

Ruling LDP maintains two-thirds majority in Japanese election

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The Liberal Democratic Party (LDP) in Japan will retain power following a landslide victory in yesterday's general election. Prime Minister Shinzo Abe's party and its junior coalition partner Komeito also maintained their two-thirds majority in the National Diet's lower house.

With only a few seats still to be decided, the LDP had received 283 seats, one less than it held before Abe dissolved parliament at the end of September. Komeito dropped five seats, giving it 29. The coalition has a total of 312—securing the two-thirds majority by two. The two main opposition parties, the Constitutional Democratic Party of Japan (CDP) and the Party of Hope (*Kibō no Tō*), received 54 and 49 seats respectively. The Japanese Communist Party's tally fell from 21 to 12 seats.

The media is declaring Abe's victory a mandate for his policies. In reality, the election results show a widespread alienation from the political establishment as a whole. The Kyodo news agency estimated voter turnout at 53.83 percent, only slightly higher than the 52.66 percent recorded in 2014's general election, the lowest in postwar history. Poor weather caused by Typhoon Lan also may have driven down turnout, especially among those alienated from all parties.

Abe, now set to become Japan's longest serving prime minister in November 2019, used the snap election to claim support for his pro-war policies. This includes his proposed evisceration of Article 9 of the constitution that renounces war and declares Japan will have no armed forces. This remilitarization drive is currently directed at North Korea and more broadly, China.

In a speech on Saturday, Abe stated: "We can no longer let ourselves be fooled by North Korea. We cannot succumb to its threats. By taking advantage of

our strong diplomacy, we have to make sure the North will have no other option but change its policy and return to the negotiating table."

Abe was surrounded by supporters waving the Rising Sun flag, which is closely linked with Japanese imperialism and the crimes committed in Korea, China and throughout Asia during World War II.

Abe's call for dialogue is entirely disingenuous, particularly given that he has previously dismissed any talks. Abe has backed the Trump administration in the United States and said he would continue to work in "lockstep" with the US president.

William Hagerty, the new US ambassador to Japan, praised the Abe-Trump relationship on September 29, saying they have a "tight connection" that "keeps these two world leaders talking and communicating on practically a daily basis." Trump has regularly threatened North Korea, including at the United Nations, where he threatened to "totally destroy" the impoverished country of 25 million.

Earlier this year, Abe said he intended to revise the constitution by 2020. Reinterpretations of the constitution over the decades have continually eroded the meaning of the Article 9, but it still represents a legal impediment to remilitarization.

Abe intends to formally recognize the Self-Defense Forces (SDF), the official name of Japan's military, and would water down the prohibitions against going to war. This would legitimize the unconstitutional "collective self-defense" legislation passed in September 2015 allowing Japan to take part in wars overseas so long as it is in conjunction with an ally, namely the United States.

No establishment party fundamentally opposed Abe, especially on the question of war. The opposition attempted to paint the prime minister as personally

corrupt, citing recent scandals involving land sales, and blame him solely for the crisis of Japanese capitalism, thereby absolving the rest of the ruling class.

The Democratic Party (DP) never recovered from its time in power from 2009 to 2012 when it was thoroughly discredited. Conservative DP members attempted to take advantage of the new right-wing, populist Party of Hope and merged with it shortly after Abe called the snap election.

While the Party of Hope got off with a loud bang, it lost eight seats in the election. Its leader, Tokyo Governor Yuriko Koike, attempted to differentiate her party with populist pledges and denunciations of Abe, but is committed to Abe's militarist agenda.

Abe praised Koike's party, saying: "Party of Hope members maintain a positive or constructive attitude when it comes to revising the Constitution. I'd like to hold dialogue with other parties, including the Party of Hope."

Koike, formerly a longstanding LDP member, did not run in the election and refused to name a prime ministerial candidate if her party were to win. Her essential aim was to gain influence in the government by proposing to back LDP factions opposed to Abe.

As for the CDP, it was formed just three weeks ago by Yukio Edano and other DP members opposed to joining the Party of Hope and ran only 78 candidates. But it has become the largest opposition party, up from 15 seats before yesterday's vote. Edano attracted large crowds during the campaign despite poor weather and the CDP quickly gained online support, with approximately 113,000 Twitter followers two days after its formation, surpassing even the LDP's 112,000.

With the assistance of the Japanese Communist Party (JCP), the CDP postured as a progressive alternative to the LDP government, saying it would "challenge top-down politics" and defend the constitution from revisions.

In fact, the CDP represents nothing of the sort. Its concerns about remilitarization extend to maintaining the fig leaf of Article 9 as a means of preventing the development of an anti-war movement that could destabilize bourgeois rule in Japan.

The CDP, were it to come to power, would, in all the essentials, implement the same agenda as the Abe government—war, austerity, and attacks on basic democratic rights. Just as the Democratic Party did in

2009, it would quickly junk any, even limited, promises to address the country's social crisis.



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