



New Japan Women's
Association

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*60th Anniversary of the Enforcement of the Constitution,
45th Birthday of Shinfujin*

**Women Say "No" to Social Disparity, "Yes" to Article 9!
We the People Who Decide Our Own Future!**

Message from the President

In the year marking the 60th anniversary of the enforcement of the Japanese Constitution, the New Japan Women's Association (NJWA / Shinfujin) celebrates its 45th birthday. While the present Cabinet under Prime Minister Abe Shinzo is pushing ahead with the constitutional revision and the "structural reform," which increasingly conflict with women and the people, the struggle is developing in Japan, encouraged by the worldwide growth of the call for peaceful resolution of the conflict and the opposition to the neo-liberal economic policy.

At this juncture, Shinfujin is called for to play its role more than ever, upholding its five objectives; to strive to prevent the adverse constitutional revision and nuclear war, to improve living conditions, to extend women's rights, to ensure the well-being of children, and to join hands with women around the world. As an NGO in special consultative status with the United Nations Economic and Social Council, we will continue our grassroots efforts to achieve the goals of gender equality, development and peace at home and internationally. Most importantly, we do our utmost to preserve the Constitution's war-renouncing Article 9,



TAKADA Kimiko
NJWA President

treasure to all humanity.

Abe Cabinet Pushing on the Constitutional Amendment, while Increasing the Social Disparity

In September 2006, the coalition government of the Liberal Democratic and Komei Parties led by Prime Minister Abe Shinzo came into power. Prime Minister Abe is a superhawk who has visited Yasukuni Shrine, where Class-A war criminals are buried and honored, and has refused to acknowledge Japan's responsibility for waging war of aggression against and colonized Asian nations. As a strong advocate for patriotism and traditional family values, he has been a man at the wheel in the backlash moves against the effort for eliminating gender biased attitude, including the sex education based on reproductive health / rights. He has even attacked the Basic Law for a Gender-equal Society adopted unanimously in the Diet. Almost all the Cabinet members under prime minister Abe belong to the Japan Conference, a right-wing group glorifying Japan's past war of aggression and driving the campaign for constitutional revision. Even the woman Minister for Gender Equality is from the backlash camp. Women and NGOs working for gender equality have raised concerns about this extraordinary lineup.

In only five months from the inauguration of the Abe Cabinet, two officials appointed by the prime minister,

the Tax Commission Chair and the Administrative Reform Minister were driven to resign over scandals. Shortly afterward, Health, Labor and Welfare Minister, triggered angry protest both from women and men by calling women "birth-giving machines," and later saying "Young people are healthy when they wish to marry and have two or more children." Japan's birthrate has dropped to 1.25, and the downward trend is continuing.

The major cause of this is the deteriorating social environments for childbirth and childcare due to the shrinking family budget, the world's highest education costs, excessively long hours of work blocking men from fulfilling their family responsibility. It is unjustifiable that the Welfare Minister, who is supposed to deal with the root cause of the low birthrate, made remarks blaming women for not having more children in disregard of the difficulties facing women and workers. Prime Minister Abe should also be held accountable for having appointed him as minister. It is unacceptable that he continues to stand up for the minister, when lawmakers of different parties and the public are demanding his resignation.

The Abe Cabinet's neo-liberal "structural reform" policy is increasing poverty and gap between the rich and the poor, and the "working poor" has become a serious social issue. In addition to imposing heavier taxes on the public by abolishing fixed-rate tax cuts, increasing the premiums of national health and nursing care insurance, the government plans to phase out extra benefits for single parent families receiving welfare benefits.

On the other hand, the government is offering further massive tax cuts to large corporations already prospering by personnel cost cuts replacing regular employees with non-regular workers. An unlawful practice now prevalent is "contract employment in disguise," meaning staffing agencies and companies use temporary workers as contract-based workers. By law, if a company uses a temporary worker for a certain period, it must offer the worker direct employment and ensure their safety and health, but such is not the case with a contract worker.

Its unfair economic policy, a series of scandals involving cabinet ministers, and Prime Minister Abe's hawkish face revealed by his obsession with the

constitutional revision have helped to decrease the Cabinet's approval rate to 40 percent, while the disapproval rate increasing to 44 percent. This year, simultaneous local elections are scheduled for April, and the House of Councilors' election for July. The two nation-wide elections will be a big chance for the Japanese people to give their verdict on the Abe Cabinet for its policy leading to further social disparity and militarization.

