

Japanese PM pushes constitutional revision ahead of upper house election

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Campaigning for Japan's upper house election began last week with voters scheduled to go to the polls on July 21. Prime Minister Shinzo Abe intends to use an expected victory for the ruling Liberal Democratic Party (LDP)-led coalition to push his agenda of remilitarization and revising Japan's constitution by next year.

There are 124 seats being contested in this election; 121 existing seats plus an additional three added due to shifting populations in constituencies. Half of the total 245 seats in the upper house, or House of Councillors, are elected every three years to a six-year term.

Many voters are motivated by a mixture of anti-war sentiment and fear over their economic future. "I don't want it changed as I have learned the anti-war ideals reflected in the Constitution," a 20-year-old student in Tokyo told the *Japan Times*. "Since I was at junior high school, it has been Prime Minister Abe's government, but there are many young people who are suffering financially, and we do not feel the economy is improving. I want to see a different prime minister sometime soon."

None of the official parties is driven by the concerns of workers and youth. Abe is pushing to revise Article 9 of the constitution, known as the pacifist clause as it bars Japan from maintaining a standing military or waging war overseas. The prime minister intends to insert a clause into the article that explicitly recognizes the Self-Defense Forces (SDF), the formal name of Japan's military. It would grant legal recognition to the SDF while paving the way for overseas military deployment in connection with other pro-war legislation.

To amend the constitution, any changes must be passed by two-thirds majorities in both the lower and upper houses in the National Diet. While the ruling

coalition has the numbers in the lower house, it needs to secure 85 seats in the upper house election to have the overall two-thirds majority. The coalition is currently projected to win as many as 77 seats according to a Kyodo News poll on Saturday, but right-wing parties like Nippon Ishin no Kai could give Abe and the LDP the numbers they need.

Despite widespread opposition to remilitarization, Abe is making constitutional revision a major part of the LDP's campaign, knowing full well that the opposition parties, posturing as opponents of remilitarization, will offer no genuine resistance. On Sunday, during a debate between party leaders, Abe demanded discussions in the Diet on the proposed revisions. He stated that a final vote should be "made by the people" in a national referendum, the final step to altering the constitution.

Yukio Edano of the Constitutional Democratic Party of Japan (CDP) and Yuichiro Tamaki of the Democratic Party for the People (DPP), leaders of the two leading opposition parties, responded as if the passage of the revisions through the Diet was an accomplished fact. Instead, they argued for reforms to the national referendum law before debate on the changes themselves. None of the opposition parties will wage a genuine fight against constitutional change and remilitarization.

The opposition parties have organized themselves into a five-party electoral bloc, which includes the CDP and DPP. The two had comprised the so-called liberal and conservative factions of the Democratic Party before their split in 2017. The latter united with the right-wing and pro-constitutional revision Kib? no T? (Party of Hope) to form an election bloc immediately after the split and then the DPP in May 2018. Many of these Democrats are themselves supporters of

constitutional revision and remilitarization, though this fact is covered up for electoral purposes.

The other members of the bloc include the Japanese Communist Party (JCP), the Social Democratic Party (SDP), and the Reviewing Group on Social Security Policy led by former Prime Minister Noda Yoshihiko. This coalition is thoroughly right-wing with the JCP providing a thin and fraudulent left-wing cover to the Democrats who have regularly betrayed the working class.

It once more exposes the JCP as a pro-capitalist and opportunist party. When the conservative Democrats split to support Kib? no T?, JCP leader Kazuo Shii denounced the move as “a serious act of betrayal.” This has not prevented the Japanese Stalinists from once again uniting with these same politicians. This is the logic of the “anybody but Abe” campaign pursued by the opposition parties in recent elections. It merely paves the way for any unprincipled alliances that set the stage for new betrayals of the working class.

These five opposition parties have agreed to a 13-point election platform. On top of their posturing over the constitution, they have offered economic reforms that are wholly inadequate and which will not be implemented given LDP’s control of the more powerful lower house. These policies include cancelling the planned consumption tax increase from 8 percent to 10 percent in October, a 1,500-yen (\$US13.84) minimum wage, and vague promises to eliminate gender discrimination.

The CDP has also included in its election platform plans to “strengthen the function of the minimum guaranteed pension” and limit pensioners’ combined medical and nursing care costs. This is in response to a report released in June that found that a married couple living to 95 years old on the national pension would face a shortfall of 20 million yen (\$186,000) over 30 years.

In 2004, the government carried out so-called pension reform and since then has reassured the public that there would be enough funds to support Japan’s aging population. The Abe government rejected the June report, but stated that pension benefits would have to be readjusted (i.e., slashed) to take in to account new economic factors. The CDP claims that to guarantee adequate pensions it will review the current corporate tax rate to fund new programs worth two trillion yen

(\$18.5 billion).

None of these promises can be taken at face value.



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