

Right-wing ruling party wins Japanese upper house election

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Japan's ruling Liberal Democratic Party (LDP) secured a large victory in the July 10 election for the upper house of the National Diet, the country's parliament. The LDP, together with its allies and like-minded right-wing parties, now has the two-thirds majority in each house required to push through pro-war and anti-democratic changes to the constitution.

Of the 248 seats in the upper house, the House of Councillors, 125 were up for election. These lawmakers serve six-year terms and half face election every three years. The LDP took 63 seats, while its coalition partner Komeito took 13.

Other right-wing parties supporting constitutional revision, include the Japan Innovation Party (*Nippon Ishin no Kai*), which won 12 seats, and the Democratic Party for the People (DPP) which won 5. Including so-called independents, the pro-revision bloc took 95 seats, bringing its total to 179.

The main opposition party, the Constitutional Democratic Party of Japan (CDP), won only 17 seats while the Japanese Communist Party (JCP) took 4, bringing their totals in the upper house to 39 and 11 respectively. Other minor parties won seats in the single digits.

Prime Minister Fumio Kishida made clear that his government would move quickly to revise the constitution, saying, "I would like to push forward efforts that would lead to the proposal [of a revision] as soon as possible." Any revisions also have to pass with a majority in a national referendum.

The proposed amendments include, above all, altering Article 9, which formally bars Japan from fielding a military or sending it overseas and remains a barrier to Japanese imperialism's full remilitarization. One proposal includes adding a paragraph that would explicitly recognize the legality of the Self-Defense

Force (SDF)—Japan's military. More extensive revisions are also under discussion, including the complete abolition of this so-called pacifist clause.

Another proposed change is to add a state-of-emergency clause that could be used to silence political dissent, including by banning political meetings or demonstrations. All four parties in the pro-revision bloc agree on allowing Diet members to extend their terms in office during a declared emergency—a step towards dispensing with parliamentary democracy and establishing autocratic rule.

A third proposal would alter Article 96, which deals with how the constitution is amended, requiring only a simple majority in both parliamentary houses to revise the constitution and opening the door for additional changes in the future.

Contrary to claims in the establishment media, the election does not represent widespread support for the LDP and its agenda. The turnout barely passed half of eligible voters, reaching 52.05 percent, indicating broad dissatisfaction with the entire political establishment.

The election also took place two days after the assassination of former Prime Minister Shinzo Abe, who was closely associated with the campaign for constitutional revision. As additional information emerges, it appears that Tetsuya Yamagami, the accused shooter, was motivated by Abe's connections with the Family Federation for World Peace and Unification, also known as the Unification Church, a cult begun in South Korea in 1954.

Yamagami was apparently angered by a 100-million-yen (\$US725,000) donation his mother had given to the cult's Japan branch, and had initially sought to shoot one of its leaders. Believing Abe to be involved with the group, Yamagami supposedly decided to target the former prime minister instead. According to

Unification Church officials, Abe had sent a video message to a related group in September 2021, with Yamagami supposedly stating he saw the video this past spring.

Whatever Yamagami's motivation, the LDP traded on public sympathy and will exploit the assassination to further its pro-war aims. Kishida and the LDP have backed the US/NATO-proxy war against Russia in Ukraine to justify constitutional change. The government has also used anti-Russia and anti-China propaganda to promote plans to double military spending to 2 percent of GDP. This would make Japan the world's third-largest military spender.

In pursuing this agenda, it is the working class that will be forced to pay for it through increased attacks on job and social conditions. Inflation has grown by 2.5 percent, and while low compared to other countries, it has led to a 1.8 percent loss in real wages, compounding the impact of more than two decades of almost no wage growth.

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At the same time, big business in Japan is enjoying record profits. In May, SMBC Nikko Securities reported that 1,323 major companies listed on the Tokyo Stock Exchange had taken in 33.5 trillion yen (\$US243 billion) in net profits for the 2021 fiscal year, surpassing the 30-trillion-yen (\$US218 billion) record posted in 2018. Toyota Motor Corporation, for example, had an operating profit of 3 trillion yen (\$US21.75 billion), an increase of 610 billion yen (\$US4.4 billion) over the previous year. Profits for major companies are expected to continue growing this year.

This makes clear the reality of Kishida's so-called "new capitalism," which was touted as a plan to raise wages for workers. Instead, the government's economic plan is a continuation of "Abenomics," in which, low interest, monetary easing policies are kept in place while the workforce continues to be casualized, with approximately 40 percent of workers now considered to be in irregular employment.

The LDP's ability to continue in office is a result of the political bankruptcy of the opposition parties, led by the CDP, which are widely distrusted by workers and youth. While the so-called "liberal" opposition postures as opponents of constitutional revision and war

preparations, the reality is they have all embraced the remilitarization drive and the attacks on working conditions.

Hiroshi Yoshida, who leads the Research Center for Aged Economy and Society at Tohoku University, told *Bloomberg* that older voters especially were wary that the opposition parties could cut pensions to pay for election promises like reducing the sales tax. "Older people think it could be worse if others take over," he stated.

During the election the attempts by the Stalinist JCP to direct widespread anti-LDP opposition behind the pro-capitalist Democrats failed, as they have in the past. Rather than work towards building a working-class movement, Chairman Kazuo Shii, demonstrating the JCP's commitment to capitalism, begged the other opposition parties to unite, saying, "The only way to change Japan's politics is [for the opposition] to fight together. I want to move forward on this decisively."

The election demonstrates that there exists widespread dissatisfaction with the ruling LDP and the entire political establishment. Opposition to war and capitalism cannot be fought through the so-called "opposition" in Japan, but through a break with these parties and a fight for socialism.



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