

**What Is Real Democracy?**  
**By HO GOKU**  
**SGI President Ikeda's Pen Name**

Does true democracy exist in Japan? What has the response of our government been to the recent financial crisis? To protect big, powerful concerns at the expense of the small and defenseless.

What is the bureaucracy's attitude? It completely lacks the spirit to serve the people and tends to regard itself as superior. And the people, inferior.

And our politicians? They say one thing and do another, paying lip service to the sovereignty of the people when election time rolls around — when, in fact, they couldn't care less about the public benefit. All that really interests them is personal gain.

What about the media? A certain sector of it is shameless, cozying up to those in power and spreading, without the slightest moral compunction, fabricated news that violates human rights.

Surveys show that nearly 70 percent of Japanese think that Japan is heading in a negative direction. Yet society is pervaded with a sense of powerlessness and resignation — the feeling that, no matter what one says or does, nothing will change.

Seven hundred years ago, Nichiren Daishonin wrote, "We live today in a time of trouble, where there is little that ordinary people can do" (*The Major Writings of Nichiren Daishonin*, vol. 6, p. 281). Those words apply to contemporary Japan.



In 1946, immediately after the war, Mr. Toda's publishing company, Nihon Shogakkan, published one of the first books in Japan on democracy, the first volume of a work entitled *A Comprehensive Course on Democracy*. The word *democracy* was then on everyone's lips in Japan. Everyone was proclaiming its virtues and placing great hopes in what it could do for the country.

But there was no true understanding of the concept of the people as sovereign. And the term democracy took on an abstract life of its own, divorced from Japanese reality.

Mr. Toda knew that unless the people were well informed and well educated, democracy could degenerate into rule by an ignorant mob, resulting in a society that violated human rights. In his Republic, Plato described five different types of government, starting with the rule of the philosopher-king. He gave democracy a low ranking, second from the bottom, because if the individuals who made up the democratic state lacked self-discipline and personal cultivation, democracy could, in the name of freedom, end up turning the people into slaves to their desires.

Mr. Toda was deeply concerned about that possibility. He thought long and hard about how to ensure that Japanese democracy would be real and lasting. Thus, he decided to publish *A Comprehensive Course on Democracy*.



The first volume dealt with the principles and history of democracy. In one of the essays, titled "Democracy in the United States," a university professor wrote, "Genuine democracy is based on a belief and commitment that is essentially religious in nature." A sharp insight.

True democracy is possible only with a philosophy that refines, elevates and ennoble each individual. And then unites all these independent individuals in the common cause of

mutual welfare.



Mr. Toda used to frequently say that the Daishonin's Buddhism was the supreme form of democracy. The Daishonin emphasized the primacy of the people, saying that "the king regards the people as his parents" (Gosho Zenshu, p. 1554) and telling those in power to act as "the hands and feet of the people" (Gosho Zenshu, p. 171). The spirit of Buddhism is to see the noble Buddha in the people — in fact, in each individual.



A month after the publication of this first volume, the author of the above-mentioned essay gave a lecture at Mr. Toda's request at the head temple — at an instructors study session for priests. Mr. Toda made earnest efforts to ensure that Nichiren Shoshu priests would not be left behind the times.

Soon after the war, High Priest Nichijun, too, had written on democracy and religion, strongly criticizing, as an enemy of democracy, "any religion that insulted the dignity of the individual and sought to delude the people." However, far from heeding the words of the high priest, the majority of priests did exactly what he had heartily condemned.

Shamelessly proclaiming absolute superiority of priests over lay believers and scorning hardworking people who strive tirelessly to propagate the Daishonin's teachings for the peace and happiness of all, the Nikken sect is clearly nothing more than the enemy of democracy that High Priest Nichijun referred to.



Over the years, the Soka Gakkai has continued to spread the Daishonin's philosophy of happiness to people dwelling in the most abysmal, destitute reaches of society, people who have endured illness, poverty and indescribable suffering. The Soka Gakkai has brought them the light of hope and courage. And these friends, awakened to their mission through faith, have gone on to make great contributions to society as the builders of a new age.

The age of the people will be an age when the people are strong and wise. When the people are the true leaders of society. In this age of democracy in name only, in today's Japan, we of the Soka Gakkai have built a movement for a true grass-roots democracy.



That is why the powers who wish to control the people will do anything to discredit the Soka Gakkai, why they scheme to bring about its downfall. But don't they realize that they are trying to topple the very pillar of Japan? In recent years, we have seen signs in many areas of Japanese life of a return of nationalism, the belief that the people exist for the sake of the nation-state. We must never forget that Germany's Nazi regime grew out of the democratic Weimar constitution. Democracy without a humane philosophical base is extremely fragile.

The Soka Gakkai must triumph.

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