We Demand the Retraction of the Refusal by the Government to Appoint Nominees as Council Members to the Science Council of Japan

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At the inception of the 25th term of the Science Council of Japan, the government has refused to appoint six of the candidates who were elected by the Science Council of Japan. This measure, taken from a political standpoint, refusing candidates elected in accordance with the Science Council of Japan Act and based on the judgement of scientists is an act that tramples upon the law and Article 23 of the Constitution of Japan, which provides for academic freedom, and is therefore totally unacceptable. We demand that the six candidates be appointed immediately.

The Science Council of Japan, after a reorganization of the pre-war National Research Council of Japan, the Imperial Academy and the Japan Society for the Promotion of Science, was established in 1949 as a "special organization" under the jurisdiction of the prime minister operating independently of the government.

The Preamble to the Science Council of Japan Act, which indicates the ground for the establishment of the Council, states that, standing in the conviction that science is the foundation of a cultured nation, under the collective will of scientists, the mission of the Science Council of Japan is to contribute to the peaceful reconstruction of Japan, to the well-being of human society, and to scientific progress in partnership with the world's academic societies.

This is because scientists who faced the task of rebuilding a peaceful nation from the devastation of the defeat, deeply reflected on their experiences of the prewar system and cooperation with the war; the suppression of freedom of speech and learning by the prewar military state power such as that represented by the "emperor-organ theory" (theory of the Emperor as an organ of government) incident and the Takigawa incident in the 1930s, or inhumane research under the influence of the military, who made frequent visits to universities, forcibly mobilizing scientists for military research, including the development of poisonous gas and biological weapons, human experimentation, research on death rays and atomic bombs, and research on development of weapons for the arming of the whole national people. Furthermore, the ideal of this preamble, which promises to contribute to peace and the well-being of human society was summarized in statements refuting the conduct of scientific research for military purposes in 1950 and 1967. In 2017, opposing the introduction by the Ministry of Defense of Research Promotion System of Military Security Technology Fund in 2015, it was announced that these statements would be unremittingly adhered to.

At the same time, for the council’s purpose of promoting and enhancing the field of science, and having science reflected in and permeated into administration, industries, and people’s lives, the Council has proposed the establishment of a large number of research institutes and centers such as the Yukawa Institute for Theoretical Physics, Kyoto University, as well as laying the foundation for the joint utilization research system. The Council has also made efforts to secure the sufficiency, comprehensiveness and diversity of basic research, and has made repeated recommendations for the Science and Technology Basic Plan. The recommendation for the three principles of democracy, independence, and openness, which have been built in the Atomic Energy Basic Law in 1955, and become Japan’s basic stance for nuclear research, development and usage, are derived from the basic stance of reflection upon the prewar academic system and reflecting the achievements of science in the people’s lives.

Internationally, as an institution representing Japan, the Council has affiliated with international science organizations in many scientific fields, including the International Council for Science (ICSU. In 2017, ISCU integrated with the International Social Science Council, ISSC, to form the International Science Council, ISC), and has made great contributions to the state of and promotion of science and technology in Japan, such as enhancing scientific research in Japan, in partnership with world academia.

Independence from the administrative command mechanism has been acclaimed since the time of the Council’s inception due to reflections upon history and the natural relationship between science and society, but it is natural that some recommendations are at times critical of government policy. The government being dissatisfied with these critical opinions and attitudes of the Council, reduced the power of the Science Council by partially amending the Science Council of Japan Act in 1983, and at the same time established the Council for Science and Technology as an advisory body to the prime minister on science and technology policy. The 2004 revision of the law brought about a further deterioration of the “scholarly parliament” character that brings together the collective will of scholars, but the Council has still developed activities based on the objectivity, criticality and comprehensiveness necessary to deepen communication between scientists by maintaining independence and to develop science and utilize the achievements. Since 2008 the Council has made more than 300 recommendations.

In order to further strengthen the social function of the Science Council of Japan, which is to promote and enhance the field of science, and have science reflected in and permeated into administration, industries, and people’s lives (Article 2 of the Act), it is necessary to enhance its independence and strengthen its democratic. communication capabilities. This is because the progress and methods of scientific research are diverse, and freedom of thinking and flexibility, freedom of speech and thought, and democratic debate among scientists are particularly required.

