

The Diet 2001

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Koizumi Junichiro's sweeping victory in the presidential primary of the Liberal Democratic Party (LDP) represents a palpable change in the national mood that may substantially affect the parliamentary conditions, although its impact on legislation is yet to be seen. In this essay, I briefly review the Diet in the past one year. In particular, the review deals with the legislative records in the 150–152 Diet sessions.

The power balance in the Diet as of August 2001 is summarized in Table 1. The ruling coalition (LDP–Komei–Conservative) commands a majority of approximately 57 per cent in both houses. The parliamentary power balance has remained relatively stable for the one-year period, although several members of the opposition parties have either joined the LDP or become independents in the House of Representatives (HoR). Even the 2001 election has not significantly shifted the power balance in the House of Councilors (HoC).

The 150th session (September 21–December 1, 2000) was the first session after the general election in 2000, during which major legislative proposals passed through the Diet. In the first half of the session, Diet deliberations were centered on the Public Office Election Law revision to introduce an open candidate listing system in the proportional representation election of the HoC members. From the beginning of the session, the opposition parties refused to participate in Diet deliberations. As interparty negotiations came to a halt, the conflict between the government and the opposition escalated to bring about the resignation of the HoC Speaker who took the blame for the political stalemate. Even after the passage of the revision bill, Diet deliberations had to go through a rough road, due to Prime Minister Mori Yoshiro's incautious remark on North Korea and the Chief Cabinet Secretary's scandal. At the end of the session, four opposition parties jointly proposed a vote of no-confidence in the cabinet. In an unusual turn of events Kato Koichi, a former LDP Secretary-General, expressed his intention to vote against the Prime Minister of his own party, and it became a matter of just a few votes to pass the no-confidence motion.

Table 1. *The Power Balance in the Diet*

<i>House of Representatives</i>	#	%	+	<i>House of Councilors</i>	#	%	+
LDP	237	49.4	5	LDP–Conservative	116	47.0	4
DP–Independent Club	126	26.3	–3	DP–New Ryokufu Party	60	24.3	2
Komei Party	31	6.5	0	Komei Party	24	9.7	0
Liberal Party	22	4.6	0	Liberal Party	8	3.2	3
Communist Party	20	4.2	0	Communist Party	20	8.1	–3
SDP–Citizen League	19	4.0	0	SDP–Constitutionalist	8	3.2	–5
21st Century Club	4	0.8	–6				
Conservative Party	7	1.5	0	Independent Party	6	2.4	–1
Independent	12	2.5	3	Independent	5	2.0	0
Vacancy	2	0.4	1				
Total	480		0	Total	247		–5

Notes: Entries are as of August 2001, and those in the + column indicate the change in the number of seats from September 2000, at which there were four seats taken by the Bicameral Club – Liberal League and 1 vacant seat in the HoC. Parliamentary parties are listed in descending order of the HoR seat share. LDP: Liberal Democratic Party. DP: Democratic Party. SDP: Social Democratic Party.

However, Kato failed to persuade his factional followers, and the motion was rejected in the HoR on November 21.

During the 150th session, the Diet approved the 2000 supplementary budget that appropriates an additional ¥ 4.8 trillion for public investment in the social infrastructure and information technology industry. As a result, the 2000 general account budget reached a total of ¥ 89.8 trillion. The major legislation passed during the session was the reform of the health insurance system, the plan for the promotion of information technology, the Police Law revision, the Juvenile Law revision, and the Influence Peddling Punishment Law.

Following the administrative reorganization of 22 ministries into 12 ministries, the first business in the 151st Diet session (January 3–June 29, 2001) was to rearrange the standing committees to correspond with the new ministerial structure (see Table 2). Diet deliberations were then centered on the issues of the KSD scandal, the misappropriation of government discretionary funds, and the collision of the US Navy submarine and a Japanese high-school training boat. The KSD scandal came to light when some politicians were suspected of soliciting and accepting bribes from the Smaller Business Owner Welfare Corporation (abbreviated KSD in Japanese). Eventually, two LDP members of the HoC were arrested on charges of bribery for asking questions in the Diet in favor of the KSD. Following this scandal, an official of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs (MFA) was arrested for misappropriating Ministry's discretionary funds for his personal use. A series of disgraceful affairs by the MFA

Table 2. *Standing Committees in the Diet*

<i>House of Representatives</i>	<i>House of Councilors</i>
Cabinet	Cabinet
General Affairs	General Affairs
Judicial Affairs	Judicial Affairs
Foreign Affairs	Foreign Affairs and Defense
Financial Affairs	Financial Affairs
Education, Culture and Science	Education, Culture and Science
Health, Welfare and Labor	Health, Welfare and Labor
Agriculture, Forestry and Fisheries	Agriculture, Forestry and Fisheries
Economy and Industry	Economy and Industry
Land and Transportation	Land and Transportation
Environment	Environment
Security	
Fundamental National Policies	Fundamental National Policies
Budget	Budget
Audit and Oversight of Administration	Audit
	Oversight of Administration
Rules and Administration	Rules and Administration
Discipline	Discipline

officials continued to become public, and the issue of the MFA reform inevitably developed into a heated argument in the Diet.

