

Japan's main opposition party elects right-wing ex-prime minister as leader

Ben McGrath
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The Constitutional Democratic Party of Japan (CDP), the country's main opposition party, elected Yoshihiko Noda as its new president on Monday. Noda is a former prime minister, who held the office from 2011 to 2012 while leading the CDP's predecessor, the Democratic Party of Japan (DPJ). This week's election of Noda represents a further shift to the right for the CDP.

The contest was largely a competition between Noda and Yukio Edano, former party leader and official in past DPJ governments. The two represent the right-wing faction and the supposed "left" faction of the party, respectively. They faced off against outgoing CDP President Kenta Izumi and Harumi Yoshida, a relative political newcomer first elected to the National Diet in 2021.

The election was a highly anti-democratic affair, heavily favoring the 136 CDP lawmakers in parliament who received 272 votes out of a total of 740. An additional 98 votes were distributed to candidates whom the party plans to run in national elections, and another 185 votes to party leaders at the local level. The votes of the CDP's nearly 115,000 dues-paying members accounted for the remaining 185 points.

Noda initially received 267 votes to Edano's 206, which sent the two to a second-round run-off as neither received a simple majority needed for victory. In the second round, the vote allocation for lawmakers and national candidates remained the same while those of the local-level politicians and members were eliminated altogether. Instead, CDP representatives from Japan's 47 prefectures received one vote each. Noda received 232 votes to Edano's 180.

The ruling Liberal Democratic Party (LDP) is also set to elect its own new president on Friday. Whoever is selected in that contest is all but guaranteed to become Japan's new prime minister, replacing current leader

Fumio Kishida. Noda and his three rivals for the CDP leadership position all campaigned by offering their party to the Japanese bourgeoisie as a more stable alternative to the LDP, which has faced numerous scandals in recent years. The next general election is slated for October 2025 at the latest.

Both the CDP and the LDP are deeply unpopular in Japan, which is one reason the party leadership elections are so carefully stage-managed. The elections are also used as a means to audition in front of the ruling class. Noda made clear during his campaign that he would work more closely with right-wing parties, including Nippon Ishin no Kai, which has capitalized on the widespread disgust towards the main parties. He stated during a debate on September 17, "There are possibilities for all kinds of things." Given such statements, collaboration with the LDP itself cannot be ruled out.

The CDP postures as a "progressive" alternative to the LDP in order to corral the support of voters opposed to the latter's open support for remilitarization and to the attacks on workers' economic conditions. However, the CDP defends the interests of the Japanese bourgeoisie no less than the ruling party, demonstrated by Noda's own history.

Noda was the third and final DPJ prime minister over a three-year period (2009–12) in which the Democrats thoroughly discredited themselves in the eyes of voters. In 2009, the DPJ took power in a landslide election victory, the first time the LDP had been voted out of power since its formation in 1955. The Democrats then failed to implement any of their promised social measures. Noda, in particular, ratcheted up tensions with China in 2012 by "nationalising" three of the five disputed and uninhabited Senkaku/Diaoyu Islands in the East China Sea, demonstrating his support for the

US war drive against Beijing.

Since then, the Democrats, now under the CDP name, have only moved further to the right. During the leadership campaign, all four candidates paid lip service to the struggles of Japanese workers. For decades, the working class has faced largely stagnant wages, barely increasing over the last 30 years. In June, real wages officially grew unexpectedly by 1.1 percent, an effect of summer bonuses, and by 0.4 percent the following month. Most of the nominal increase was eaten up by inflation. It was the first growth in wages in 27 months. However, wages are expected to decline again from August.

The CDP leadership candidates had nothing to offer but vague and minor welfare measures, which the party has no intention of implementing should it come to power. The lack of any significant differences with the LDP is reflected in the vapid remark by Kenta Izumi: “The ruling Liberal Democratic Party’s economic policies neglect people. But the CDP advocates an economy that values people. We are so different.”

The CDP and LDP basically agree on major issues that include Tokyo’s support for the US-NATO war against Russia in Ukraine, Israel’s genocide in Gaza, and the US-led war drive against China, all of which were consciously ignored during the leadership contest. This is because the CDP supports Washington’s wars and Japan’s remilitarisation no less than the LDP, despite its claims to the contrary. This includes support for revising Article 9 of the constitution to formally legalise Japan’s military, in preparation for sending it overseas to wage imperialist war once again.

Noda has long been open about his support for constitutional revision, which means support for remilitarisation. Other members of the CDP, like Yukio Edano, have attempted to posture as opponents. The party officially criticises the 2015 military legislation that the LDP rammed through parliament amid mass protests. This legislation allows Japan to send its military abroad alongside an ally, which is dubbed “collective self-defense.”

The CDP claims that if it comes to power it will repeal this legislation. However, Noda made clear during the leadership campaign that his party would not carry out any fundamental shift in policy from that of the LDP. He commented at the beginning of September in regards to the legislation, “If [the CDP] takes power

and makes a complete policy shift, the international community will no longer take us seriously.”

This is not a new change imposed by Noda. The promise to repeal the unpopular military legislation was never genuine. Even at the time the legislation was passed, the Democrats proposed nearly identical laws only with more supposed oversight from the United Nations to give Japan’s remilitarisation a fig leaf of legitimacy. Any claims the CDP makes that it opposes remilitarisation or war are not worth the paper they are printed on.



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