

Japan's main opposition party elects new right-wing leader

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Japan's main opposition party—the Constitutional Democratic Party of Japan (CDP)—elected its policy chief Kenta Izumi as its new leader on November 30, replacing Yukio Edano. Izumi was chosen from among four candidates in a move that will further shift the supposed “liberal” party to the right. Edano resigned from his position following the CDP's poor showing in October's general election.

Izumi defeated Seiji Osaka in a run-off election after no candidate secured a majority of votes among the party's National Diet representatives and other party delegates in the first round. The initial vote eliminated the other two candidates, Junya Ogawa and Chinami Nishimura, from the race.

Izumi has since selected Nishimura to serve as party secretary-general, claiming that elevating a woman to the party's second-highest position demonstrated that “the CDP has worked toward achieving gender equality.”

In fact, the CDP is embracing identity politics to cover up its right-wing record. All the candidates said they would work to increase the number of female lawmakers in the National Diet.

Junya Ogawa, whom Izumi appointed as policy chief, said: “We need to think about substantial support for female candidates.” What naturally goes unsaid is how the promotion of privileged and affluent women in Japanese society will benefit ordinary workers and youth, regardless of gender.

As the youngest of the four at 47, Izumi is being touted in the media as a leader capable of connecting with young people in Japan. He stated after his victory: “As a political party that works for the people, I would like to bring everyone's power together and start walking again.”

These and other similar empty and vacuous

statements do little to conceal the fact that the CDP is shifting even further in a pro-business and militarist direction.

The party's unpopularity is not due to the age of its leaders or broad public support for the ruling Liberal Democratic Party (LDP). The Democrats have proven themselves incapable and unwilling to oppose remilitarization and attacks on working conditions, or to fight for a policy to eliminate COVID-19.

The CDP in fact seeks to politically block workers and youth in Japan, who are moving to the left. The party is backed by the Japanese Trade Union Confederation, the country's largest union apparatus, known as Rengo.

Tellingly, Izumi was backed by many of the most conservative members of the CDP, including longtime establishment figure Ichiro Ozawa. All four candidates also expressed support for right-wing positions, including on constitutional revision.

Revision is a longtime goal of the Japanese bourgeoisie, which, above all, is attempting to change or eliminate the constitution's Article 9, known as the pacifist clause. Article 9 explicitly bars Japan from waging war overseas and maintaining a military.

While years of “reinterpretations” have chipped away, the ruling class aims to revise the clause in order for Japanese imperialism to once again fully project its power overseas as it did prior to World War II. Other proposed constitutional revisions include an emergency law that would attack free speech and other democratic rights.

Izumi stated on November 21: “The CDP is a political party that puts weight on debating the constitution, and I'm ready to fully discuss the country's supreme law at the Diet's commissions on the constitution.” In this context, a debate is not

between one side opposed to revision and another in favour, but between two sides discussing how best to sell militarist changes to the population.

While the Japanese public is inundated with claims of threats from North Korea and China, the majority of people oppose any revision of Article 9. An *Asahi Shimbun* poll released on May 3, Constitution Day, found that 61 percent of people were against changes to Article 9 while only 30 percent were in favour.

Support for constitutional revision is widespread in the CDP. The party was founded in October 2017 as a successor to the Democratic Party (DP), which dissolved itself the previous month in order for its more openly conservative members to run in that month's general election as members of the right-wing Party of Hope (*Kib? no T?*).

These Democrats, including Izumi, attempted to capitalize on the Party of Hope's short-lived hype in the corporate media after it was founded that year to allow them to cast off even the thin liberal façade they previously wore. This included abandoning public opposition to constitutional revision.

When this opportunistic manoeuvre failed, the Party of Hope and its Democratic Party allies formally merged to form the Democratic Party for the People (DPP) in 2018. The DPP subsequently merged with the CDP in September 2020, further indicating that the “left” faction of the CDP is not fundamentally opposed to the policies of their right-wing colleagues.

Izumi, as well as the other leadership candidates, criticized the CDP's alliance with the Japanese Communist Party (JCP). The Democrats have used electoral alliances with the Stalinist JCP, including in October's general election, to attempt to give themselves a more left-wing veneer.

However, the only thing communist about the JCP is its name. The party has long been integrated into the capitalist establishment, as demonstrated by its support for the CDP and predecessors. The JCP has even abandoned its stance to sever the US-Japan security treaty. It is calling for a “friendship treaty” with US imperialism, which comes to nothing more than thinly disguised support for pro-war policies, above all directed at China.

Izumi's opposition to the alliance with JCP is meant to push the CDP further to the right by abandoning even lip service to progressive policies. Many among

the Democrats blamed the election outcome on the alliance with the JCP. During a candidates debate on November 22, Izumi challenged the CDP's election slogan of a “change of power” and similar phrases, claiming, “Are they messages that voters really wanted to hear?” In other words, Izumi is calling for the CDP to openly embrace right-wing positions in order to win support from the political establishment and demonstrate its subservience to big business.

The CDP's election of Izumi confirms that the Democrats are moving to the right in response to the growing public health, social and political crises in Japan and internationally. The party has no intention of pursuing policies that benefit the working class, but instead is offering its services as a means of suppressing the growing class struggle in Japan.



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