

# An exchange on Japanese politics

5 August 1998

To the Editor,

I read the article 'Japanese politics in limbo' by Peter Symonds. That was well summed up to describe what had been going on in the Japanese politics until a few weeks ago, but a few accounts on the opposition parties were or might be contrary to the fact and one term the author used made me puzzled:

The author wrote that the Democratic Party of Japan was formed a few months ago, but actually the party was formed in 1996. The author also wrote that the Democratic Party was seeking a broad opposition coalition including the Communist Party, but as far as I know the DPJ have never mentioned such a thing. I've seen Kan Naoto -- the head of DPJ in name only -- being asked if there's any possibility of coalition with the CPJ repeatedly by a famous TV commentator but [he] never answered clearly to that question. One of the Hatoyama brothers -- the founder of the party and leads it practically -- claimed that his party would never form a coalition with CPJ in a TV debate program just after the recent election of the House of Councillors. The other one of the brothers even said one of his aims in establishing a new party was to hinder the Communist Party gaining more power when he and his brother established their party.

The author confused me by calling the Communist Party of Japan a Stalinist party. In Japan, only the rightest sect of ultra right-wing bigots would believe the CPJ members [are] Stalinist. CPJ claims they have their own method to achieve their goals and [that] there has been no socialist country that can be their model. And I've never heard CPJ speak well of Stalin -- all I've heard was Stalin was an imperialist and oppressor who distorted Marxism.

But, since I know little about Stalinism, I haven't enough clue to assert the CPJ isn't a Stalinist party. So could you tell me why the author consider the CPJ a Stalinist party? CPJ accuse what Stalin have done but still believes in his ideology from the author's perspective? Or was he merely ignorant of the CPJ?

Sincerely,  
IS

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Dear IS,

Thank you for your e-mail to the World Socialist Web Site concerning my article 'Japanese politics in limbo'.

Let me first make a couple of points about the Democratic Party of Japan. As you say the DPJ was first formed in 1996, but it was then reformed just a few months ago to include other oppositional groups.

Of course whether or not a coalition between the DJP and the Japanese Communist Party materialises is still up in the air. According to English language sources, both Naoto Kan and the JCP leader Tetsuzo Fuwa have indicated that such an alliance is possible. Conservative elements have blocked the plan, temporarily at least, but in the final analysis the formation of an 'Olive Tree' alliance will be dictated by political events.

As in Italy, sections of big business may turn to such a coalition as the means for implementing their economic agenda while using it at the same time to suppress any opposition from the working class. The JCP has long been groomed for such a role.

You ask why we designate the JCP as 'Stalinist'. The only scientific means of assessing the political orientation of a party or grouping is by examining its political program and its history.

Like many similar parties, the JCP was formed in the 1920s, in the aftermath of the Russian Revolution. Workers and intellectuals around the world were inspired by the establishment and initial achievements of the first workers state.

But under conditions of continued isolation and backwardness, a conservative bureaucracy led by Stalin emerged within the Soviet Union which abandoned the basic principles of international socialism and usurped power from the working class. Its narrow nationalist program of 'Socialism in One Country,' first elaborated in 1924, led to defeats and outright betrayals of the working class in one country after another.

In the 1930s, Stalin and the bureaucracy, terrified at the widespread opposition to its rule, carried out the murder of hundreds of thousands of revolutionaries, socialist minded workers and intellectuals. The chief target of these blood purges was our movement -- the Left Opposition led by Leon Trotsky -- who alone defended socialist

internationalism and politically fought the betrayals of Stalin.

Stalinism had a profound impact on all of the parties of the Third International, many of which were very young like the JCP. Those who did not agree with the Stalinist line were either driven out or, in some cases, brought to Moscow, and imprisoned or murdered. By the 1930s, the nationalist perspective of 'socialism in one country' and its corollary 'the two-stage theory' were thoroughly entrenched in the JCP.

In the aftermath of World War II, the Japanese working class paid a high price for the political degeneration of the JCP. In the 1940s, the JCP, which grew rapidly as a result of the widespread disaffection with the bourgeois parties, adhered to a particularly grotesque form of the 'two stage theory'.

The 'two stage theory,' first elaborated by the Mensheviks prior to the Russian revolution, was resurrected by the Stalinists in the course of the Second Chinese Revolution of 1925-27 to justify the subordination of the Chinese Communist Party to the bourgeois Kuomintang -- a political course that resulted in a disaster for the working class.

The Stalinists claimed that in backward countries socialism was off the agenda. What was first required, they claimed, was a bourgeois democratic revolution which would be led by bourgeois parties supported by the working class. But as Leon Trotsky showed in his theory of Permanent Revolution, the bourgeoisie of the backward capitalist countries has proven completely incapable of carrying out the most basic bourgeois tasks -- national unification, democratic and social reforms including land redistribution. As the Russian Revolution demonstrated, the working class alone, at the head of the oppressed masses, is capable of carrying out these tasks through the establishment of a workers state which will be compelled to rapidly proceed towards the socialist reconstruction of society -- a task that can only be completed on the international arena.

The two-stage theory, which has always been used to justify the most crass forms of class collaboration, had particularly devastating consequences in Japan. According to the JCP, the policies of the US occupation forces under General MacArthur represented the completion of the bourgeois revolution in Japan with socialism consigned to the distant future. As a result, the developing movement of the working class was subordinated to the requirements of US imperialism. In 1948, when the JCP called off a general strike on the orders of MacArthur, the movement ebbed, setting the stage for what is known as the 'Reverse Course' -- a purge of JCP members, a crackdown on the unions, the consolidation of the Liberal Democratic Party and the signing of the US-Japan Security Treaty.

A number of Stalinist parties around the world have made

criticisms of Stalin, particularly after the 1956 secret speech of Khrushchev. But none of them, including the JCP, has made a thoroughgoing Marxist analysis of the origins and crimes of Stalinism, nor ever broken with its essential political program of 'Socialism in One Country'.

In the case of the JCP, it has shifted even further to the right, adopting a parliamentary approach indistinguishable from reformist parties around the world. Its unabashed Japanese nationalism serves the needs not of the working class but sections of the ruling class -- particularly those seeking a more independent stance in relation to the rivals of Japanese imperialism.

It is worth noting that lack of a coalition between the DPJ and the JCP is due to the opposition of elements within the DPJ. The JCP leaders have indicated that they are more than willing to form an alliance with what is a conservative, capitalist party. Its policies and political perspective demonstrate that the JCP is completely integrated into bourgeois politics in Japan.

The increased support for the JCP in the recent elections is a product of a number of factors -- the collapse of the Democratic Socialist Party [previously the Japanese Socialist Party] as a result of its open coalition with the LDP; considerable political confusion in the working class; and above all, the lack of a party based on the principles of socialist internationalism, which alone represents the historic interests of the working class.

I hope these comments help clarify the questions you raised. The rise, decline and fall of the Stalinist regimes in the former Soviet Union, Eastern Europe and Asia and their impact on the working class movement around the world is a crucial issue for workers not only in Japan but internationally. I would urge you to consider studying further the record of the Trotskyist movement's protracted struggle against Stalinism. If you have further questions do not hesitate to write again.

Regards,

Peter Symonds

See Also:

*In-fighting over Hashimoto's replacement*

Japanese politics in limbo

[17 July 1998]

Leon Trotsky and the Fate of Socialism in the 20th Century

[By David North - Full text of lecture 102 KB]



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