community. Community relations could be improved if a system existed under which members could help each other. Enhancement of after-school child-care centers is needed, as well; due in part to issues over which government agency has jurisdiction, the current budget allocations are inadequate. Clearly, the Ministry of Health, Labor, and Welfare and the Education Ministry should share jurisdiction and work together to promote better after-school child care. Moreover, in keeping with their own long-term enlightened self-interest, the companies that employ parents should recognize their social responsibility to cooperate. In sum, a revival of the educational power of the family depends on cooperation between the state, businesses, and the community to make things easier for parents.

Revival of the Educational Power of the Community

The key to supporting ailing schools and alleviating today's educational decay is the community at the level of the school district. Society at the local level interacts as a community in various aspects of daily life. In order to sustain that community, the sound development of the children is essential, and it is therefore in the community's own interest to work toward alleviating today's educational decay.

I believe that bringing the community's volunteer activities into the schools by making school-based community service activities compulsory is the most effective way of reviving the community's educational power. At present, simply teaching children about morality and public spirit in the classroom is ineffective. Hands-on welfare activities and other social-service activities make children realize that they are useful and give them a "zest for living." Making schools the nucleus of such activities, however, places too great a burden on them; the community must play the leading role.

There has been some criticism of the idea of making volunteer activities—which by nature are independent, unpaid, and socially oriented—compulsory in schools. I would like it understood that the objectives of community service activities are to nurture the next generation of those who will take part in volunteer activities and thus rectify the national culture of overreliance on government to solve problems, and to cultivate true citizens who think about what they can do for government, rather than what government can do for them, and act accordingly. Underlying this proposal is the idea that a society with vigorous volunteer and non-profit activities is the ideal for the 21st century. Here again, promoting volunteer activities requires the involvement of the community as a whole, including parents and businesses.

Charter (Community) Schools

School education in which schools and the community offer hands-on social experience together, and thus social-education activities, represents a partial "fusion of school and society." Efforts to bring about this kind of school-society fusion should be further promoted at the elementary and middle-school levels. In some communities, such initiatives are already under way. The schools that most fully incorporate the idea of school-society fusion are the charter schools that originated in the United States, which the National Commission on Educational Reform calls "community schools." The community, business, and ordinary residents together determine the school's educational principles and curriculum and have the school certified on the basis of a charter with the municipality or prefecture. Of course, these schools receive fiscal assistance in the same way as public schools; they are, in effect, publicly established, privately administered schools. What is important is to effectively shift the board of education's authority to make personnel decisions to the school principal, make use of the talents of the community, and ensure that the community monitors school administration. Since the community's educational power is still inadequate, it is too soon to

establish such schools nationwide, but we have reached the stage where model schools should be set up as a national policy.

Seen from another perspective, the restructuring of schools using the revival of the community's educational power as a catalyst is actually the decentralization of education. To local educational institutions accustomed to waiting for directions from the central government, decentralization from above would simply lead to chaos; but decentralization can be highly effective if it is grounded in the enhancement of community volunteer activities.

Amendment of the Fundamental Law of Education

The educational reforms discussed so far have to do with enhancing what the Education Ministry calls "education for the heart." This phrase often leads opponents to charge simplistically that educational reform itself represents a reversion to prewar moral education or to parochialism. Because such arguments have a certain plausibility, they block the progress of reform proposals. It is critical that we make it quite clear that there cannot and will not be any regression to the prewar disregard for individual rights and, on this basis, that we gain public understanding of and a national consensus on precisely what is meant by enhancing "education for the heart." Without a national consensus, there is a very real danger that, as back in the days of conflict between the Education Ministry and Nikkyōso, new systems will be watered down at the operational level. This indicates the importance of public oversight at the operational level.

For this reason, I suggest amending the Fundamental Law of Education. The law as it stands says nothing about the importance of the community's role in education. Thus, it places no weight on Japan's traditions and provides no image of Japanese people and society for the 21st century. More importantly, in its overemphasis on freedom, the law fails to indicate the importance of discipline. True freedom can exist only in the context of appropriate discipline. Unless we debate these points properly and build a national consensus, I fear that the "third great educational reform" will be ineffectual. Just as we are debating the amendment of the Constitution of Japan, I propose a debate on the amendment of the Fundamental Law of Education.

