

Japan's Democrats found new party to posture as opponents of remilitarization

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Members of Japan's Democratic Party (DP) who were left out of its recent merger with the right-wing Party of Hope (*Kibō no Tō*) will form a new party to contest the October 22 lower house election. Called the Constitutional Democratic Party of Japan (CDP), it is posturing as a left-leaning alternative for Japanese voters.

Yukio Edano, the former DP deputy president, announced the establishment of the CDP at a Monday press conference. He said the new party would “protect constitutionalism, democracy, liberal society and citizens’ livelihoods,” adding that he “wants to play a big role in stopping the Abe government in the general election.”

Edano is attempting to obscure the political issues, with the claim that a change in administration would yield positive results for the Japanese people. In reality, the entire political establishment is united in its anti-working class policies. Edano's desire to “play a big role” in opposing Prime Minister Shinzo Abe leaves the door open for a parliamentary coalition with the Party of Hope or even elements within the ruling Liberal Democratic Party (LDP) that oppose Abe.

Yuriko Koike, the governor of Tokyo, formally launched the Party of Hope on September 25. Three days later, the DP imploded. Its conservative leader Seiji Maehara declared his party would not run any candidates in the election and that Democratic lawmakers should request nominations from Koike's party. However, Koike rejected any DP member who did not share her right-wing, militarist views on constitutional revisionism.

While offering a few populist measures to garner public support, the Party of Hope's agenda includes revising Article 9 of the constitution, the so-called pacifist clause; slashing corporate tax rates and big

business regulations; and implementing special economic zones to further attack workers' legal rights. Koike has spoken glowingly of US President Donald Trump and French President Emmanuel Macron and their attacks on the working class.

Influential DP members announced their intention to join the CDP, including former Prime Minister Naoto Kan and Banri Kaieda, one-time leader of the DP's predecessor, the Democratic Party of Japan (DPJ). The CDP intends to field more than 50 candidates for the election. The Japanese Communist Party (JCP) and Social Democratic Party (SDP), which have aligned with the CDP, are planning on 249 and 18 candidates respectively.

In total, 1,079 candidates so far intend to vie for 465 seats in the lower house of the National Diet, Japan's parliament. The Party of Hope has 198 candidates, leaving them 34 seats short of challenging the ruling Liberal Democratic Party (LDP) for a majority, though it is expected to cobble together enough names to reach that mark. Koike's party has also accepted candidates from the Liberal Party of Ichiro Ozawa, a former leading figure in the LDP, then DPJ, though he is planning to run as an independent. Koike says she does not intend to run in this election.

The CDP offers nothing new or progressive for the Japanese working class. Instead, it is a regrouping of many of the same Democrats, like Kan, who reneged on election promises and pursued austerity policies antithetical to workers, and aligned with the US war drive against China, while in office between 2009 and 2012.

Nor have these so-called liberal democrats waged a genuine struggle against constitutional revision, which is ostensibly the basis for the new party. They have used the issue to provide themselves with a left-leaning

veneer in order to keep workers trapped within the framework of parliamentary politics. Their concerns about remilitarization focus on its potential impact on big business and trade with countries like China.

This has not prevented them from pursuing remilitarization in different forms. In 2016, while calling for the repeal of Abe's legislation allowing the Self-Defense Forces (SDF) to take part in wars overseas in coordination with an ally like the US, the Democrats proposed an almost identical bill to replace it, requiring only the fig leaf of UN oversight.

The Japanese Trade Union Confederation (Rengo) has declined to endorse a specific party in this election, despite Edano meeting with its president, Rikio Koze, and imploring him to back the CDP. Rengo, the largest union organization in Japan with 6.8 million members, has traditionally supported the Democrats while pursuing pro-business and pro-government policies.

Koze has expressed support for the DP's merger with the Party of Hope but the union bureaucracy clearly felt uncomfortable about officially aligning with the right-wing party. Instead, it will individually back former DP members now running under Koike's banner, allowing Rengo to still shift further to the right and curry favor with the new party.

The JCP, on the other hand, has pledged to "cooperate extensively" with the CDP, pushing a new bourgeois liberal front along with the SDP. Having lost the DP as its primary bourgeois ally, the JCP is now promoting illusions in another capitalist party.

For years, the Stalinists backed the Democrats, portraying them as left-wing, pacifist, and friends of workers. This has been the modus operandi of the JCP since the 1920s and Stalinism generally, tying the working class to the bourgeoisie to derail revolutionary struggles. While JCP leader Kazuo Shii denounced the DP's merger with the Party of Hope as a "betrayal," the past century is filled with examples of bourgeois parties abandoning their Stalinist allies when they no longer find the latter useful.

JCP secretariat leader Akira Koike, in similar language to that used by the CDP's Edano, stated shortly before the DP's implosion: "The JCP will call on voters to deliver a severe verdict to Abe's high-handed handling of politics." He urged people "to put an end to the runaway Abe government" by voting for opposition parties like the DP. The merger of the

Democrats with the right-wing militarist Party of Hope, further exposes the JCP as the pro-capitalist party that it is.



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