

Japanese political establishment lurches to the right as snap election called

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On Friday, Japanese Prime Minister Sanae Takaichi officially dissolved parliament to call a snap general election for February 8. Campaigning began yesterday, making it the shortest such period in Japan's post-war history. Takaichi and the ruling Liberal Democratic Party (LDP) hope to secure a so-called "mandate" for the government's far-right policies, which include deepening Japan's remilitarization in preparation for war with China.

The main opposition Constitutional Democratic Party of Japan (CDP) is also using the election to shift further to the right. The CDP has merged with Komeito, the LDP's former coalition partner of 26 years, to form a new "centrist" party, dubbed the Centrist Reform Alliance (CRA), or Chudo Kaikaku Rengo.

The new party holds 172 seats in the lower house of parliament where all 465 seats are now up for election. The CRA is jointly led by Yoshihiko Noda of the CDP and Komeito's leader Testuo Saito. For the time being, their respective members in the upper house, where seats are not up for election, will abstain from entering the new party.

In comparison, the LDP holds 199 seats and is in coalition with the far-right Nippon Ishin no Kai, which holds 34 seats, providing a slim majority in the lower house. The coalition only achieved this majority in November when three so-called "independents" joined the bloc but still does not hold a majority in the upper house.

The election takes place under significant upheavals internationally and at home. The Trump regime's attack on Venezuela and kidnapping of its president Nicolás Maduro has exposed Washington and Tokyo's claims to stand for the "rule of law." Economic turmoil brought on by Trump's trade war against allies including Japan has also exacerbated declining

conditions.

Growing anger towards Japan's ruling party led to the LDP initially losing its lower house majority in the October 2024 general election for only the third time in post-war history and then its upper house majority in July last year. Presiding over an unstable minority government, previous Prime Minister Shigeru Ishiba was forced to resign, paving the way for the far-right Takaichi to come to office this past October.

CRA co-leader Saito offered an explanation on January 16 for launching the new party, stating that the CDP and Komeito "will fight under a new name to create a new centrist bloc with all who support our cause." Noda echoed these comments. This is not a call to oppose the far-right, but an appeal for a broad coalition, one that would provide a supposedly stable government and assure the passage of the ruling class's agenda.

There is no guarantee the LDP's ruling coalition will secure a parliamentary majority. A *Yomiuri Shimbun* poll last month found public support for the LDP at just 30 percent.

Social distress is rising. Real wages have fallen each year on an annual basis since 2021. The Labour Ministry reported this month that real wages fell 2.8 percent in November due to inflation, the 11th straight month of decline. Rising inflation has had a particularly sharp impact on food like rice, the price of which reached a record-high this month of 4,416 yen (\$US28.67) per five kilograms.

All parties are offering promises of tax and inflation relief, particularly regarding the highly unpopular consumption tax. Takaichi's cabinet approved a 21.3 trillion-yen (\$US135 billion) stimulus package in November and now has pledged additional tax cuts. But with no clear indication of how this would be achieved

Japan's bond market went into turmoil.

By contrast, the opposition CRA insists on debt restraint, catering to the sections of the bourgeoisie that are concerned that Japan's growing debt-to-GDP ratio is becoming untenable. While claiming his party would reduce the consumption tax on food to zero, Noda stated on Monday, "We will not issue deficit-covering government bonds. We want to work hard to achieve this by autumn by clearly indicating the source of funds." The International Monetary Fund estimates Japan's debt-to-GDP ratio at 237 percent.

When it comes to remilitarization and war, the CRA tacitly supports the measures taken by the LDP in recent years as well as Takaichi's proposed agenda, which includes constitutional revisions that would allow Japan's full rearming while imposing attacks on democratic rights. Takaichi also plans to revise Japan's National Security Strategy, the National Defense Strategy, and the Defense Buildup Program by the end of this year.

These three documents were last revised in 2022 and were intended to cover a ten-year period. A key component of the documents was the raising of military spending to 2 percent of GDP by 2027 and the acquisition of offensive military hardware in direct violation of the constitution. Article 9 bans Tokyo from maintaining any war material or waging war overseas.

After passing a supplementary budget at the end of last year, Japan reached its 2 percent military spending goal a year early. The revision of the documents therefore will likely lead to even higher amounts of spending, potentially reaching 3.5 percent or more in line with demands from the Trump administration. This would necessitate further attacks on the working class.

The Democrats are aware that this war agenda is deeply unpopular with the working class. Therefore, they are working to provide it with a sense of legitimacy by stating they are building "consensus" with right-wing parties like Komeito.

As the LDP's former longtime junior partner, Komeito played a key role in paving the way for this militarist agenda, approving the documents in 2022. It also provided support for the Shinzo Abe government and LDP to railroad legislation through parliament in 2015 that further undermined Article 9.

These laws codified a "reinterpretation" of the constitution to allow Japan to wage war overseas so

long as it is in alliance with an ally or in a so-called "survival-threatening situation." It was under this rationale that Takaichi threatened to back Taiwan in a war with China in November.

The CRA released its basic policies on January 19, stating, "The exercise of the right of self-defense for our nation's defense in situations that threaten survival, as defined by the peace and security legislation (i.e., the 2015 military legislation), is constitutional." In other words, the Democrats now declare that the LDP's longstanding rationale for Japan's remilitarization is entirely legitimate.

The Democrats previously claimed the 2015 legislation was unconstitutional, but in reality supported the primary goals of the laws. The Democrats insisted on more supposed oversight from the United Nations to give Japan's warmongering a sense of legitimacy. To join with Komeito and potentially other right-wing parties, even face-saving device has been done away with.



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