POLICYMAKING AND THE ROLE OF POLITICIANS

As the field of education has changed during the postwar period, so too has the role of politicians in education-related policymaking. As I have

discussed, we are now facing the need for a monumental shift in educational policy, the “third great educational reform.” What role can politicians play? And how can they engage effectively in the policymaking process so as to fulfill that role?

As already noted, since the time of the National Council on Educational Reform, the LDP education clique and the Education Ministry, under cabinet leadership, have worked together to formulate education policy. This, I think, represents the correct basic direction. Under the Obuchi and Mori administrations, the National Commission on Educational Reform was set up in 2000 as a private advisory body to the prime minister. There is one major difference between the National Council on Educational Reform and the more recent National Commission on Educational Reform, however: Whereas the establishment of the council was subject to strong opposition by the education clique, the creation of the commission enjoyed strong education-clique support.

Both the council and the commission were established as cabinet initiatives. Why, then, did the education clique support the commission? One reason was that the prime minister at the time the commission compiled its interim and final reports was Mori Yoshirō, who was the “boss” of the education clique. In short, care was taken to get the education clique on board beforehand. Another reason was that the bulk of the content of the commission’s reports echoed ideas already put forward by the education clique. And as a background factor, we cannot overlook the fact that around the time of the council, the Education Ministry’s power began to wane. This can be seen as a sign of the council’s efficacy. As I have already noted, after the council, the public supported cabinet-led educational reforms, which effectively signified the public’s refusal to let the Education Ministry take the lead in the reform process. I think that reflection on the council experience has facilitated the progress of cabinet-led educational reform. Within the context of cabinet-led educational policymaking, politicians should collaborate with the cabinet (not forming issue-based “partial governments” with the respective government agencies) to push forward reform proposals. This type of process should be applied not only to education policymaking, but to other policy areas as well.

In addition, in view of the nature of educational reform, it is desirable that bills be submitted first to the House of Councillors (Upper House) rather than the House of Representatives and be subjected to thorough debate as a long-term national educational plan. The significance of the bicameral legislature has been questioned, but in the case of educational

reform, which requires lengthy debate and both careful and bold solutions, I think the Upper House has a major role to play, given that its members have six-year terms and that it aspires to “politics of reason,” reflecting the will of the people.

JAPAN'S POLICYMAKING SYSTEM AS A WHOLE

The Ruling Party–Cabinet Relationship

Thus far, I have concentrated on the policymaking process in the field of education and outlined the impressive achievements of the cabinet-led educational reform process. Here, I would like to discuss how Japan's policymaking process as a whole might be shifted to a similar cabinet-led system. The 1990s in Japan have been called the “lost decade,” as calls for reform not only in education, but in all fields—the economy, industry, the bureaucratic system, social security, and so on—made little progress. Analysis of the reasons for this lack of progress will be helpful to understanding what sort of changes are required.

One reason reform has not progressed much has to do with the phenomenon of what I have called “partial governments”—specifically, the way in which “partial governments” in each field of government administration craft policy. This was not a problem when Japan was enjoying steady economic growth, but now that growth has stopped, the system has become unworkable. At a time when anticipated future budget outlays have to be closely reviewed and policy priorities set, coordination among government agencies is imperative. Cabinet-led policy coordination is the minimum necessary condition. In view of this, the recent creation of the Cabinet Office and the establishment of the Council on Economic and Fiscal Policy as a result of a series of amendments of laws dealing with government organization are steps in the right direction. Whether they are effective will depend on whether they operate as intended.

Even if cabinet-led policy coordination can be achieved, however, a serious concern still remains, namely, the recent tendency of the LDP, and the ruling coalition as a whole, to excessively involve itself with policy. With the end of the so-called 1955 system, whereby the LDP had maintained a solid majority of seats in the Diet from 1955 through 1993, the central government agencies, including the cabinet, lost the ability to carry out policy coordination across agencies. Probably in reaction to this new environment, the LDP's Policy Research Council began to involve

itself with government agencies and took the initiative in policymaking. In the present period of coalition government, some opinion leaders even regard meetings of the ruling parties' top policymakers as having equal weight to the cabinet. In this bipolar situation, the cabinet and the coalition parties frequently clash over basic policy, and coordinating policy with the coalition is often laborious. The biggest problem is that the LDP, which is playing the central role in the policy process, is too closely tied to special interests and the groups representing them and thus cannot solidify opinion within the party. It is eminently clear that the LDP cannot play the main role in carrying reforms forward.

