

New Japanese government marks dangerous turn to militarism

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The return of the Liberal Democratic Party (LDP) to power in last Sunday's election in Japan marks a sea change not only in Japanese, but also in international politics. The nationalism and militarism that pervaded the election campaign signal the determination of the Japanese ruling class to reassert its interests in Asia and globally by every means, including military force.

LDP leader Shinzo Abe, who will be installed next week as prime minister, has already signalled a hard line response in the territorial dispute with Beijing over the islands known as Senkaku in Japan and Diaoyu in China. Speaking to Japan's national broadcaster NHK, Abe declared that the Senkakus were part of "Japan's inherent territory" and warned that "our objective is to stop the challenge" from China.

During the election campaign, the LDP advocated the building of permanent structures on the uninhabited islands—a move that would dramatically worsen relations with China. A tense situation already exists in the East China Sea after the present Democratic Party of Japan (DPJ) government "nationalised" the islets in September. Last week, the Japanese military scrambled fighter jets to intercept a Chinese maritime surveillance plane that entered the airspace around the islands.

The governments in both Japan and China have resorted to whipping up nationalism as the global economic crisis has increasingly impacted their economies, fuelling widespread public disaffection and anger over deteriorating living standards. Beijing responded to the "nationalisation" of the Senkakus by giving the green light for anti-Japanese protests that had an openly racist character.

The Japanese economy has now slumped into recession for the fifth time in 15 years. Japanese exports have been hit by the high yen and contracting markets in the US, Europe and China. After two

decades of economic stagnation, there is intense frustration in ruling circles over the country's protracted slide, epitomised last year when China eclipsed Japan as the world's second largest economy.

In economic as in foreign policy, the new government is determined to reverse the decline at the expense of Japan's rivals and the Japanese working class. Abe has announced an aggressive monetary policy, similar to that of the US Federal Reserve, to induce inflation and lower the value of the yen—steps that will only compound the emerging international currency wars. The LDP also advocates steep rises in the sales tax to shift the burden of Japan's massive public debt onto working people.

Abe embodies the aggressive agenda of what he has termed the "new LDP." He is a scion of the LDP establishment. His maternal grandfather, Nobushuke Kishi, was imprisoned but never charged for war crimes under the US post-war occupation. He later became prime minister and pressed for the abolition of the so-called pacifist clause in the country's constitution. Like his grandfather, Abe is seeking constitutional change to "normalise" and strengthen the Japanese military and end what he terms the country's "self-torturing history"—that is, any acknowledgement of Japan's wartime crimes.

The present situation bears an eerie resemblance to the 1930s. Japan, hit hard by the slump in world trade, plunged into deep economic and political crisis. The desperate militarist regime in Tokyo sought to overcome Japan's economic malaise through wars for markets and raw materials—invading Manchuria in 1931 and China as a whole in 1937. The military occupation of China greatly exacerbated tensions with US imperialism, which had pursued its own predatory interests in China by demanding an "open door" policy

that favoured its position. The competing interests erupted in the Pacific War in 1941.

Japanese militarism was accompanied by the ruthless suppression of the working class at home and the most brutal methods to reinforce its occupation of China, and later South East Asia, as well as its existing colonial rule over Korea and Formosa (Taiwan). Last week marked the 75th anniversary of the notorious Nanjing Massacre in which Japanese occupying troops slaughtered hundreds of thousands of Chinese civilians and soldiers. The attitude that is rife in Japanese ruling circles was openly expressed earlier this year by the former Tokyo governor Shintaro Ishihara, who now heads the right-wing Japan Restoration Party. He baldly denied that the rape of Nanjing ever took place.

The world has, of course, changed dramatically since the US ended the Pacific War in 1945 with the dropping of atomic bombs on Hiroshima and Nagasaki. The US is seeking to maintain its post-war dominance in Asia through President Obama's so-called pivot to the Asia Pacific. As part of this aggressive campaign to undermine Chinese influence, Obama has encouraged Japan to strengthen its military and take a tougher stance against China—a policy that will only be accelerated under Abe.

The most far-reaching changes have taken place in China's position in the world. Over the past 30 years, the Chinese Communist Party (CCP) has junked the economic and social gains of the 1949 revolution, restored capitalist property relations and transformed China into the world's largest cheap-labour platform. The nationalism promoted by the CCP as the basis for shoring up its rule represents the class interests of an aspiring bourgeoisie, deeply frustrated that its ambitions are being thwarted by the present imperialist order dominated by the US. The CCP denounces Japan's wartime atrocities only to justify its own drive to end China's "national humiliation" by the major powers in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries and carve out its own sphere of influence.

The working class throughout Asia and internationally confronts great dangers as the deepening global economic crisis reopens the fault lines that led to war in the Pacific. Once again the competing capitalist classes are plunging recklessly towards a new and even more catastrophic conflict.

The only way to prevent this drive to war is to put an

end to capitalism and its outmoded division of the world into nation states. Workers in China, Japan and internationally must reject the poison of nationalism and militarism and unify their struggles to abolish the profit system and establish a rationally-planned, world socialist economy. That is the program for which the International Committee of the Fourth International alone fights.



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