Children and Education

Basic Law of Education Adversely Revised, and the Struggle Continues

In the extraordinary Diet session convened immediately after its inauguration, the Abe Cabinet gave "top priority" to the adverse revision of the Fundamental Law of Education, to change the purpose of education from one of guaranteeing human rights based on the principles of the Peace Constitution, into one of fostering citizens who can serve the state. The odds were on Abe's side with the ruling parties commanding an overwhelming majority in the Diet, but the movement calling for the withdrawal of the revision bill rapidly grew nationwide involving parents, teachers, teachers' unions and broader sections of the people, not allowing them to get the bill enacted until the very end of the Diet session. The bill was railroaded through the Diet, but the people's struggle made history, because it reminded everyone that after 60 years from the end of the war, the ideal of the Fundamental Law of Education has taken root among educational circles and the rest of the nation, and that the growing struggle against the constitutional revision had laid the groundwork for the development of the struggle for defending the educational law.

Shinfujin members across the country went all out to block the bill, encouraging younger members who hardly knew the Fundamental Law of Education to read the text of the law, so that they would realize the aim of the law corresponded to what children and parents were calling for. Young mothers, now aware that the education law had much to do with the future of their children, started to take actions, organizing seminars, making campaign material, collecting signatures, and going to the Diet to lobby the

lawmakers or to stage a sit-in for the first time in their life. These grassroots actions spread out nationwide, and in many places including smaller cities and towns many people rallied against the revision.



The revised education law contravenes the Constitution in many ways, and the need now is to make a thorough use of the Constitution to block the compulsion of implementing it in schools. The struggle continues!

Children Killing Themselves

The whole society has been shocked at series of suicides linked to school bullying. Underlying the bullying in the class is the lack of political will to address the "excessive competition" in education, as pointed out by the U.N. Committee on the Rights of the Child, leaving Japanese children exposed to severe stress. On December 10, 2006, Shinfujin held a symposium on this problem. The panel included the mother whose son, a junior high student, had killed himself to escape from bullying. 250 people gathered to discuss what should be done to save children, and how to build a network of parents, teachers and community members to create an environment where children can foster human relations based on caring. Shinfujin local members are taking initiatives in organizing symposium and discussions in their communities.

Peace

Defending the Constitution

In the year commemorating the 60th anniversary of the Japanese Constitution, the Abe Cabinet is making its way for changing Japan into war-waging nation. It enacted the Defense Ministry-related Law, mandating that the Self-Defense Forces engage in overseas activities as their primary task and upgrading the Defense Agency to Defense Ministry. Prime Minister Abe has stated in public that he would push the bill to establish the procedures for national referendum on constitutional revision to be enacted in the current Diet session. He has further said that he would make the

constitutional revision a central issue in the Upper House election scheduled for this coming July. The biggest opposition Democratic Party of Japan has submitted its own bill on national referendum for constitutional revision, and that both sides reportedly have almost reached an agreement on revising respective bills so that they can jointly support the bill. It is urgent to further develop public opinion and the movement to scrap the bill, making it known to the public that these bills are aiming to establish a procedure in favor of those who want to revise the constitution by setting the lowest possible legal hurdles for it.

Internationally, the call for the abolition of nuclear weapons and for a peaceful, just world is becoming a major trend. Even in the United States, President Bush is rapidly losing popular support for his adherence to the unjust war in and occupation of Iraq. At the same time, the voice is spreading out in Asia and throughout the world that Article 9 is a treasure to humanity. Prime Minister Abe stands alone in the world current for his remarks that the Iraq war was a just war, and that he would not hesitate to exercise the right to collective defense in violation of the Constitution.

In response to the appeal made by nine prominent figures for defending Article 9, "more than 6,000 "Article 9 Associations" have been formed in communities, workplaces, and various fields across the country. Their influence on public opinion is visible. In a poll conducted by a local newspaper, those who think the government should strictly observe Article 9 increased, and those supporting the "revision" decreased from 51% in 2004 to 37.9% at the end of 2006.

Shinfujin has collected and submitted to the Diet 930,000 signatures in support of Article 9. We attach importance to learning activity, especially among younger generation without firsthand knowledge of war. Our members in communities and the workplace get together to read the text of the Constitution, to listen to the stories of seniors with war experiences or atomic bombing, or to discuss any issues they are concerned about linking them to the Constitution. Inspired by the achievement of the struggle against the revision of the education law, Shinfujin members of all

generations are working vigorously to defend Japan's Peace Constitution.

