

Japanese demonstrators denounce government ahead of vote on military legislation

A WSWS reporting team
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Protests are continuing in Japan against the military legislation of Prime Minister Shinzo Abe and the ruling Liberal Democratic Party (LDP), as well as other expressions of Japanese and United States militarism. Demonstrations took place over the weekend in Tokyo and throughout the country, as well as through this week.

Yesterday, according to protest organisers, more than 30,000 people gathered outside the Diet, or parliament, in Tokyo, demanding the military bills be scrapped ahead of a scheduled parliamentary committee vote, which was then delayed after opposition politicians blocked doorways in parliament.

On Monday, approximately 45,000 people rallied in front of the Diet. The demonstration was the largest in Japan since 120,000 people protested at the Diet on August 30. People held banners reading “No war” and “Scrap war legislation” while pushing through police barricades to occupy the street leading to the Diet.

“Abe’s government is currently not listening to the voices of the people, and many things are being pulled back to the past in a bad way. So I can’t keep quiet,” Yasuko Yanagihara, a protester, said at Monday’s event.

Abe’s government has brought forward the bills as part of its re-militarisation of Japan, which includes “reinterpreting” the Japanese constitution to permit military forces to be dispatched to join interventions by allies, notably the US. Washington has encouraged these moves, regarding Tokyo as a partner in its military and strategic “pivot” to Asia against China.

Recent surveys continued to show widespread disapproval of the new legislation. An *Asahi Shimbun* poll reported that 54 percent of respondents outright

opposed the bills while 75 percent declared that the government had not adequately explained their need. Abe’s approval rating has fallen to 36 percent, the lowest since he came to office in December 2012.

Monday’s protest was organised by various citizen groups and the Students Emergency Action for Liberal Democracy (SEALDs). Leaders of official opposition parties also took part, including Katsuya Okada of the Democratic Party of Japan (DPJ) and Kazuo Shii of the Stalinist Japanese Communist Party (JCP). While SEALDs and other groups promote illusions in these establishment parties, none offer a genuine, anti-war alternative to the Abe government.

Over the weekend, smaller protests were held outside the Diet. On Saturday, according to organisers approximately 22,000 people gathered to denounce plans to move the Futenma US Marine base on Okinawa to a new location at Henoko, along the coast of the main island. Protesters carried signs reading “No!”

The crowds represented a wide range of people, including youth, mothers with children, small farmers and pensioners. Many not only expressed opposition to the US base, but also to the potential environmental impact that would result from building the new facility.

The event was largely characterised by opposition to war. People carried banners demanding that article 9 of the Japanese constitution—the so-called pacifist clause barring the use of military force—not be changed while others held up signs saying, “Peace not war.” Others called for Abe to resign, a common refrain throughout the protests.

The focus on Abe by the protest organisers serves to distract people from the role of the DPJ, the main

opposition party and former governing party, in promoting Japanese remilitarisation. In 2012, the DPJ government deliberately raised tensions with China by purchasing the disputed Senkaku/Diaoyu Islands in the East China Sea.

Some protesters correctly drew the conclusion that regardless of who is prime minister, remilitarisation would still be pursued.

Yama, 33, a small farmer, told the WSWS: “If Abe resigned, the situation would not change. So we [must] change the political and economic construction [of the system]... a fundamental change.”

However, many people held illusions in the various establishment parties. Some demonstrators expressed hope that actor-cum-politician Taro Yamamoto and his group could be a vehicle for an anti-war movement. Yamamoto was elected to the Diet’s Upper House in July 2013 after gaining popularity by criticising the government’s plan to continue using nuclear energy.

In reality, Yamamoto is a bourgeois politician who formed an alliance last December with former DPJ powerbroker Ichiro Ozawa’s People’s Life Party to establish People’s Life Party & Taro Yamamoto and Friends. Ozawa is a veteran establishment politician and one-time member of the LDP and the new formation is designed to channel popular discontent back into the official political framework.

On Sunday, a slightly smaller event was held in front of the Diet. The organisers comprised labor unions, student groups and the Japanese Revolutionary Communist League-National Committee (JRCL-NC).

Two groups in Japan identify themselves as the JRCL, the second being the JRCL-Marxist Faction. Both are pseudo-left groups that seek to dupe workers. The JRCL, which split in 1963, was formed in 1957 just before the struggle against the revised US-Japan Security Treaty in 1960, pushed through by Prime Minister Abe’s maternal grandfather Nobusuke Kishi.

At this protest, various trade union representatives and petty-bourgeois radicals attempted to pose as militant opponents of the Abe government. Despite some anti-capitalist rhetoric, all these groups, including the JRCL-NC, seek to tie the working class and youth to the establishment parties of the DPJ and JCP.

Members of the JRCL-NC aligned student group Zengakuren (All Japan League of Student Self-Government) began the protest with a denunciation of

militarism as well as problems facing students on Japanese campuses, such as inadequate dormitories. Other speakers condemned “economic conscription,” whereby students, faced with dwindling job prospects, feel compelled to join the military.

The Doro Chiba (National Railway Motive Power Union of Chiba) and Doro Mito (the railway union from the city of Mito) trade unions were present, alongside a representative from the Suzuki Concrete branch of the Tokyo Seibu Union. While these unions denounce the government, and posture at times as anti-capitalist, they tacitly endorse the establishment parties.

These trade unions function as safety valves for working class anger. Doro Chiba hailed Yamamoto’s election in 2013, claiming in its newsletter “Quake Report” that he could address labor issues. In reality, the politics of Yamamoto, who has been embraced by Ozawa, differ little from that of the large bourgeois parties.



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