

Japanese protest organisations promote illusions in opposition parties

Our reporters
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Last Saturday and Sunday, student groups, labor unions and pseudo-left organisations took part in different demonstrations denouncing the government of Prime Minister Shinzo Abe and his ruling Liberal Democratic Party (LDP). These organisations have sought to tie workers and youth to the Democratic Party of Japan (DPJ) and other establishment parties.

On Saturday, Students Emergency Action for Liberal Democracy (SEALDs) hosted a discussion with Sota Kimura, a professor of constitutional and public law from Tokyo Metropolitan University. Kimura conducted a lecture on the constitution and “collective self-defense.”

Under the banner of “collective defense,” the government’s new military legislation will codify last summer’s “reinterpretation” of the constitution to allow Japan to take part in wars of aggression in aid of an ally, namely the United States. This is part of Washington’s “pivot to Asia,” aimed at militarily surrounding China and undercutting Beijing’s economic interests in the region.

Following the lecture, Kimura held a question and answer session with two members of SEALDs who then opened up the discussion to the 50 to 60 people in the audience. The topics discussed included whether or not to support the opposition DPJ, and the supposed threat represented by China.

Kimura as well as the SEALDs members taking part, while not openly calling for a vote for the DPJ, sought to promote the notion that the plans of Abe and the LDP could be defeated through the next election and by implication through the election of the opposition parties.

SEALDs originated as Students Against Secret Protection Law in 2014, following the passage of the State Secrecy Law in December 2013. Members of the

group went on to form SEALDs on May 3 of this year. The group claims to not support any parties—in essence proscribing a discussion of the political issues surrounding the state secrecy law as well as the current military bills. In reality, SEALDs hopes it can pressure the DPJ through protests.

The WSWs held discussions with attendees after the event while passing out leaflets opposing Japanese remilitarisation. One student, Hiko, 19, initially expressed illusions in the DPJ. He discussed how he became involved with SEALDs after joining a demonstration he saw promoted on Twitter.

Hiko stated: “These protests are somewhat unprecedented. It might be more common in other countries, but it’s pretty new here. And it’s becoming more massive, so I think it will continue to gain momentum.”

When asked about SEALDs’ political orientation, Hiko replied: “SEALDs is a trans-party movement, unrelated to political parties, but connecting everyone. The parties might be opposed to each other, but SEALDs brings everyone together.”

The discussion then led to the DPJ. Hiko expressed the belief that the DPJ could be an anti-war party, saying “they [the DPJ] are the second largest party, so we can’t ignore them. There’s no way around them. We [SEALDs] are putting pressure on them.”

After it was pointed out that the former DPJ government raised tensions in the East China Sea by purchasing the Senkaku/Diaoyu Islands in 2012, Hiko stated that: “A new party really should be built after all.”

While people at the SEALDs protest criticised the government, those taking part in the protest on Sunday struck a more militant tone. This included the railway unions Doro Chiba and Doro Mito, the pseudo-left

organisation Japanese Revolutionary Communist League-National Committee (JRCL-NC) and its allied student group Zengakuren.

The WSWs conducted an interview with JRCL-NC member Kunio Yoneda. While he denounced US and Japanese imperialism, as well as the DPJ and JCP (Japanese Communist Party), his organisation's true politics showed most clearly through its support for the trade unions.

Yoneda said: "I think that the union is very important to fight against the government and fight against war." He said the JRCL-NC not only backed the Japanese unions but also the Korean Confederation of Trade Unions (KCTU) in South Korea. The KCTU has a long history of betraying the working class, notably during the Ssangyong factory occupation in 2009 and the railway workers' strikes in 2013.

When asked how the JRCL-NC could support the KCTU despite these betrayals, Yoneda said the JRCL-NC did not support the union leadership, only the rank and file. "We are fighting, we make solidarity with the rank and file ... of the KCTU. In November, we [will] hold a very big rally in Hibiya Park and ... KCTU's rank and file, about 50 or 40, will come to this rally. We are consolidating solidarity between the workers. But KCTU's leaders don't want to send these workers to Japan," he said.

This is simply untrue. The Japanese Doro Chiba and Doro Mito unions and the JRCL-NC annually hold this rally in November. In the past, the KCTU has sent representatives from its Seoul Regional Council, i.e. the union leadership in Seoul. Representatives from the German train drivers' union (GDL) have also taken part. Earlier this summer, the GDL concluded an agreement with Deutsche Bahn, the German railway company, to effectively ban strikes through 2020.

The JRCL-NC like pseudo-left organisations around the world promote the illusion that the trade unions can be rebuilt to defend the interests of workers. Yoneda insisted that all that was needed was a change in leadership. "Especially the railway workers union, [are a] left tendency, so we are now cooperating with Doro Chiba and the KCTU's railway workers," he declared.

In reality, labor unions in Japan and South Korea are responsible for suppressing any genuine struggle by workers to defend their jobs and living standards and seek to subordinate workers to one or other faction of

the political establishment. Their nationalist outlook is antithetical to any genuine struggle against war. The JRCL-NC bears political responsibility for the betrayals of the unions like Doro Chiba, the KCTU and the GDL.



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