

Japanese ruling party chooses likely new right-wing prime minister

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On Saturday, Japan's ruling Liberal Democratic Party (LDP) elected Sanae Takaichi as its new president to replace outgoing leader and Prime Minister Shigeru Ishiba, who resigned last month. Parliament will be convened on October 15 for an extraordinary session during which Takaichi is set to be installed as Japan's next prime minister.

The capitalist media has focused on the fact that Takaichi's likely ascension to the premiership would make her Japan's first female prime minister. This serves to distract from the fact that she represents the far-right of what is already a nationalistic and pro-war party.

Takaichi is a militarist and anti-China hawk. She was close to former Prime Minister Shinzo Abe, who was assassinated in July 2022. Abe played a leading role in Japan's remilitarization while in office between 2012 and 2020, effectively tearing up constitutional constraints on the military, attacking democratic rights and preparing to wage war overseas.

Takaichi takes over at a time of crisis for the LDP and the entire Japanese political establishment. Widespread public anger exists as a result of declining economic conditions, which include long-term rising inflation. Real wages have fallen for seven straight months through July. The economy is expected to grow only 0.7 percent this year and at a similarly low rate in 2026.

Moreover, Japan, like every other country, faces the fallout from the Trump administration's tariff war. This is punishing all US rivals, while ultimately aimed at China, regarded as the existential threat to the post-World War II dominance of the US.

The LDP selected Takaichi with the hope that she can win back LDP supporters, while dealing with Donald Trump, as the two share similar far-right, anti-China positions, and potentially develop a relationship over

Trump's reported fondness for Abe.

Serious tensions have developed between Tokyo and Washington. Sections of the Japanese ruling class have reacted with hostility to Trump's tariff demands, which include Japanese investment in the US of \$550 billion, to be dispersed as Trump sees fit. Washington will also receive 90 percent of the profits. In exchange, Trump merely agreed to reduce tariffs on Japanese goods to 15 percent.

Takaichi has hinted at trying to reopen negotiations over this trade deal. Trump's gangster-like approach to nominal allies has exposed the differences that exist as Washington and other imperialist countries attempt to redivide the world for the exploitation of resources and cheap labor.

The US and NATO have instigated a war against Russia in Ukraine and Washington has led a rapidly developing war drive against China.

Successive Japanese governments have backed these conflicts and justified remilitarization. Tokyo is currently increasing de facto military spending to 2 percent of gross domestic product (GDP) by 2027, while facing calls from the Trump regime to increase this level even further to 5 percent as part of the anti-China war drive.

As tensions between "allies" grow, it is not out of the question that factions of the Japanese ruling class may decide that conflict and even war with the US is necessary to protect their own imperialist interests, just as they concluded in the 1930s.

Takaichi's government will be an unstable one. Social unrest found expression in the previous two National Diet elections, one for parliament's lower house last October and another for the upper house this past July. The LDP lost its majorities in both, even with the backing of coalition partner Komeito. October's

election loss was only the third time since the LDP's formation in 1955 that it or its ruling coalition lost its majority in the more powerful lower house.

These losses and the LDP's inability to control the discontent led to Ishiba's resignation as prime minister. Takaichi won the leadership election, competing against four other candidates. An LDP president is chosen by party parliamentarians and votes by rank-and-file members. In a highly anti-democratic process, the more than 910,000 party members' votes are proportionally allocated to equal only 295, the same number of LDP Diet members.

After no candidate received a majority of the votes in the first round, the election went to a run-off between Takaichi and Agriculture Minister Shinjiro Koizumi, the son of former Prime Minister Junichiro Koizumi. At this second stage, voting was limited to LDP parliamentarians and one vote from each of the LDP's 47 prefectural organizations. Takaichi won 185 to 156.

As the leader of the largest party in parliament, Takaichi will now likely replace Ishiba as prime minister. This is not guaranteed as the LDP does not hold a majority. It is however doubtful that the opposition, composed of various competing parties, will unite behind a single candidate.

That the LDP even remains in office is due to the lack of any genuine, left-wing opposition. The Constitutional Democratic Party of Japan (CDP), the main opposition in parliament, offers little more than milquetoast criticisms of the LDP while having no program to improve the conditions of workers or oppose war. The Stalinist Japanese Communist Party's entire agenda is to prop up the CDP and block any development of a left-wing movement against capitalism.

Other right-wing parties have capitalized in this atmosphere, notably the fascistic Sanseito Party and the Democratic Party for the People (DPP), which have exploited the anger of young and middle-aged people who have grown up in a period of economic stagnation, unable to find decent jobs or wages. Sanseito, in Trump-like fashion, has pushed a xenophobic agenda, blaming tourists and non-Japanese residents for the country's social ills, including low wages and crime.

The DPP is not a far-right party, though it was formed by the most conservative elements of the old Democratic Party, which in 2017 split into the CDP and

another faction that founded the DPP the following year. While supporting the outgoing Ishiba government in passing legislation and Tokyo's pro-war agenda, the DPP has made numerous populist pledges as economic conditions have declined.

Without a majority in parliament, Takaichi will have to rely on Komeito and at least one other party to pass her agenda. She could possibly expand the ruling coalition to include the CDP, DPP, or a third party, the right-wing Nippon Ishin no Kai, though the three may keep their distance from the unpopular LDP.

At the same time, there are calls from the ruling class for economic restructuring as the country's gross national debt stands at approximately 234.9 percent of GDP, one of the highest among developed countries.

Takaichi has been a supporter of "Abenomics"—Abe's economic program—that includes limited government spending as a means of boosting the economy. She made vague and empty populist pledges during her campaign, but also indicated that austerity is on the agenda. She acknowledged the demands for restructuring, stating she "never said that there is not a need for fiscal reconstruction."

Paying for Tokyo's war preparations and fiscal restructuring means a full-scale attack on the conditions of the working class, including increased taxes, cuts to social programs, reduced wages and job-slashing.

To deflect from this agenda, Takaichi has taken pages from the playbooks of Sanseito and the far-right in the US and Europe. During the leadership race, she denounced foreigners and suggested limiting the number of people entering Japan, declaring: "We need to rethink the policy of receiving large numbers of people every year whose culture and everything else are so different from ours."

This racist agenda is meant to divide workers who face similar declining conditions both domestically and internationally, while creating a more nationalist and militarist atmosphere.



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