

A Call to Support the People's Network to Protect the Autonomy of Japan's National Universities

Japan's national universities have a hundred year history, but at present their academic freedom is under siege due to the government's recent attempts to implement the "Independent Administration Institute" policy. This policy will not only affect national, public and private universities, but will have repercussions for all Japanese people. In order to stop this unjust government policy we seek to build a coalition that crosses professional lines, political parties, and nationalities. In doing so, we call upon all those who value freedom and care about free speech and academic autonomy.

What is this Independent Administration Institute?

This primary purpose of the proposed administrative system is to remove and separate the functions of establishing educational objectives, planning, and enforcement from the existing institutions and place these prerogatives in the hands of the Tokyo government. Consequently, the Minister of Education will determine and define what ought to be the universities' "intermediary objectives." It will then be incumbent on the Independent Administration Institute to submit a plan to achieve these goals over a period of time. These plans will then be subject to the Minister's approval and the universities will be evaluated on their performance in achieving the prescribed plans. This policy will furthermore give the Minister the power to control the funding of a university and the right to shut it down.

Past Opposition by the Ministry of Education

Initially, the Ministry of Education opposed the Independent Administration Institute policy; however, yielding to pressure, two years ago, the Ministry of Education changed its stance and decided to approve it. The Association of National Universities that is supposed to be responsible for protecting the autonomy and academic freedom of its universities is also taking a questionable stance. In response to these recent developments, the Association has apparently participated in discussions about a survey that was designed by the Ministry of Education's Department of Sciences to further the implementation of this policy change. In contrast to its publicly stated opposition to the policy, such activities by the Association reveal a very ambiguous stance. Both of these bodies have turned their backs on the people by ignoring requests to clarify their responsibilities in this matter.

The Consequences of this Independent Administration Institute

Despite the misleading use of the term "independent," the implementation of this administrative system will bring about the exact opposite, by placing all national universities under the direct management and control of the government. This is a clear violation of the twenty-third clause of the Constitution which guarantees the autonomy of universities to protect their academic freedom. It is also a clear violation of the tenth clause of the Fundamental Education Law that forbids the "improper control" of education.

This policy will significantly influence university research and education. The content of education will be uniformly standardized and there is a risk that research will be pursued only for the purpose of obtaining short term results. Japan's national universities currently play an important role internationally, but under the new system such a standard will be difficult to maintain.

But above all, by subjecting universities to the threat of being shut down, the vital function of the university to speak out on matters of concern for the society will be lost. What will become of Japan if we cannot protect the freedom of speech and academic freedom? It was only a few decades ago that many people in Japan and in countries nearby experienced terrible suffering as a result of the war caused by our own government.

A Concern that Extends beyond National Universities

The tuition increase for national universities will threaten equal access to education. By increasing the numbers of incoming students at public universities based on management considerations, the quality of education is at risk. Increasing the number of students at public universities will, in turn, decrease the number of students who pay to attend private universities that, already, are not as financially stable as public universities.

The Independent Administration Institute will not only impact national universities, but also will aim to regulate all public universities. If national universities lose their freedom this will surely have repercussions for private universities.

Calling on the People to Voice their Will to

Expand the Freedom of Universities

We must aim towards reforming the universities by abolishing the various forms of bureaucratic regulation and expanding the freedoms and rights of the universities and those who work within them. It is also imperative to expand the rights of university students. By doing so, we aim to fulfill the 1998 UNESCO Declaration of Higher Education that calls for the independence of universities to enable them to perform their vital role as critical forces in society*. In order to do so, the people must voice their opinions to preserve the academic freedom of the national universities.

Nothing is determined yet

On several occasions the mass media have reported that this Independent Administration Institute is already an established fact. But this matter has not even begun to be discussed in the Diet, and by stating that it is a "decided actuality" ignores the fundamental legal procedures of our nation.

If the people raise their voices and take action, we can stop this destruction of our national universities.

We ask all of you to join with us in this network to protect the people's universities.

May 1, 2001

* See Article 2(b) of the Declaration.

(June 20, 2001 ver.2.2)

Petition of Support

for the People's Network to Protect the Autonomy
of Japan's National Universities

Name: _____

affiliation and/or title: _____

Address: _____

Post code: _____

Tel/Fax no: _____

e-mail: _____

I support the People's Network and consent for my name to appear on the website or on printed materials.

(Please fill in the above form and send it to the executive secretary via Email, fax or conventional mail.)

People's Network to Protect the Autonomy of Japan's National Universities

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