In view of this situation, I strongly advocate amending the Constitution to stipulate direct election of the prime minister. The object of introducing such a system would be to invest the prime minister with national authority. Without such authority, I believe, neither the prime minister nor the cabinet can exercise true leadership and thus cannot overcome the vested interests in the old system, a process which is essential for reforms. First, when a party leader is elected in Japan, the elected candidate's promise is not viewed as a party promise. Second, because Japan has adopted the parliamentary cabinet system, the prime minister is formally chosen by Diet vote. In other words, there is no direct involvement of the public in the election process, and as a result, generations of prime ministers have been dependent on ruling-party (especially LDP) Diet members and faction leaders. Basically, there is no distinction between the prime minister and faction leaders in terms of authority. This means that the prime minister cannot advance his own policies or push through reforms based on his own convictions in the face of opposition forces within his party. Thus, the party's policymaking bodies, which are headed by faction leaders, exercise their power extraterritorially, and the prime minister is forced to engage in policy coordination with them from the start. The reason that the United Kingdom, which like Japan has a parliamentary cabinet system, does not engage in this kind of "bipolar politics"—and the reason that party heavyweights all join the cabinet—is that in U.K. general elections, party leaders are in the forefront, which in effect amounts to direct election of the prime minister. In other words, the party leader's pledges are party pledges, and if that party takes power, they become the prime minister's pledges. In Japan, where there is little sense of the head of the party being the leader of the party and of voting for parties as such, the adoption of a complete single-member-constituency system for general elections would render it impossible to replicate the United Kingdom's *de facto* direct-election system.

Direct election of the prime minister would mean that a party's very fate rested on the outcome of the election, with prime ministerial candidates' pledges being their parties' pledges. In other words, through direct elections, prime ministerial candidates' pledges would guide and coalesce their parties' pledges. And the introduction of direct elections would probably lead to party heavyweights, policy experts, and leaders of Diet cliques emerging together as candidates for cabinet posts. This would ameliorate the present system of bipolar politics.

Prior Review by the Ruling Party

Direct election of the prime minister, although an improvement, is not sufficient in and of itself to do away completely with the current bipolar structure. It is also necessary to improve the system of prior review of bills and other measures by the ruling party. When cabinet bills are drafted, the ruling party customarily reviews them, but the time allotted is brief and government agencies' input is limited, resulting in a highly unsatisfactory process. Moreover, the Diet committee deliberation that follows LDP review is formalistic because of tight party discipline. Given this situation, it would be more effective if we were to take advantage of the recently devised system of parliamentary secretaries and senior vice ministers by having them serve concurrently as party division directors and deputy directors of the Policy Research Council and be involved in the drafting of cabinet bills from the start. And if party review were conducted simultaneously with the policymaking process in government agencies, I believe this would lead not only to more effective collaboration between politicians and bureaucrats in the policymaking process, but also to the improvement of politicians' policymaking skills, thus killing two birds with one stone.

Most importantly, we should abolish the final decision by the party (in the case of the LDP, the decision by the General Council) in relation to policy, leaving only the cabinet decision. In other words, we should strengthen the party cabinet system, making the cabinet decision the ruling party's highest and final policy decision. The present situation of bipolar policy formulation by the party and the cabinet leads to postponing or watering down needed reforms. This process should be consolidated immediately and, as mentioned above, the focal point should be the cabinet. I should note that this idea means getting rid of the controversial *prior* review by the ruling party (that is, prior to the cabinet decision), while not repudiating ruling party review itself. If we look at

the example of Germany, there is vigorous ruling party review, but it is conducted *after*, not before, legislation has been submitted to parliament.

In my view, the LDP Policy Research Council should be retained, with parliamentary secretaries and senior vice ministers serving concurrently as division directors and deputy directors. They would see that division decisions were debated in cabinet and endorsed through cabinet decisions. (At that point, a distinction would be made between matters requiring strong party discipline and those necessitating only loose discipline, for reasons given below.) This, coupled with direct election of the prime minister (direct election serving to promote unification of policy formulation within the cabinet), would permit party heavyweights—including the chairman of the Policy Research Council—and policy experts to join the cabinet en masse. Cabinet ministers would also evolve from being mere spokespeople for government agencies to becoming true ministers of state, exercising comprehensive and strategic leadership of government agencies. This is what the Constitution sees as the primary duty of cabinet members.

