次世代のために

民主主義を深める新しい道

昨年12月19日、東京・銀座の大手都市内発電工場で大爆発事故が起きた。事故原因は、都市内発電工場で使用されているガスが大量に発生し、そのガスが燃えると大きな火災を引き起こしたためである。

このような事故は、我々が日常生活を送る中で時折発生するが、それを防ぐためには、私たちが行うべきことが何でもある。民主主義は、我々の自由を守るためのものであり、それを深めるための新しい道を見つけることが必要である。

民主主義の根拠は、我々が自由に選ぶことができるということである。そのためには、我々は、民主主義の理解を深め、それを活用するための知識を身に付ける必要がある。
Current democratic systems have to solve many difficult scientific and technological problems such as nuclear plant accidents, climate change, and complications in genetic engineering.

With the situation in Fukushima, there is a risk that problems in those fields may remain unknown even in the future.

It is unfair that future generations cannot discuss or vote for those problems now even though they will have to deal with nuclear waste and a warmer earth caused by current generations.

We also see similar issues around us such as in Social Security and taxations that we postponed to pay for in the future.

Current democracy is not good at solving generational problems systematically. How is it possible to suppress the selfishness of the current generations and make decisions taking future generations into consideration?

We can find one possible answer in the “Deliberative Poll (DP)” held at Keio University on May 28 and 29 in Mita, Tokyo.

It is different from a normal survey. One hundred twenty seven people composed of male, female, and all generations were chosen from randomly selected three thousand people from all over Japan. Some participants were from Iwate, Miyagi, and Fukushima Prefecture therefore turning each classroom into a microcosm of Japan.

The main theme was “Pension System, A Generational Choice.” The participants discussed three themes including “Social Insurance Method or All Tax Method” in small groups. At the plenary session, participants asked scholars and specialists a variety of questions related to the theme.

It was more than 10 hours “deliberation” in total. The purpose was not to make a consensus as a whole but to make each participant understand the issues over the two days.

One of the interesting points is that they had to answer the same surveys before and after the discussions therefore we can understand clearly whether or not the participants changed their thoughts.

For example, the idea that “consumption tax should be increased and used for Social Security” was more supported after the deliberation than it was before.
Another example is that more participants supported the idea that “we should take future generation into account more than current generation” after the deliberation.

Professor James Fishkin of Stanford University, a founder of DP who came to Japan for this event said “What I can say from past experiences in other countries is that people are actually smart. If people were provided this opportunity, people would come up with rational ideas.”

Indeed, some of the past results were used in actual policy decision processes in other countries.

According to Professor Yasunori Sone of Keio University, a chief of Keio DP, it is a unique case in DP that focuses on generational problem. “We can change Japanese democracy if we can use DP to solve the problem of fairness among generations.”

Considering that we have to watch the malfunction of the Diet and partisan politics, the DP has a great meaning in terms of challenging to create a new democratic method.

How about a combination of a referendum and a DP? For example, what kind of results we would see if many people vote after they have the opportunity to “learn,” “think,” and “talk”?

There are many places we can add, reform, and develop the current democratic system.