

The JSPE Statement against the Government's Intervention in the SCJ

The Japan Society of Political Economy strongly objects to the administration of Prime Minister Yoshihide Suga abusing its power over appointing new members to the Science Council of Japan, as a part of an effort to intervene in that organization's internal affairs and exert de facto control over it. Furthermore, we condemn the Japanese government for abdicating its responsibility to provide some legal justification or reason for its refusal to approve the appointment of six candidates recommended by the Council, and urge the government to recant this decision.

Since the establishment of the Science Council of Japan, the Japanese government has been reinforcing its actual control over it through such interventionist measures as replacing the initial electoral system with the current recommendation-based system under which new member candidates are selected by co-optation of the Council. The Japan Society of Political Economy condemns such measures and resolutely demands that the government respect the independence of the Council and ensure that it can preserve its function as an organization that truly represents the roughly 8.7 million scientists in Japan pursuing research in the humanities, social sciences, life sciences, physical sciences, and engineering.

October 10, 2020

Board of Directors of the Japan Society of Political Economy
Chairman/President: Dr. Tetsuji Kawamura

Purpose of the Statement

For the appointment of the 25th term of new members of the Science Council of Japan, Prime Minister Yoshihide Suga excluded 6 of the 105 candidates recommended by the organization on October 1, 2020. However, the Prime Minister did not provide a sufficient explanation of the reason for refusing their appointment.

The "Charter" of the Science Council of Japan states that the Council "shall freely accept its obligation and responsibility to act with prudence, so as to ensure that it is able to conduct its activities in a sustained manner as a representative institution of Japan's

scientific community,”¹ which currently numbers around 8.7 million scientists nationwide.²

According to the “Act on the Science Council of Japan”, the Council recommends candidates for membership to the Prime Minister, as prescribed by the Cabinet Office Ordinance, and the Prime Minister then appoints them “based on the recommendation.” For the selection process, it is prescribed that the Council chooses candidates among “scientists with outstanding research achievements.”³ Since government officials generally lack the scientific expertise to determine whether a candidate is fit for membership or not, the grounds for rejecting the six candidates are feeble. The Japan Society of Political Economy strongly criticizes the government’s refusal to take assume responsibility by adequately explaining the reasons for its decision and demands full disclosure of the deliberation process leading up to it.

The Japan Society of Political Economy expresses deep concern that the Prime Minister’s recent refusal to appoint six candidates restricts the ability for a diverse membership to actively participate in the Council’s activities, while tightening government control over the organization by intervening in personnel-related matters. Such efforts must be seen in light of earlier changes made in the process of Science Council of Japan members since its establishment in 1949.

One major change, in particular, was made in May 1984, when the system of having scientists elect new Council members was abandoned in favor of a system whereby members were nominated by academic associations. In 2005, the so-called “co-optation method” was introduced, involving recommendation of candidates by current Council. In 2016, the Prime Minister’s Office refused the appointment of recommended candidates to replace three members who had retired. This refusal left those positions unfilled,⁴ in violation of Article 7 of the “Act on the Science Council of Japan,” stipulating that the Council consists of 210 members. It was reported that the Prime Minister’s Office had insisted that the Science Council of Japan to suggest two candidates for each post in advance,⁵ which, according to a former executive member of the Council, was accepted

1 Article 1, Article 7 of the “Charter of the Science Council of Japan” (resolved at the 152nd General Assembly on April 8, 2008).

2 “Guide to the Activities of the Science Council of Japan” (issued by the SCJ in September 2020).

3 Article 7, Article 17 of the “Act on the Science Council of Japan.”

4 October 2, 2020, article in *The Mainichi* by Harumi Kimoto and Jintaro Chikamatsu.

5 *NHK News Web*, October 8, 2020.

as an “inevitable compromise”⁶ that allowed the government to appear to be in charge of selection. That incident revealed the passive attitude of the Council in giving in to increased government pressure. The past incidents outlined above reflect the ongoing efforts on the part of the government to intervene in and dominate the Science Council of Japan, progressively narrowing the possibilities for subjective engagement in the organization’s activities by a diverse membership.

Considering the sequence of past events, we cannot help but conclude that the recent refusal to approve six candidates recommended by the Science Council of Japan is a clear expression of the government’s intention to continue to interfere with and control the Council. The Japan Society of Political Economy, as an associate organization of the Science Council of Japan, strongly condemns such intervention and calls on the government to safeguard the independence of the Council so that it can preserve its function as an institution that truly represents the roughly 8.7 million scientists in Japan pursuing research in the humanities, social sciences, life sciences, physical sciences, and engineering.”.

6 October 3, 2020, article in *The Asahi Shimbun* by Ryo Miyazaki.