

Japan's ruling party maintains majority in general election

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Japan's ruling Liberal Democratic Party (LDP) maintained its parliamentary majority in Sunday's general election. Prime Minister Fumio Kishida hopes to use the victory as a mandate for the policies of his new government, which took office on October 4 following the resignation of his predecessor Yoshihide Suga after widespread criticism of Suga's handling of the COVID-19 pandemic.

However, the election was marked by extensive abstentionism, with voter turnout reaching only 55.33 percent, reflecting disillusionment in the official opposition parties and the entire political system.

All 465 seats in Japan's House of Representatives, the lower house in the National Diet, were contested, with 289 seats chosen through direct election and the other 176 decided through proportional representation. The LDP, originally projected to lose as many as 40 seats, only lost 17, dropping from 276 to 259. The LDP's junior coalition partner Komeito increased its number of seats by three to 32.

The main opposition Constitutional Democratic Party of Japan (CDP) and affiliated independents had held 112 seats, but that fell to 96. The CDP had entered an electoral alliance with four other parties: the Stalinist Japanese Communist Party (JCP), the Democratic Party for the People (DPP), Reiwa Shinsengumi, and the Social Democratic Party (SDP). The JCP won ten seats, losing two. The DPP, a splinter from the CDP, gained three seats, now totalling 11. Reiwa gained two seats, adding to the one it previously held. The SDP's total remains unchanged with one seat. Additionally, 12 so-called independents won seats.

CDP leader Yukio Edano defended the alliance despite his party's defeat, indicating that it will continue in the future. "Since the single-seat constituency system is based on creating a structure for

a one-on-one fight, we, as the largest opposition party, have solicited understanding and cooperation from other opposition parties as we determine it is the goal we should be striving for," he stated.

JCP leader Kazuo Shii echoed that. The JCP did not enter the election to advance a socialist perspective, but to prop up the deeply unpopular CDP, which prior to the election saw its public support rating in single digits. The CDP's failure to gain ground with workers and youth is not a result of support for the LDP, but the inability of the Democrats to put forward any alternative to the ruling party. While there is popular anger over the government's handling of the COVID-19 pandemic, declining economic conditions and plans for remilitarization, the CDP puts forward many of the same policies as the LDP, only in slightly revised form.

This has left the door open for more right-wing parties to posture as opponents of the government. The biggest winner among the opposition parties was Nippon Ishin no Kai (Japan Innovation Party), which won 41 seats, an increase of 30. Ishin no Kai was formed in 2015 as a right-wing populist party, favouring overturning the formal post-World War II constitutional limits on Japan's remilitarization.

The election took place alongside a growing United States-led drive to war aimed at China, an agenda which the entire Japanese ruling class has backed. In its election pledges the LDP included support for Taiwan, challenging the "One China" policy and further raising tensions with Beijing. The One China policy, to which Tokyo has formally adhered since establishing ties with Beijing in 1972, states that Taiwan is a part of China and not independent. Beijing is concerned that if Taiwan declares independence, the island will be used by the US and Japan as a potential staging ground for

military attacks on the mainland.

The LDP further stated it would deepen Japan's remilitarization by more than doubling its military spending, raising the budget to over 2 percent of gross domestic product (GDP). This would give Japan the third largest military budget in the world, behind only the US and China.

For fiscal year 2022, Japan's Defense Ministry has requested a record-high budget of more than 5.4 trillion yen (\$US47.3 billion). This exceeds the previous record high from this year of 5.34 trillion yen. The budget contains plans to purchase F-35 fighter jets, with some stationed in the East China Sea. Tokyo claims it is necessary to safeguard the uninhabited and disputed Senkaku/Diaoyu Islands, which are also claimed by China. The LDP also pledged during the election to acquire weaponry to strike targets in other countries. This would be a flagrant violation of Article 9 of the Japanese constitution, which bans such capabilities.

The CDP also backs the militarization of the Ryukyu Island chain, which includes the Senkakus/Diaoyus, having vowed to increase the military presence around the disputed islands. The CDP therefore is lining up behind the LDP's agenda, which includes plans to place ground-to-air and ground-to-ship missile batteries and up to 600 troops on Ishigaki Island, just 300 kilometers from Taiwan, by March 2023. Ishigaki will be the fourth island in the chain to host missile batteries.

The military also plans to put an electronic warfare unit on Yonaguni Island, which is just 110 kilometers from Taiwan. Prior to 2016, there were no military bases on the Ryukyu Islands excluding Okinawa, which hosts approximately 30,000 US troops.

None of the opposition parties opposed this agenda before or during the election campaign. That demonstrates that an anti-war movement cannot be built on appeals to the CDP or its allies like the JCP. Japanese workers and youth opposed to the war drive must turn to the fight to unify the international working class and take up the struggle for a genuine socialist alternative.



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