Opposition to the U. S. Military Realignment, Movement for Nuclear Abolition

According to the military transformation and realignment the U.S. government is promoting on a global scale, command centers of Army, Navy and Air Force will be concentrated in U.S. bases in Japan. With Japanese SDFs integrated into them, these bases will be reinforced sortie and command bases. While the Japanese and U.S. governments are pushing ahead with the implementation of the plan, the movement against the realignment is developing in many municipalities concerned, with municipal heads, governments and people working together. Regardless of their thoughts and creed, people are united around the slogan, "If we remain silence, our town will be occupied by the base forever.

Under the pretext of reducing the burden of the people of Okinawa, where 75 percent of the U.S. military bases are concentrated, the Japanese and U.S. governments agreed to relocate U.S. Marines to Guam, and the Japanese government is going to pay 6.09 billion dollars covering 60 percent of the total cost of 10.3 billion dollars. This has ignited anger of the Japanese people, who are suffering from the increased burden due to the reduction of social services and tax increase. Debbie Quinata, woman leader of the indigenous people's organization in Guam called I Nasion Chamoru (The Chamoru Nation), who was invited by the Women's Peace Fund to the 2006 World Conference against A & H Bombs, said in the exchange meeting with Shinfujin that the transfer of the U.S. Marines would make the whole island of Guam a U.S. base with reinforced function. She expressed her concern that it would affect the tourism industry, the country's main source of income, and that the damage caused by the military presence would increase.

Shinfujin takes the lead in the struggle against the U.S. military realignment in different municipalities, with the appeal for the preservation of the Peace Constitution, to ensure that our children can live in a society without military bases and war.

In Iwakuni City, Yamaguchi Prefecture, citizens launched a campaign for a referendum on the transfer of U.S. carrier-borne aircraft from Atsugi Air Base in Kanagawa Prefecture. Shinfujin members in Iwakuni took to the streets appealing to the citizens to go to the polls, whether they supported or opposed the planned transfer. Their advocacy campaign contributed to raising people's awareness and to the success of the referendum.

In Kanagawa Prefecture, Shinfujin will commemorate the 30th year of the U.S. warplane crash on the residential area in Yokohama in September 1977, which killed a mother and her two little sons. To pass the tragedy on to the next generation and to give momentum to the campaign against military bases, Shinfujin members have produced picture cards on this incident, and sponsored film show in different places in the prefecture, inspiring younger members to get involved in actions. The head of Shinfujin branch in Zama City, where U.S. Camp Zama is located and the U.S. plans to set up a new Army command, is running for the gubernatorial election in April. In Yokosuka, the city hosting the U.S. naval base, the mayor joined the Governor in accepting the U.S. plan to deploy a nuclear-powered aircraft carrier. Determined that they are the ones to decide on the issue affecting their lives, citizens including Shinfujin members launched a campaign to make a direct claim to the local government to hold a referendum on the deployment. They collected 41,551 signatures representing about 12 per cent of the eligible voters, largely exceeding the minimum requirement of one fiftieth (about 7,200) to have the mayor propose a bill for a referendum, but the city council voted it down. Citizens are continuing the struggle, informing the public which council members voted for or against the bill, so that they can give a





verdict in the city council election this spring.

In response to North Korea's nuclear test, Japanese ministers and politicians argued Japan's going nuclear, and the government is accelerating the participation in the U.S. missile defense system. The Abe Cabinet's military-first approach is not only unbecoming to the government of the atomic bombed country, but also runs counter to the world trend for nuclear abolition. As the strong nuclear abolition advocate, Shinfujin is carrying out the signature drive centered on 6 and 9 of every month in commemoration of Hiroshima and Nagasaki Days, calling for the start of the negotiations on a international treaty for abolishing nuclear weapons. It also sends its members to the yearly meetings on peace and nuclear abolition such as the Bikini Day event on March 1, the World Conference against Atomic & Hydrogen Bombs and No Nukes! Women's Forum in August, and the Japan Peace Conference in autumn.

People's Livelihood and Social Security

Facing the increasing gap and poverty, Shinfujin members are organizing seminars on taxation and support system, or consultation meetings for those in need. They get information on the existing tax relief measures to claim refund on their taxes. At the same time, they lobby the national and local governments to take relief measures to reduce the burden of resident tax and the premiums of national health and nursing care insurance. In many municipalities, they have succeeded in getting such measures established. Shinfujin has long worked for free medical services for small children, helping to get the system established in all 47 prefectures in some way or another. For the

families with schoolchildren, we have been demanding that the cost for school material in compulsory be reduced and abolished, while lobbying for increased school expense subsidies for low-income families as well as in the education budget.

