

Recall of opposition lawmakers in Taiwan rejected by voters

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An unprecedented “Great Recall” campaign in Taiwan to shift the balance of power in the country’s legislature in favour of the ruling Democratic Progressive Party (DPP) ended in across-the-board defeat in last Saturday’s poll. All 24 lawmakers from the opposition Kuomintang (KMT) facing recall retained their seats. A further seven face recall votes on August 23 but there is no reason to believe that the result will be any different.

The bitterly fought campaign reflects sharp infighting in Taiwanese ruling circles fuelled by the intensifying US-led drive to war against China, in which Taiwan is the central flashpoint. President Lai Ching-te, who came to office in May last year, has increasingly aligned his administration with Washington, sought to boost military spending and earlier this month held the largest annual military war games, explicitly aimed against China.

The KMT, along with the Taiwan People’s Party (TPP), has a majority in the legislature. It has blocked key aspects of Lai’s agenda, cutting this year’s military budget and fuelling accusations that the KMT members were pro-China and Communist agents or stooges.

Pro-recall campaigners denounced the KMT in the most lurid and inflammatory terms. Slogans included “Fake Legislators Are Real Communist Bandits.” One campaigner, cited by the US-based National Public Radio, declared: “Their purpose is to weaken Taiwan. They want to sabotage Taiwan from within.”

In reality, the KMT fought a civil war in China against the Chinese Communist Party (CCP) but was forced to retreat to Taiwan—with the assistance of the US military—following its defeat in the 1949 Chinese Revolution. Chiang Kai-shek, its leader, routinely branded the CCP as “Communist bandits.” His

dictatorial regime claimed to be the legitimate government, in exile, of all China.

The KMT’s attitude to Beijing only began to shift with the restoration of capitalism in China from 1978 onward, and the loss of US backing after Washington established diplomatic relations with Beijing in 1979. In seeking to improve relations with Beijing, the KMT represents the interests of Taiwanese corporations that have heavily invested in China to the tune of some \$US200 billion.

The DPP, like the KMT, is a right-wing capitalist party but is oriented to ending the ambiguous status of Taiwan. In establishing diplomatic relations with Beijing in 1979, the US de facto recognised the “One China” policy under which Beijing is regarded as the legitimate government of all China, including Taiwan. At the time, the US ended diplomatic relations with Taipei and withdrew all military forces from the island.

Since coming to office last year, Lai has edged toward a declaration of formal independence—a move that Beijing has long declared would provoke military intervention. Lai has been encouraged by the Biden and Trump administrations, which have step-by-step undermined the One China policy, boosted arms sales to Taiwan and returned US military forces to the island.

In May, congressional testimony by retired Rear Admiral Mark Montgomery revealed that 500 US military personnel were stationed in Taiwan, far more than the handful previously acknowledged. Speaking at the Shangri-La Dialogue in Singapore in June, US Defence Secretary Pete Hegseth claimed that President Xi Jinping was preparing to invade Taiwan by 2027 and war with China was “imminent.”

In fact, it is the US that is accelerating preparations

for war with China by seeking to goad Beijing into attacking Taiwan—paralleling the way it provoked Russia into attacking Ukraine. And in similar fashion, Washington is completely indifferent to the catastrophic impact such a war would have on the Taiwanese population. US imperialism is driven above all by the fear that China's economic growth is undermining America's global dominance.

The “Great Recall” campaign in Taiwan was clearly seen in the US and international media as a step toward ensuring Lai could proceed with his agenda of militarising the island and marginalising the opposition. Currently the DPP holds 51 seats in the 113-seat legislative Yuan, while the KMT holds 51 and the Taiwan People's Party holds 8.

The slick, well-funded recall campaign was billed as a popular, grassroots movement based on civic groups, but it had formal DPP support and the party was heavily involved behind the scenes. According to an article on the *Diplomat* website, the DPP deployed 20 percent of its central party staff to the constituency of KMT legislator Fu Kun-chi, one of the main targets of the recall campaign, in bid to oust him.

The result reflects growing opposition to Lai who only won the presidential election in January 2024 with 40 percent of the vote. The remaining vote was split between the candidates of the KMT and TPP. There was no second-round run-off for the presidency. The results for the election to the legislature reflected a similar divide, leaving the DPP without a majority.

Given that the recall votes were taking place in KMT constituencies, those backing the campaign were clearly hoping that its anti-China war scaremongering and a low turnout by KMT supporters would result in success. If that had happened, fresh elections for those constituencies would have taken place. As it was, the turnout was relatively high for recall elections at nearly 60 percent. The final results are due to be announced on August 1.

The KMT responded to the recall campaign with its own strident denunciations. Stating the obvious fact that the DPP was seeking to overturn the results of the January 2024 election, the KMT sought to hypocritically posture as a defender of Taiwanese democracy. The KMT not only has a history of decades of ruthless dictatorship, but its anti-democratic methods have continued subsequently.

Over the past year, the two parties of the Taiwanese bourgeoisie stopped at nothing in their battles in the legislature, at times descending into physical brawls. The KMT has used its legislative power in a bid to curb the powers of the presidency and courts. After the country's Constitutional Court struck down some of its bills, the KMT refused to confirm any of Lai's nominations to the court. The KMT's own efforts to target DPP legislators failed to meet the required level of signatures amid allegations of fraud against its local chapters.

Throughout this acrimonious political brawling, the two parties and their supporters made no attempt to address the social crisis facing working people. Despite their occasional empty promises, both parties are staunch defenders of capitalism committed to imposing the demands of big business on the working class.

While the recall campaign has all but failed, the bitterness of the campaign—reflecting acute tensions in Taiwanese ruling circles—means that the political crisis will only erupt in another form.



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