

Japanese Communist Party signals regroupment with bourgeois ‘left’ parties

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The Stalinist Japanese Communist Party (JCP) is positioning itself to gain from widespread disillusionment in the Japanese political establishment. Posing as the leading opponent of Prime Minister Shinzo Abe’s right-wing Liberal Democratic Party (LDP), the JCP is seeking to channel popular discontent by forming a new bourgeois “left” alliance that would posture as the only viable opposition to Abe.

Abe’s LDP-New Komeito coalition is losing support, as the reactionary and anti-working class character of its policies is increasingly exposed. Encouraged by the US “pivot,” the Abe administration is stoking a confrontation over the East China Sea that threatens to provoke war with China, while fuelling a chauvinist political atmosphere to pass hikes in defence spending and an anti-democratic state secrets law. At the same time, Abe is printing free money for the banks and the stock market in a massive “quantitative easing” program, while doubling the country’s regressive sales tax and increasing taxes on workers and car owners.

A recent poll by *Jiji Press* found only 24.6 percent support for LDP and 3.8 percent for its ally New Komeito. While opposition to the LDP is growing, Japan’s opposition parties also stand discredited, with polls regularly finding that two thirds of respondents support no existing political party.

Above all, the Democratic Party of Japan (DPJ), Japan’s main bourgeois “left” opposition party, has deeply discredited itself after its disastrous 2009–2012 term in office. Having come to power for the first time ever—campaigning on a program of economic stimulus and more independence from Washington in foreign affairs—its policies proved indistinguishable from the chauvinist, pro-business policies of the LDP. The DPJ has since suffered electoral defeat and splits, and its support currently stands at 3.4 percent.

The JCP, long incorporated into the political establishment, sees itself as called upon to fill this political vacuum and block an independent mobilization of the working class against Abe. “What has emerged is a configuration of political parties in which the LDP and JCP face off against each other,” JCP leader Kazuo Shii told *Asahi Shimbun* in an extensive December 10 interview.

Shii signaled his openness to merging with other parties. Citing Shii, the *Asahi Shimbun* wrote that “creating a powerful party of political forces opposed to the LDP in the near future, but excluding the JCP, would be ‘more difficult than alchemy’.”

Even though the support for the JCP is only at around 1 percent, it aims to exploit the opposition to the LDP which will emerge, acting either alone or through a “powerful party of political forces” assembled for the occasion.

In particular, the JCP has longstanding ties to the DPJ, with which it proposed to “cooperate” after the DPJ came to power in 2009 as a “constructive opposition party.” Indeed, DPJ officials told the *Asahi Shimbun* that their concern was that the JCP might drop the term “communist” from its name and appeal to DPJ officials or voters eager to jump ship from their own unpopular party.

Asked about this possibility, Shii replied that the JCP would not change its name. “The time for communism will definitely come,” he said. “The party name is a symbol of our unwavering stance.”

Coming from a practiced political operative like Shii, such a statement only means that the JCP hopes to use the “communist” label as a cover for self-promotion and reactionary manoeuvres directed against the working class.

The JCP is a Stalinist party whose political specialty

is cynically exploiting its pre-World War II record of opposition to the militarist regime to cover up its reactionary nationalist politics. For all its pacifist and anti-imperialist posturing, the JCP's record on the Senkaku/Diaoyu islands in the East China Sea exposes it as a war-mongering party, lined up behind the efforts of US and Japanese imperialism to militarily contain China and stoking a chauvinist atmosphere in Japan itself.

In 2012, when the DPJ government was considering "nationalizing" the Senkaku/Diaoyu islands—a provocative step taken with tacit US approval, as the Japanese ambassador to Washington later revealed—the JCP released a statement declaring: "The Japanese Communist Party takes the position that it is reasonable for Japan to nationalize the Senkaku Islands."

In another statement from September 2012, Shii criticized the "meek attitude" of successive Japanese governments. He said they were "continually avoiding making the necessary efforts to assert legitimacy of Japan's sovereignty over those islands." He advocated admitting the existence of a dispute over the islands, in order to convince China and the world of Japan's claims.

More recently, the JCP railed against the establishment of the Chinese Air Defence Identification Zone in the East China Sea in terms indistinguishable from the Abe administration. In a statement published on its website on December 10, JCP secretary general Tadayoshi Ichida denounced the Chinese move as "absolutely unacceptable, wrongful behaviour under the international norms."

The petty-bourgeois chauvinist milieu in which the JCP is based is deeply hostile to the working class, and not politically distinct from the right-wing or far-right forces.

While the JCP makes overtures to the DPJ, the DPJ is also receiving advances from the ultra-nationalist right. Fourteen parliamentarians from Your Party, a 2009 split-off from the LDP, recently left that party over its support for the state secrets bill. These breakaway MPs are now courting the DPJ and also the right-wing, ultra-nationalist Japan Restoration Party (JRP) to form a new party.

The JRP, co-led by former Tokyo governor Shintaro Ishihara and Osaka mayor Toru Hashimoto, has suffered since Hashimoto's statements last summer

justifying the Japanese military's enslavement of Asian women into sex slavery in World War II. The *Jiji* poll found only 1.2 percent support for the JRP.

The *Asahi Shimbun* article contains a revealing interview with a newly-elected JCP official, Kotaro Tatsumi, who won a seat in Osaka. As far as his supporters are concerned, the JCP is simply a party label that is little different from the bourgeois DPJ or the extreme right-wing Japan Restoration Party.

"I lost three times in Osaka prefectural assembly elections," Tatsumi said. "On the first occasion, my supporters said, 'You would have won as an independent candidate.' On the second occasion, they said, 'Run as a DPJ candidate.' On the third occasion, they felt I would have won had I run with the Japan Restoration Party. Now, however, no one complains that I am running on the JCP ticket."



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