

[Japan Society-New York: Documents Project. 1890-1930, Politics)]

**Document 32: “Male citizens aged twenty five and above have the right to vote.” Universal male suffrage law, 1925.**

*House of Representatives Election Law*

1. Members of the House of Representatives shall establish each election district. They will use statistical tables to establish the election district and the number of representatives to be elected from that district.

5. Japanese male citizens aged twenty five and above have the right to vote. Japanese male citizens aged thirty and above have the right to be elected.

6. The following do not have the right to vote or to be elected:

1. A person judged incompetent or quasi-incompetent.
2. A bankrupt person who has not been reinstated.
3. A person who, because of poverty, receives public or private relief or aid.
4. A person who has no fixed place of residence.
5. A person who has been sentenced to more than one year of jail or to six years of penal servitude.

**Source:** *Kanpō*, May 5, 1925, in Uchikawa Yoshimi and Matsushima Eiichi, eds. *Taishō nyūsu jiten* (Encyclopedia of Taishō news). Vol. 7. Tokyo: Mainichi Komiyunkēshiyon Shuppanbu, 1989), 293. James L. Huffman, trans.

**Context:**

Early voting laws under the Meiji Constitution restricted voting to men who paid at least 15 yen a year in property taxes, meaning that roughly 1 percent of the population could take part in elections. In response to ongoing public activism and pressure from the political parties, the Diet gradually expanded suffrage, then enacted this universal male suffrage law in 1925, raising the number of eligible voters to about 12 million, or a fifth of the population. The suffrage act, hailed as a sign of the pluralism and intellectual energy of the Taishō years (1912-1926), did not keep the Diet from adopting another law the same year restricting freedom of speech (see Document 33). Suffrage for women would not come until 1946.

**Questions.**

1. Although the Diet's measure is typically called the "universal" male (or manhood) suffrage act, it contained many restrictions on voting, even for men. Name them.
2. What philosophy of citizenship and voting is revealed by the list of people who were not allowed to vote under this act?

**Terms.**

*House of Representatives.* The lower house of the Diet. The upper house consisted of peers, princes, and elite citizens selected by the emperor; only House of Representatives members were elected.

*Diet.* The word typically used to translate the Japanese term *kokkai* (national legislature), presumably because the drafters of the Meiji constitution were influenced heavily by advisors from Germany, where the legislature is called the Diet.