

第4部 課題

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第15回 毎日パソコン入力コンクール 6月大会

【課題】

第4部 英文B

Conquering decline in voter turnout has become national challenge

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Editorial: Conquering decline in voter turnout has become national challenge 


The declining voter turnout could shake the foundations of Japan's democracy. The voter turnout in the Dec. 14 House of Representatives election hit a postwar low of 52.66 percent in single-seat constituencies, down 6.66 points from the previous low in 2012. 


It is true that the general election was abruptly called without points of contention that drew much attention from voters. Still, the problem is all the more serious because the downward trend in voter turnout in Japan is seen in both national and local elections. All levels of government should seriously consider measures to halt this damaging trend. 


Even though the Dec. 14 lower house election was an opportunity for voters to select which party should take power, nearly half of Japanese voters did not bother to cast a ballot. The turnout did not reach 60 percent in any of the country's 47 prefectures. Moreover, the figure fell below 50 percent in eight prefectures -- Aomori, Miyagi, Toyama, Ishikawa, Ehime, Tokushima, Fukuoka and Miyazaki. It was commonly held that voter turnout tends to be higher in rural areas than urban regions, but this is no longer true. 


The voter turnout in national elections declined sharply in the December 2012 lower house election, which swept the Liberal Democratic Party (LDP) back into power, and the figure for the 2013 House of Councillors election was the third lowest in history. Experts say this is largely because votes of many of those who do not support any particular political party have nowhere to go. 

Additionally, voter turnouts in local elections remain low, as


was seen in the last Tokyo gubernatorial election earlier this year. Professor Masao Matsumoto, head of Saitama University's Social Survey Research Center and an expert in voting trend analysis, pointed out that the turnout declined in 14 of 18 mayoral elections held in Saitama Prefecture in 2013 compared to the polls previous. He then warned that it is a serious problem that the number of people casting ballots in elections for public office has been declining. The declining voter turnout should be understood as a structural problem. 


If fewer voters go to the polls, it will increase the distance between voters and local and national governments, shaking the foundations of Japanese democracy. To prevent that, it goes without saying that political parties and individual candidates must hold in-depth debate that can draw attention from the public, while voters must be fully aware of the weight of their votes. 


In particular, it is an urgent task to implement measures to raise the voter turnout among young people. The minimum voting age should be lowered from the current 20 to 18 from the standpoint of nurturing young people's awareness as sovereign citizens of Japan's democracy, and encouraging these people to make a habit of going out to vote. At schools, students should have more opportunities to learn about elections through mock voting and policy debate so that they become interested in elections before they reach adulthood. 

It is also important to create an environment in which voters can cast their ballots more easily. Poll hours should be extended beyond 8 p.m., and the number of polling stations should be increased to encourage voters to use the early voting system. 

As the population is aging rapidly, it is feared that a growing number of senior citizens will be unable to go to polling stations. It is indispensable to redistribute polling stations,


which have decreased in number as a result of municipal mergers, and take other steps to help elderly people go to the polls. The government should also consider allowing voters to cast their ballots at any polling station in their constituency. 


The Public Offices Election Act, which places strict regulations on election campaigns -- such as a ban on door-to-door canvassing -- should be reviewed, but there are many things that local governments can improve at their own discretion. Local elections to be held across the country next spring are an opportunity to put the brakes on the decline in voter turnout. 

December 19, 2014(Mainichi Japan) 



Yoroku: Making barrier-free films 

Barrier-free films, for anyone unfamiliar with the term, refers to those that include narration for blind and partially-sighted viewers to explain the content being shown, as well as films with subtitles for spectators who are deaf or hard of hearing. 

Some screenings also feature narrators who stand beside the screen and voice the film's scenes -- giving those watching it to experience something akin to attending a live performance. 

While these types of events were long held at only a small number of Braille libraries for the blind, recent backing from companies and private foundations has brought the showings to libraries and event spaces across the country. Film production companies have also begun providing support -- meaning that it is now often possible to attend barrier-free screenings of the latest big-screen cinema hits. 

Every year in February, a disabled rights event takes place in the city of Otsu. Titled Amenity Forum, and attended by some 1,500 people, one component of the event is a barrier-free film festival. Screened this year was "Lady Maiko" by director Masayuki Sudo, who made an appearance at the festival -- and who

also writes all of his own narration. ↵

"I really had no idea that blind and partially sighted people were interested in coming to movie theaters to enjoy films," admits Suo, who says that he has closed his eyes during narrated screenings of his own films to experience the effect of the spoken imagery. "But scenes from the film kept popping into my head," he said with a wry laugh. ↵

So-called "silver seats" in theaters are no longer reserved only for the elderly, but are increasingly open to the disabled or pregnant women. Meanwhile, toilets for wheelchair users have evolved to allow multiple uses, while easy-to-understand signage aimed at people with intellectual disabilities has also proven a great help to foreign tourists unable to read Japanese. ↵

Showing consideration for people who face difficulties with respect to day-to-day living is, in fact, something that benefits a great number of individuals -- and also helps to spur social change. ↵

"I think that it will become more common for filmmakers to keep blind and partially-sighted individuals in mind when creating their works," said Suo, who noted that he has made his own films to be enjoyed by people across the board. "I think things are changing." ("Yoroku," a front-page column in the Mainichi Shimbun) ↵

March 08, 2015(Mainichi Japan)