There are various opinions about how scientific research and scientific measures should tackle

unknown problems, and there may be various ways of evaluating scientific achievements. If the administration of the time arbitrarily excludes some of them, this will eventually distort the scientific process of reaching the necessary conclusions by demonstrating the maximum benefit of the scientific capabilities of the current society through the exchange of diverse opinions. There are various methods and possibilities through which scientific achievements may contribute to the well-being of the people of the nation, comprehensive judgments being required from a scientific standpoint. But here, too, what is strongly required is, once again, the publication of scientific achievements, freedom of speech and research stance and independent judgment, the independence of academic content, and a democratic cooperative system.

Research on the new coronavirus and virus countermeasures are also full of unknown problems, but if political criteria are introduced to exclude some scientists simply because they do not coincide with the interests of the administration, the neutral scientific investigative activities required of scientists may be hindered and finally fall short of the expectations of the public. Judgment criteria based on political interests or an administrative standpoint are not always in harmony with the scientific criteria of scientists, but rather distort scientific judgments, and thus the utilization of scientific achievements may ultimately be contrary to the interests of the people of the nation. It is impossible to forget the bitter experience of the history of Japan’s nuclear power, that is, the promotion of the “safety myth” through the exclusion of the scientific views and knowledge of some scientists on the basis of the so-called “nuclear village,” formed due to cooption by political and economic interests, that resulted in the terrible damage brought about by the Fukushima Daiichi Nuclear Power Station accident on March 11, 2011 and the great many people who are still not able to return to their hometowns.

The method of selecting members of the Science Council of Japan has changed from a popular-vote election system at the outset, to a system of recommendations from academic societies in 1983, and finally, from 2004, to the cooptation system of the present day. The criteria for selecting members are excellent research or achievements, and each method has had its own problems. However, in each of these cases, intervention into matters of personnel from the totally different dimension of the administration, bringing into science the criteria of accommodation with specific administrative purposes, threatening the crucially important academic freedom and freedom of speech in science, which influences research methods, democratic debate among scientists, scientists’ attitudes, and thus harms the autonomous development of science. Ultimately, it may undermine the interests of the people of the nation.

The refusal to appoint candidates this time is said by Prime Minister Suga to be “an appropriate measure based on the law” and a “comprehensive and bird’s-eye view” measure, but the reasons and criteria for the refusal have not been indicated. If there is a selection standard that differs from the Science Council of Japan Act, it cannot be persuasive unless it is clearly stated. To the contrary, there is no option but to say that this is political intervention in personnel matters that is inconsistent with

the provisions of the Science Council of Japan Act. While this political intervention obstructs autonomous and free academic activity, we have little option but to harbor suspicions that the lack of explanation for the reasons behind the refusal are, in the end, an aim to carry into the scientific community the kind of politics of “*sontaku*” (the performance of pre-emptive acts designed to ingratiate oneself with one’s superiors) that brought about a barbaric destruction of official documents unparalleled in history. Scientific research challenges the unknown, but at the same time it is also a challenge to academic and social authority, including the scientists themselves. If academic freedom is suppressed and “*sontaku*” prevails, democratic, free-spirited debate and the enterprising spirit in the scientific community that confronts social and academic powers and authorities, and pioneers the unknown, may be impeded. If this occurs, looking to the long term, this may lead to the power of scientists to confront the unknown being diminished, the “scientific ability” of society being impaired, and this may result in disempowering the people of the nation to pursue profits.

We are strongly concerned that the government's recent measure will harm not only the Science Council of Japan but also the scientific community and the lives of the people of the nation, and we therefore demand the prompt retraction of the refusal to appoint the six candidates and their immediate appointment

Furthermore, on October 9, Prime Minister Suga explained that he did not see the list of the 105 nominees submitted by the Science Council of Japan, only a list of 99 people (six nominees having already been excluded). If this is true, the very fact that the decision was a “comprehensive and bird’s-eye view” decision is doubtful, and even calls into suspicion the falsification of official documents. What is therefore required is an accurate explanation of the process from the submission of the recommendation document by the President of the Science Council of Japan to the decision to appoint 99 nominees, and the reasons for the refusal to appoint the six nominees.

https://historyofscience.jp/blog/2020/10/13/presidents-statement-2020-10-11j/ (Japanese)