The Ruling Party-Diet Relationship

Thus far, I have been discussing the role of politicians in terms of the relationship between the ruling party and the cabinet, but we must also reconsider their role in terms of the relationship between the ruling party and the Diet. There is no doubt that Diet members will be assessed on their performance in getting members' bills passed and amending cabinet bills. In terms of the future role of politicians in policy decisions, however, given Japan's present legislative conditions—inadequate attention to upgrading politicians' policymaking skills or to ensuring adherence to the proposition that new legislation supersedes old, and the need for advance coordination of proposed legislation with related laws—we should change the Diet so that, to begin with, members' amendments to bills submitted by the cabinet, especially those originating with bureaucrats, become commonplace. Working toward increasing the number of bills submitted by members should be the next step. We must not forget that change in the policymaking process is also Diet reform.

In this connection, improving opposition parties' ability to crystallize opinion and formulate policy is highly desirable. To enhance opposition parties' policymaking skills, treasury funds should be made available specifically for opposition parties to gather information, as in the case of the United Kingdom's shadow cabinet system. In addition, a system of

government agencies seconding personnel to both ruling- and opposition-party staff should be introduced to provide information and follow up on policy proposals, with especially generous support to opposition parties.

Looking to the future, we may need to designate a way to encourage the practice of Diet members submitting bills. I would like to suggest four points to create the necessary environment. First, Diet members' policy staff should be upgraded. Diet members' policy staffers should be made Diet staff members, and after a certain amount of training, they should be assigned to parties and pooled according to policy area. Seconding of bureaucrats to political parties would also contribute to this. Second, the conditions regarding the number of Diet members required to submit a members' bill should be relaxed. Individual Diet members have the right to legislate, even though the Constitution does not regulate it, so the Diet Law should be amended to allow even one Diet member to submit a bill. (I have already submitted a bill to this effect to the LDP in the House of Councillors.) The danger of self-serving bills can be averted adequately by reviewing bills at the time of submission to determine whether they will be referred to the Diet. Third, in connection with the above points, a regular day should be set for reviewing members' bills to determine whether they will be formally referred to the Diet for deliberation. Giving priority to cabinet bills is natural in a parliamentary cabinet system, but for this very reason, it is essential to set aside one day a week for reviewing members' bills. These three conditions represent the bare minimum required to encourage members' bills. A fourth condition is the abolition of the institutionalized system whereby party factions give their approval to the bills before they are submitted to the Diet. Within this particular system, party discipline is excessive to the point of inhibiting the politicians' legislative rights.

One additional problem in this connection is the timing of the imposition of party discipline by the ruling parties, and particularly the LDP. Traditionally, party discipline is imposed before questioning when a bill is in committee, which means that even if good policy proposals emerge from committee questioning, the bill is seldom amended, so that committee questioning has been more or less reduced to a formality. We should shift to a system of imposing party discipline when a bill is voted on in committee, *after* the questioning process. This is the method followed in Germany, which like Japan has strong party discipline, and we should learn from this example. I believe that if we amend the policy process in this way, questioning by all committee members will be

encouraged instead of the present pattern of confrontation between ruling and opposition parties. We would then see a healthy flow of amendment proposals in committee and debate would also become more accessible to the public, contributing to building the national consensus that is crucial to educational reform.

CONCLUSION

What is needed today is not politicians who are members of Diet cliques specializing in different branches of government administration, but rather politicians who can, in the words of the Constitution, “conduct affairs of state”—politicians capable of overseeing affairs of state as a whole and engaging in comprehensive and strategic policy planning and coordination. The “partial governments” of Diet cliques and individual government agencies are relics of Japan’s catching-up period; their persistence is a classic case of an organizational model successful in the past now standing in the way of change. We must not forget that the reform Japan needs to undertake is not only huge in scale but must be accomplished in a limited time. For this reason alone, establishing a cabinet-led system that unifies the ruling party’s policy formulation system on the basis of direct election of the prime minister is an urgent task.

The Koizumi cabinet is said to have been formed by means of pseudo-direct election. So far, buoyed by strong public support, it has enjoyed considerable success, including reform of special public corporations and the medical insurance system. But the limits of this approach to reform are also evident. Each reform has required compromise with Diet cliques. Perhaps the clearest evidence of the limits to this approach is the fact that Prime Minister Koizumi himself is urging direct election of the prime minister and unification of policy formulation.

The establishment of a policymaking system suited to pushing through reforms is itself the most critical policy reform needed in Japan today. As the saying goes, the longest way around is the shortest way home.