

Right-wing LDP expected to maintain majority in upcoming Japanese election

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Campaigning for Japan's October 31 general election began last week. Given the widespread unpopularity of the opposition parties and general ambivalence towards the establishment parties as a whole, the ruling Liberal Democratic Party (LDP) is expected to maintain its parliamentary majority in the National Diet. Newly installed Prime Minister Fumio Kishida, after taking over for Yoshihide Suga at the beginning of October, is hoping to use the election to claim a mandate for his new government.

All 465 seats in the lower house of parliament, known as the House of Representatives, are currently being contested. Of these seats, two-thirds are elected by direct vote while the others are distributed to parties based on proportional vote. The ruling coalition of the LDP and Komeito currently hold 276 seats and 29 seats respectively. The LDP is fielding 310 candidates while Komeito has 53. The ruling party is currently projected to lose around 40 seats.

The main opposition Constitutional Democratic Party of Japan (CDP) currently holds 112 seats while its ally, the Japanese Communist Party (JCP), has 12. The two have formed an electoral bloc and are running unified candidates. Any change in government would require a coalition as the CDP is fielding only 214 candidates, short of the 233 needed for a majority. The JCP is running 131 candidates, pledging to prop up a CDP government if the electoral bloc manages to win.

The CDP, however, is content to play the role of "opposition," providing very limited critiques of the LDP. At the same time, it provides support to the government when needed to push through legislation demanded by the capitalist ruling class, whether this takes the form of votes from the more conservative members of the party or by defusing public opposition by organizing token protests.

A poll by broadcaster NHK found that support for the LDP stood at 38.8 percent while the CDP is polling at 6.6 percent. Nearly half of eligible voters intend to or are considering sitting out the election, with only 56 percent of people saying they intend to vote.

At a press conference on October 14, following the dissolution of the lower house in preparation for the election, Prime Minister Kishida stated, "The age is at a turning point. Which way it moves will determine the future of Japan." He claimed, "I wanted to establish the makeup of the lower house as soon as possible so as to accelerate the process of formulating specific policy proposals."

In reality, the political establishment is keenly aware of the public anger over the handling of the pandemic, declining economic conditions, and Japan's active support for the US-led drive to war against China. A former member of the previous Suga cabinet told the *Asahi Shimbun*, that the "only alternative was to hold the election before the Cabinet approval rating fell." The former minister continued: "Even with the change in prime minister, there is no sense of enthusiasm in the local constituency." Kishida's cabinet is polling at 45 percent, the lowest for a first-time polling of a new cabinet in 20 years.

One of the biggest issues facing Japanese workers, farmers, and youth is remilitarization and the prospect of war with China, which all bourgeois parties support. The LDP is running on a platform of remilitarization. It has called for increased military spending by raising its defense budget over 2 percent of GDP and acquiring the ability to strike targets in foreign countries. It has also pledged support for Taiwan to further chip away at the "One China" policy.

While the CDP stops short of offering explicit support for Taiwan, like the LDP, it has called for

increased cooperation with the US and other countries in the growing anti-China alliance. It has pledged to increase the military presence around the disputed Senkaku/Diaoyu Islands in the East China Sea, which Beijing also claims, raising the risk of a clash.

The JCP also supports these measures through its bloc with the Democrats. It has modified its longstanding call for the abrogation of the US-Japan security treaty by calling for a “friendship treaty” with US imperialism. This thinly disguised support for pro-war policies exposes the Japanese Stalinists’ opposition to constitutional revision as fraudulent. The Japanese ruling elite has long pushed for revising the constitution to enable Tokyo to go to war to pursue its foreign policy objectives, a move that has been spearheaded by the LDP. However, support for these policies is also found within the CDP, despite its public posturing as an opponent of revision.

The JCP has long abandoned any support for a genuinely socialist or anti-war program. The party’s backing for the CDP at every turn makes clear that while it may posture as a left-wing party, it is little more than an appendage of the Democrats, attempting to block the working class and youth from a political fight against capitalism.

Domestically, none of the parties has a plan for eliminating COVID-19, instead making proposals to strengthen “crisis management” and inadequate economic measures, the purpose of which is to keep Japan’s economy open for the benefit of big business. At present, there have been more than 1.7 million COVID-19 cases with over 18,100 deaths.

Conscious of public anger, Prime Minister Kishida has promised a “new capitalism,” that would supposedly bring about a fairer distribution of wages. This amounts to nothing more than phony promises of wage increases for essential workers that would supposedly be paid through more tax cuts for corporations.

The CDP has pledged a temporary reduction in the consumption tax from 10 percent to 5 percent and an income tax reduction for anyone making 10 million yen (\$US88,000) or less a year. The JCP has proposed increased taxes on the wealthy and a limited increase of the minimum wage to 1,500 yen (\$US13.20) an hour. Neither party will be in a position to carry out these pledges after the election.

If the LDP returns to power in Sunday’s election as expected, it will not be the result of widespread support for its policies or for Prime Minister Kishida. It stems from widespread disillusionment in the entire political system and in particular the political bankruptcy of the so-called “progressive” parties which have no fundamental differences with the LDP.



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