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Emperor Meiji's Letter to President Grant on Iwakura Mission, 1871

Metabolko, Emperor of Japan, etc., to the President of the United States of America, our good brother and faithful friend, greeting:

Mr. President: Whereas since our accession to the throne of our ancestors we have been ever mindful of the friendship and alliance that has existed between our respective nations, in order to strengthen that friendship and to promote the welfare and prosperity of both nations, we have dispatched to your country a mission led by Mr. Okubo Toshimichi, Minister of the Interior, and Mr. Yamanouchi Yosaburo, Minister of Foreign Affairs, as well as other distinguished men, in order to bring about a closer alliance between our nations.

The mission has arrived and has been welcomed by all who have had the opportunity to meet them. They have been received with great honor and have been given every possible convenience. They have been shown the sights of the city and have been entertained at various public and private functions.

In their letter to the President they express the hope that the friendship between our nations may be strengthened and that a treaty of mutual assistance may be concluded.

Signed
Metabolko, Emperor of Japan

Countersigned
Yosaburo Yamanouchi, Minister of the Interior

Adapted from the official translation as reproduced in The New York Times, March 5, 1872.
The search for political equality was conducted by former samurai of Tosa (Koch) and Hizen (Saga), who unlike their counterparts in Satsuma and Hoshia, were not first among equals in the Meiji oligarchy. They started the people's rights movement, which was supported by rich farmers and former samurai who sided with the Tokugawa bakufu. As a means of gaining power for themselves, and taking it away from their former colleagues in the Meiji oligarchy, the Tosa-Hizen group advocated a form of representative government.

Takashi Takakusu (1837-1919) of Tosa was among the signers of a memorial (Document 14) urging the establishment of a representative assembly. His "progressive stance" was enunciated in January 1874, shortly after his resignation from the government. Okuma Shigenobu (1838-1922) of Hizen, who intermittently was a member of the oligarchy and a progressive when elevated from power, wrote a well-reasoned opinion on the necessity of establishing repre-

tative government (Document 15). The document included a provision seeking the establishment of a British-type party government. Its content was hidden from his colleagues for three months, and precipitated another infighting within the oligarchy. In the end, Iio Hirobumi outmaneuvered Okuma, forcing the latter again to resign from his post. This incident, known as the crisis of 1881, had a serious repercussion on the making of the constitution. Those liberal thinkers, who were destituted by Iio Hirobumi, are represented by Nakae Chôjin in Document 16. Nakae studied in France and was deeply influenced by Jean Jacques Rosseau's liberalism and Auguste Comte's positivism. His translation of Rousseau's "Contrat Social" was widely read, and profoundly influenced the leaders of the popular rights movement.

**Document 14**

**Memorial on the Establishment of a Representative Assembly, 1874**

As for the subjects humbly reflect upon the quarter in which the governing power lies, we discover that it does not rest with the Throne above, nor with the people below, but with the officials alone. This is not to suggest that the officials are disrespectful of the Throne, yet the Throne is gradually losing its prestige. Nor do we suggest that the officials fail to protect people, yet the manifold decrees of the government appear in the morning only to be changed in the evening. The administration is conducted in so arbitrary a manner, rewards and punishments are meted out with partiality, the channel of communication is blocked, and people have no way of stating their grievances. How can the country be governed peacefully in this manner? Even an infant knows that it is impossible. We fear, if the evil practices are not altered, they may bring about the ruin of the nation. Unable to restrain the promptings of our patriotic feelings, we have sought a way to rescue our nation from this danger, and have found that it consists in the promotion of public discussion of issues in the empire. The only means of promoting public discussion is to establish a representative assembly elected by the people. In this way a limit will be placed on the power of the officials, and those who are above and below will obtain peace and happiness. We therefore beg your indulgence in allowing us to express our opinion on this matter.

The people who have the duty to pay taxes to the government concurrently possess the rights to be informed of the affairs of the government and to approve or reject such governmental matters. This is the principle universally accepted in the world, which requires no further elaboration on our part. We therefore humbly request that the officials do not resist this great truth. Those who now oppose the establishment of a popularly-elected representative assembly assert: "Our