

Attack on Japanese prime minister points to growing political instability

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During a campaign event Saturday morning for upcoming parliamentary by-elections in Japan, a man allegedly threw a pipe bomb in the direction of Prime Minister Fumio Kishida in the city of Wakayama. While Kishida was not hurt and a police officer reportedly received minor injuries in the explosion, the event highlights the increasing political instability in Japan.

According to Japanese authorities, the suspect in the bomb-throwing incident is Ryuji Kimura, a 24-year-old man from Hyogo Prefecture who was detained at the scene. A motive has not yet been revealed, as Kimura refused to talk with police until he had a lawyer present. He has initially been charged with forcible obstruction of business. Police searched Kimura's home early Sunday morning, removing some ten boxes of material.

Kishida was in Wakayama to speak on behalf of the right-wing ruling Liberal Democratic Party's (LDP) candidate for the city's first district. It is one of five seats available in a by-election occurring on April 23 for four seats in the lower house and one in the upper house of the National Diet.

Numerous connections have been made between this latest incident and the assassination of former Prime Minister Shinzo Abe last July, which also took place during a campaign event. The suspected assassin Tetsuya Yamagami is believed to have shot Abe over the latter's involvement with the Unification Church, a cult in Japan that exercises a great deal of influence within the LDP.

Without any evidence or other information being made public, one can only speculate on the reasons why this latest supposed attack on Kishida was carried out. However, in the span of less than a year, one former and one sitting prime minister have been the targets of

violence, pointing to growing volatility in Japanese politics. This is bound up above all with deteriorating social and economic conditions.

This goes unmentioned by the political and media establishment, which undoubtedly will use the bombing to increase the powers of the police and the military in preparation for crackdowns on working class protests. Instead, politicians are posturing as defenders of democracy. LDP Secretary-General Toshimitsu Motegi stated, "This was an outrageous act coming during a campaign that lies at the very foundation of our democracy."

The head of the main opposition Constitutional Democratic Party of Japan (CDP) Kenta Izumi, echoed these remarks, saying, "We must not let any violence affect our democracy."

In reality, it is the ruling class itself that is carrying out attacks on democracy, above all in its drive to remilitarize in support of a US-instigated war against China. These preparations are falsely presented as necessary measures to counter Chinese or North Korean "aggression." Washington's efforts to stoke a conflict over Taiwan are kept from the working class and young people.

At the same time, economic conditions are deteriorating. The Kishida government intends to raise taxes in order to pay for its plan to double military spending over the next five years. Last year, the economy grew only 0.1 percent from October to December while contracting 1.1 percent between July and September. Takeshi Minami, an economist at the Norinchukin Research Institute told Reuters in March, "The economy remains in a tough position from April onward with the heightening risk of stalling growth in Europe and North America on relentless monetary tightening."

Wages in general have been stagnant for more than two decades. The COVID-19 pandemic, in which thousands in Japan continue to be infected each day, and the refusal of the government to address this serious health crisis, has similarly led to a growth in poverty.

A report published in January by business magazine *Shukan Diamond* in cooperation with Professor Kenji Hashimoto of Waseda University pointed out that those living in lower economic strata have seen their incomes fall sharply in recent years. The average annual income for the bottom stratum, comprising 17.39 million households, fell from 4.313 million yen (\$US32,236) in 2019 to 3.966 million yen (\$US29,642) in 2021. The number of people in this group living below the poverty line rose to 36.6 percent over the same period, a 3.8 percent increase.

The deepening gulf between rich and poor is incompatible with genuine democracy. However, there is no party in Japan that represents the interests of the working class and poor. The so-called “liberal” or “left” parties like the CDP and its ally the Stalinist Japanese Communist Party (JCP) offer nothing to the working class and are widely unpopular.

While in power from 2009 to 2012 the then Democratic Party of Japan reneged on election promises to move a US military base off Okinawa, supported the US war drive against China, and pursued austerity measures at home. Since leaving power, it has falsely postured as opponents of remilitarization while advocating pro-war policies similar to those of the LDP with only minor differences. The CDP has supported the US war against Russia in Ukraine.

The mass hostility to the Democrats was demonstrated during the first round of regional elections held April 9. In total, there were nine prefectural gubernatorial and six mayoral races as well as 2,260 prefectural assembly seats in 41 prefectures up for election. The LDP took six of the prefectural governor seats, including in Hokkaido, traditionally considered a CDP stronghold. The ruling party also took more than half of the prefectural assembly seats available.

The right-wing populist party Nippon Ishin no Kai, or Japan Innovation Party, also won the governorship and mayoral seat in Osaka Prefecture and city respectively. Founded as an Osaka regional party, it also gained the

governorship in Nara Prefecture, the first time it has won such an election outside of Osaka, demonstrating a growth of right-wing forces.

Voter turnout reached averages of just 46.78 percent in the gubernatorial elections and 41.85 percent for the assemblies, both record lows. Overall, a Jiji Press poll from April 14 found that Kishida’s government has only a 33.5 percent approval rating while even fewer—24.9 percent—supported the LDP. The CDP had just a 3.6 percent approval rating.

In the absence of a genuine socialist alternative, the widespread frustration, alienation and anger finds no progressive outlet. Whatever the exact political motives behind the targeting of Kishida, the incident points to the poisonous political environment being created by the deepening crisis of the profit system.



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