The tragedy happened off the coast of Hawaii in the morning of February 10 (Japan Time). The USS *Greeneville* slammed into *EhimeMaru*, a high-school training fishery boat, while it was practicing an emergency ascent. The incident itself raised a series of questions on the ability of the government in managing emergency situations. Moreover, the disgust of the people for Prime Minister Mori was intensified by the fact that he continued to play golf when the report of the collision first came in. In March, although the Diet rejected a vote of no-confidence proposed by the opposition, Mori indicated his intention to step down. In the ensuing LDP presidential primary, Koizumi Jun'ichiro, outspoken in advocating reform, won the race by a landslide. On 26 April, following Mori's resignation, the Diet designated Koizumi as the 87th Prime Minister.

Soon after the inauguration, Prime Minister Koizumi had to make a tough decision on the case of state liability for compensation of patients with Hansen's disease. The ruling handed down by the Kumamoto District Court on May 11, ordered the government to compensate patients by approximately ¥ 1,800 million, and broadly accepted legal responsibility for acts of omission without premeditation by the Diet. While extremely exceptional, the government made a decision not to appeal the ruling. Prime Minister Koizumi offered an apology to Hansen's disease patients for the pain and suffering caused by government policies in the admitting of

Table 3. *A Summary of Legislative Records 2001***A.** *Passage Rates by Bill Sponsorship*

Cabinet Bills		HoR Bills		HoC Bills	
#	%	#	%	#	%
120	94.2	92	31.5	39	5.1
(186)	(95.2)	(76)	(31.6)	(37)	(10.8)

B. *Bill Approval Rates by Opposition Party*

# Bills	Democratic Party ^a	Liberal Party	Social Democratic Party ^b	Communist Party
144	85.4	84.7	72.2	55.6
(205)	(58.5)	(100.0) ^c	(84.4)	(38.5)

Notes: Entries are for the period of the 150–152 Diet sessions, and those in parenthesis are for the previous one-year period, which covers the 146–149 Diet sessions. Data are based on the HoR plenary decisions, compiled by the HoR, Proceedings Department, Bills Division: 113 (177) cabinet bills, 29 (24) HoR bills, and 2 (4) HoC bills. HoR bills include three bills that are carried over from the session prior to the 150th session.

^a Democratic Party – Independent Club (the 150–152 sessions).

^b Social Democratic Party – Citizen League.

^c The Liberal Party left the ruling coalition during the 147th session in 2000.

patients to isolated facilities that have severely violated their human rights. The Diet also made a resolution to apologize to Hansen's disease patients for the continuation of the isolation policy, and accordingly the legislative measure was devised to compensate Hansen's disease patients in line with the district court ruling.

During the 151st session, the Diet approved the 2001 general account budget of ¥82.7 trillion to facilitate the market-oriented transformation of the economic structure, in order to give a stimulus to the nation's stagnant economy. The major legislation passed during the session was the reform of the education system, the reform of quasi-official corporations, the Japanese version of 401K, the prevention of domestic violence and improvements in housing for the elderly.

The HoC election was held on 19 July, which proved that those who appear on TV programs obtain a large number of votes under the new open listing system. Following the HoC election, the 152nd Diet (August 7–10, 2001) was convened to assign seats and elect both the Speaker and the Vice-Speaker of the HoC.

Table 3 summarizes the legislative records in the 150–152 Diet sessions. A cabinet-sponsored bill becomes law in roughly 95 per cent of cases, while a bill submitted by a member in the HoR has a 30 per cent chance of being made into legislation. These passage rates are not significantly different from those in the previous one-year period, although the chance of legislative success for a bill submitted by a member of the HoC decreases from 10 to 5 per cent. There is a large decrease in the actual number of cabinet bills, but the level of the previous period is

exceptional, considering that the level of 100–150 cases per year is normal for the last 30 years.

The rates of legislative approval for major opposition parties are shown at the bottom of Table 3. The approval rate is approximately 85 per cent for both the Democratic Party and the Liberal Party, followed by those of roughly 70 per cent for the Social Democratic Party and of 55 per cent for the Communist Party. Keep in mind that both the Democratic Party and the Communist Party in the 146th session opposed government legislation much more frequently, against a background of the emergence of the LDP–Liberal–Komei coalition whose total seat share in the HoR exceeded 70 per cent. Since then, the Liberal Party seceded from the coalition, unpopular Mori became the Prime Minister of the LDP–Komei–Conservative coalition, and popular Koizumi succeeded as the Prime Minister of the three-party coalition. As a reflection to the changing political landscape, the bill approval rate has increased significantly for both the Democratic Party and the Communist Party. While not surprising for the Liberal Party that has left the ruling coalition, the Social Democratic Party becomes slightly less supportive of government legislation, implying that the cabinet reshuffle has not straightforwardly affected the relationship between the government and the opposition.