

# Official inquiry into Japanese ruling party's ties to right-wing cult

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On October 17, Japanese Prime Minister Fumio Kishida announced that his government would open an investigation into the Unification Church, a far-right organization with deep ties to his ruling Liberal Democratic Party (LDP). These ties, coupled with anger over Tokyo's war drive and deteriorating economic conditions, have generated widespread public anger, which the Kishida administration hopes to dissipate in what will amount to a whitewash.

The investigation, based on Japan's Religious Corporations Law, is focusing on the dishonest manner in which the Unification Church—a cult—collects donations, and could potentially lead to the group being ordered to disband. Many in Japan view the organization as a criminal organization, with the revelation of its close ties to numerous right-wing LDP politicians generating shock and anger.

LDP Secretary-General Toshimitsu Motegi reported on September 8 that at least 179 of the 379 party members in the National Diet have some connection to the Unification Church.

Speaking to the National Diet's Lower House Budget Committee session, Kishida stated that the Ministry of Education, Culture, Sports, Science and Technology (MEXT) would conduct the investigation into the Unification Church. "Although large numbers of people have suffered and many families collapsed and were broken (by the organization), measures to save victims have yet to be sufficiently taken. The government takes this situation very seriously," he claimed.

The day after announcing the investigation, Kishida said that his government would draw up a relief package bill for victims of the Unification Church and submit it to the current session of the Diet soon. Details of the package have yet to be released. Opposition

parties have backed the proposed idea, with the main opposition Constitutional Democratic Party of Japan (CDP) and the right-wing Nippon Ishin no Kai presenting their own joint bill on October 17, aimed at supposedly helping victims of the cult's scams.

The Unification Church is formally known as the Family Federation for World Peace and Unification, though it is often referred to as the Moonies, in reference to its founder Sun Myung Moon. It was established in South Korea in 1954 and has a long history of promoting religious obscurantism while pushing an ideology virulently hostile to the working class and to socialism.

The LDP's ties to the Moonies came into the public spotlight following the assassination of former Prime Minister Shinzo Abe on July 8 in Nara. The suspected assassin, Tetsuya Yamagami, targeted Abe after seeing him appear in a video for a group affiliated with the cult. Yamagami reportedly wrote in a letter a day before the assassination, stating, "After my mother joined the church (in the 1990s), my entire teenage years were gone, with some 100 million yen (\$US665,000) wasted." He is currently being held for psychiatric evaluation until November 29.

However, Kishida only ordered the current inquiry into the group more than three months after Abe's assassination. It is also being wrapped up in bureaucratic red-tape with MEXT scheduled to begin studying how to conduct the investigation on October 25.

The Kishida administration ultimately hopes the investigation will deflect the growing discontent towards his government and the LDP. An October 13 the Jiji Press poll found only 27.4 percent approved of the current administration. Kishida was already forced to reshuffle his cabinet on August 10 in an attempt to

distance his government from the scandal surrounding the Unification Church.

Public anger, however, is not simply directed at the Moonies' reactionary behavior or the LDP's ties to the group, but at the far-right orientation of the entire political establishment that these ties represent. The working class faces worsening living conditions while Tokyo has joined Washington in a war drive against China. Japan also recently experienced its most deadly COVID-19 wave, with millions infected this past summer. Tens of thousands continue to be infected daily.

As of August, real wages had fallen for five straight months as consumer prices have risen at the fastest pace in eight years, according to the latest government figures. In August and July respectively, real wages fell by 1.7 percent and 1.8 percent over the previous year.

Kishida's attempt to glorify Abe's legacy of remilitarization and attacks on the working class through an unprecedented state funeral on September 27 for the former prime minister also met with widespread anger. Public opinion polling found that as many as 56 percent of people were opposed to the funeral. People taking part in protests against the funeral denounced Abe's pro-war record, the government's removal of COVID-19 safety measures, and the huge price tag for the event, which came to 1.2 billion yen (\$US8 million).

In the investigation of the Unification Church, the government wants to ensure none of these issues are addressed. The focus on the Moonies' dishonest practices is meant to obfuscate and distract from the LDP's deep and longstanding ties with this and other far-right organizations on which the LDP relies for political support, especially in elections.

Speaking to the *Nikkei Asia* in September, Koichi Nakano, a professor of political science at Sophia University in Tokyo, called the extensive ties between the Moonies and the LDP "shocking." He explained that in the 1990s, "The LDP got closer to the church and moved even further to the right, in an effort to differentiate itself as much as possible from the [Democrats], which seemed left-wing and dangerous."

Other far-right groups include Nippon Kaigi, an ultra-nationalist group that counts numerous politicians among its members, including Prime Minister Kishida and large numbers of LDP members including those in

the cabinet. Nippon Kaigi promotes historical revisionism, remilitarization, emperor worship, and a return to "traditional" values.

The Unification Church scandal is a further demonstration of the extreme right-wing character of the government and the fragility of bourgeois democracy in Japan. The LDP utilizes its longstanding ties to far-right organizations to prop up its unpopular rule, allowing the LDP to remain in power with supposed "mandates" from the public after each election.

By reducing the issue to one of personal ties to the cult, the official investigation is meant to hide the operations of the LDP as a whole. Undoubtedly, a more in-depth analysis of the ties of all the parties would expose a host of practices and interconnections the ruling class would like to keep from public view.



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