

Japan's ruling party wins upper house election

By Ben McGrath
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Japan's ruling Liberal Democratic Party (LDP) took the majority of seats up for election in Sunday's upper house race. The final results leave the LDP and its ruling coalition short of the necessary two-thirds it needs to approve a constitutional change, but workers and youth should place no faith in the so-called opposition to fight a genuine campaign against remilitarization.

Voter turnout in Sunday's contest reached only 48.8 percent, the second lowest on record. Voter turnout among youth, aged 18 and 19, was particularly low, standing at only 31.33 percent. Japan's upper house, or House of Councilors, holds elections every three years for half the 245 seats in the body. Members are elected to six-year terms. The lower house in the National Diet is the more powerful of the two.

The LDP won 57 seats out of 124 in the race while its coalition partner Komeito took 14. Including the independents and the opposition Nippon Ishin no Kai, which won 10 seats, parties favoring revising Article 9 of Japan's constitution hold 160 seats, or four short of a two-thirds majority. Article 9 is known as the pacifist clause for its ban on a standing military and Japan's ability to wage war. Constitutional amendments require passage by two-thirds majority in both houses of the Diet and then by a national referendum.

Prime Minister Shinzo Abe intends to insert a clause into Article 9 to directly recognize the Self-Defense Forces (SDF), the formal name of Japan's military. Combined with military legislation passed in 2015, this would accelerate Tokyo's ability to send the SDF overseas in wars of aggression. He held a hand out to the opposition parties on Monday, stating, "Although we have provided a basis for debate (on Article 9), which we believe is the best, we want to have flexible discussions without sticking to our proposal."

Among the election bloc of parties claiming to defend Article 9, the main opposition Constitutional Democratic Party of Japan (CDP) won 17 seats, increasing its total strength to 32 while the Democratic Party for the People (DPP) won only six seats, a loss of two from pre-election numbers, bringing its total to 21. The Japanese Communist Party (JCP) won seven seats, a net loss of one, reducing its overall total to 13 seats. The Social Democratic Party (SDP) retained its seat up for reelection. It holds two in the upper house.

While typhoon rains in western Japan may have played some role in the low turnout, the reality is the official opposition is discredited in the eyes of the working class and youth. It is this lack of a political alternative in Japan that allows Abe's LDP to maintain power despite broad opposition to remilitarization and its economic agenda.

This opposition was confirmed in a Kyodo news survey after the election in which 56 percent of respondents stated they opposed revising Article 9. If the CDP, DPP, Japan's Stalinists, and the social democrats cannot win support based on this, it is because they support, either directly or tacitly, Japan's remilitarization.

None of these parties sought to build on the antiwar movement that developed in 2015 against the LDP's military legislation. Rather, they deeply fear that such a movement would grow outside of their control and represent a threat to capitalism as a whole. This is especially true for the JCP, which is one reason it provides an extremely thin left-wing cover for the Democrats, hoping to convince workers and youth that an election bloc is the only way to stop Abe's agenda.

In pre-election debates, Yukio Edano and Yuichiro Tamaki, the leaders of the CDP and DPP respectively, rejected attempts to galvanize support based on an

antiwar perspective. They accepted the passage of a revised Article 9 as an accomplished fact, instead arguing with Abe over reforms to the national referendum law. Both know, as do the JCP and SDP, that there is widespread support, particularly in the more conservative DPP, for constitutional revision, a fact that was covered up during the election.

Taking advantage of the bankruptcy of these parties, a new political grouping called Reiwa Shinsengumi has gained wider support, though it only won two seats. It is led by Taro Yamamoto, a former actor who gained political prominence for his criticisms of nuclear power following the Fukushima disaster in 2011. He won an upper house seat in 2013, but lost in this election despite receiving 970,000 votes, a record for the most votes received by an unsuccessful candidate.

Yamamoto poses as a political outsider. However, none of his criticisms of Abe or the LDP go beyond the confines of accepted bourgeois politics. He has called for the abolition of the consumption tax and raising the minimum wage to 1,500 yen (\$13.86).

Reiwa Shinsengumi also ran candidates that included members of the LGBT community, single parents, and part-time workers. In a country where the disabled are routinely stigmatized, it became newsworthy that the party's two successful candidates, Yasuhiko Funago and Eiko Kimura, are both disabled.

This does not alter the bourgeois character of Reiwa Shinsengumi. Yamamoto declared his party will create "a society that doesn't cut anyone off," but such empty phrases are meant to prevent workers and youth from breaking with the current capitalist system by convincing them it can be reformed.

Furthermore, Yamamoto's characterization as an "outsider" is entirely for show. He is politically connected to Ichirō Ozawa, currently a member of the DPP and the lower house. Ozawa bolstered Yamamoto's political credentials when the two formed the People's Life Party and Tarō Yamamoto and Friends in 2014. This became the Liberal Party which was absorbed into the DPP this past April.

Ozawa is the definition of a political insider, winning his late father's seat in the lower house in 1969. He spent the first part of his political career in the LDP before moving into the opposition circles in the 1990s that comprise the Democrats today. He wields a great deal of influence behind the scenes while also

supporting remilitarization and revision of Article 9.

Genuine opposition to remilitarization can only be fought through a clear political program of opposition to war and capitalism. This means above all a complete break with all of these bourgeois parties and a fight for international socialism.

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