

Japan's new Party of Hope releases right-wing populist election platform

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9 October 2017

Japan's new right-wing Party of Hope (*Kib? no T?*) on Friday released its platform for the October 22 general election. The party led by Tokyo Governor Yuriko Koike is attempting to obscure the pro-war, anti-working class agenda it shares with Prime Minister Shinzo Abe and the ruling Liberal Democratic Party (LDP) by making vague populist pledges it has no intention of keeping. Official campaigning begins Tuesday.

The platform includes “nine pillars” and “twelve zeros” as well as an economic policy dubbed “Yurinomics,” a play on Koike's given name and the term “Abenomics,” Abe's signature domestic policy. Two of the pillars call for revising Article 9 of the constitution, the so-called pacifist clause, and strengthening the military.

This entails altering Article 9 to formally recognize the Self-Defense Forces (SDF), Japan's military, and to do away with constraints on waging war overseas. “We will squarely face the Constitution itself and call for discussions in the Diet's (Japan's parliament) Constitution commissions,” Koike stated Friday. “We will fulfill the role of creating strong momentum toward constitutional revision.”

Koike also expressed support for the US-Japan Security Treaty and the relocation of the US Marine Corps Air Station Futenma within Okinawa, from the city of Ginowan to Henoko. Residents of the prefecture have long opposed US bases due to brutal crimes committed by US soldiers, such as the rape and murder of a 20-year-old woman last year, and opposition to war more broadly. US bases on Okinawa would play a key role in any conflict with China or North Korea.

The Party of Hope made its pro-war agenda absolutely clear by requiring all Democratic Party (DP) members seeking to join to support constitutional

revisionism as well as the military legislation rammed through the National Diet in September 2015. The law allows the SDF to take part in wars abroad in alliance with an ally, namely the United States. DP leader Seiji Maehara announced three days after the Party of Hope's establishment on September 25 that the DP would not field any candidates and would essentially merge with Koike's party.

Economically, “Yurinomics” is essentially populist camouflage for an agenda to deepen the attacks on the working class already being carried out by the Abe government. This includes deregulation of businesses, specifically in special economic zones, and cuts to public works spending. Koike has also promised to tax corporate cash reserves, but did not provide further details; halt a scheduled consumption tax increase from 8 to 10 percent in 2019; and provide all Japanese citizens with a guaranteed basic income, with the caveat that “this is not something we would introduce today or tomorrow.”

The Party of Hope's “twelve zeros” include vague promises to eliminate corporate corruption and the violation of labor laws, ensure there are no packed commuter trains or overhead power cables, and end the euthanization of abandoned pets.

“Some of [Koike's] economic policies seem unrealistic” said Hiroshi Shiraishi, a senior economist at BNP Paribas Securities. “Basic income is being called for in some countries facing growing social inequality, so I'm not totally rejecting the idea. But without a secure source of revenue, it's simply impossible.” In reality, a decent guaranteed income within the confines of the capitalist system is impossible.

The Tokyo governor has also postured as a proponent of ending discrimination against women, people in the

LBGT community, and those with disabilities. However, Koike is a senior member of Nippon Kaigi, which, among other far-right beliefs, opposes gender equality. Her pledges are little more than window dressing that will be discarded as soon as the election is over.

For all the talk of shaking up politics, the Party of Hope is having trouble finding enough candidates to challenge the LDP for a majority in the lower house. The majority of its nominees are coming from the right-wing of the DP.

The new party has also failed to gain public support. An *Asahi Shimbun* poll released last Thursday showed the LDP with a large lead over the Party of Hope, with 35 percent and 12 percent support respectively. The newly formed Constitutional Democratic Party of Japan and LDP coalition partner Komeito both had 7 percent support while the Japanese Communist Party had 6 percent.

In fact, Koike, a longstanding LDP member before leaving the party this year, does not intend to win the election. She is instead utilizing her pledges to gain enough public support and seats in the Diet that she will have influence over national politics without having to keep any of her promises.

Koike stated Friday that her party will not announce a candidate for prime minister, leaving the door open for an alliance with the LDP, specifically if Abe were to step down as prime minister. Koike, as well as the other opposition parties, are attempting to capitalize on widespread public hostility to Abe while covering up their similarities with the prime minister and his agenda of war and austerity.

The Party of Hope is running candidates in single-seat districts where Abe's allies are competing, but will not contest seats where the prime minister's LDP rivals are running. "It is a signal for the possibility of a large coalition government," a member of the faction led by the LDP's Shigeru Ishiba told the *Asahi Shimbun*. Koike praised Ishiba on Friday as "an experienced politician of longstanding" whom she supported for the LDP presidency in 2012.

The Party of Hope is also avoiding competing with the longstanding LDP ally Komeito, which aligned with Koike's regional Tomin First no Kai in July's Tokyo Metropolitan Assembly election rather than the LDP. Komeito is clearly interested in a broader

coalition. "There are no major differences on basic policy areas, with the exception of raising the consumption tax rate," said Tetsuo Saito, head of Komeito's election policy committee. "In order to form a stable government, I believe there will be an opportunity for various discussions."



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