One of our uniqueness is that we encourage our members to keep household accounts, collect data on household spending on consumption tax and conduct a yearly research on living conditions. We publish the result to show how the tax increase and cuts in social security are affecting the household economy.

Against the government's attacks on the socially vulnerable including the elderly, the handicapped, and single parent families, to reduce or even abolish the allowances and subsidies, the people concerned have stood up to fight back. Their courageous act has attracted support from broader sections of people including the conservatives, forcing the government to withdraw the policy of discontinuing subsidies to services for the disabled and incurable disease patients.

Advancement of Women

In the Global Gender Gap Report 2006, released by the World Economic Forum, Japan is ranked 79th among 115 countries covering over 90 per cent of the world's population. According to the "Human Development Report" released in November 2006, Japan ranks 43rd on GEM (Gender Empowerment Measure). The two figures show how far Japan lags behind the rest of the countries in gender equality and advancement of women. Above all, the percentage of women in parliament and in decision-making level in various fields is extremely low. The Japanese government must commit itself to the international agreements including the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women and the Beijing Platform for Action, demonstrating its political will to realize de facto equality.

Revised Equal Opportunity Employment Law

In 2006, the Equal Opportunity Employment Law

was revised. The Japanese government enacted the law in 1985, as national legislation necessary for Japan to ratify CEDAW. It was revised in 1997 to ban all kinds of discriminatory treatment of women including in recruitment and employment. It also committed the employer to take preventive measures against sexual harassment in the workplace. However, the revised law had many loopholes making it little effective in eliminating discrimination against women. Worse still, the government deleted from the Labor Standards Law protection measures for women lifting ban and restrictions on night, overtime labor and work on holidays by women. This has become one of the major causes of difficulties facing women balancing work and family responsibilities.

When the Equal Opportunity Law was submitted for revision again in 2006, Shinfujin carried out investigation on discriminatory treatment of women in the workplace and launched a signature campaign calling for a drastic amendment to the law to make it effective in establishing humane working environment, where men and women workers can equally share the family responsibility. The revision made this time has some positive aspects, such as ban on unfair treatment of women because of pregnancy and childbirth. But it failed to address "indirect discrimination," the remaining problem women have long called and the CEDAW Committee has recommended for its redress. Far from eliminating unjust practices, the revised law limited the "indirect discrimination" to three cases, leaving space for companies to evade its responsibility for ensuring equal treatment for men and women. Facing strong concerns and criticism, the parliament adopted an additional resolution calling for an earliest possible review of the clause concerning the indirect discrimination.

To meet the business circles' demand for a through personnel cost reduction, the government attempted to submit a bill to introduce a white-collar exemption system that will allow employers not to pay overtime by removing restrictions on working hours for workers with a set annual income. Due to the growing opposition from the workers and people, the government had to shelve the submission of the bill to the current Diet session. To force the government completely give up the introduction of the white-collar

exemption system, Shinfujin is carrying out questionnaire among its members, their families and fellow workers about their working conditions to have factual data to be used in the advocacy campaign as well as in lobbying.

The Second Basic Plan for Gender Equality

In December 2005, the Cabinet approved the Second Basic Plan for Gender Equality. The second plan defined "gender perspective" so narrowly as "to have awareness that sexism, stereotyped roles, and bias are social attributes," although the term "gender" refers to the economic, social, political and cultural attributes and opportunities associated with being male and female. Furthermore, it placed the term "gender free" widely used in Japan meaning "free from gender-based stereotyping." This is a clear example of the Japanese government's weak attitude toward the right-wing advocates of constitutional revision intensifying attacks on gender equality, by mobilizing their fellow lawmakers, local council members and the mass media. The government should stop making double-tongue speeches at the UN Commission on the Status of Women or other international meetings as if it is undauntedly promoting gender equality, while it fails to take undaunted stance on the backlash moves.

We are also deeply concerned that the section "Spreading awareness of reproductive health/rights" and the language "enhancing sex education at school" included in the original Basic Plan were deleted, despite the alarming situation with the lowering trend in the age of starting to have sexual relations, the increase in teenagers undergoing abortion or picking up sexually transmitted diseases, and the spread of HIV / AIDS. It is essential for the girl child and women to have scientific knowledge on sex for their life-long health. In this regard, Shinfujin, at the consultation between the government and NGOs on the 51th CSW, called on the government to overcome the weakness of the second plan.

