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Japan

New NCIW/JRCL joint weekly analyses elections

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This analysis of the elections comes from “Kakehashi” (Bridge), a newspaper which is, from this month, produced weekly in co-operation between two Fourth Internationalist organisations: the National Council of Internationalist Workers (NCIW) and the Japan Revolutionary Communist League (JRCL). The decision to publish a co-edited weekly is important for both organizations to develop a organizational reunification after a split in 1989.

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The 45th general election for the Japanese house of representatives was held on August 30, and the election results confirmed various media forecasts based on opinion polls: the bourgeois Democratic Party of Japan (DPJ) got a overwhelming victory over the former government-bloc of the bourgeois Liberal Democratic Party (LDP) and the petit-bourgeois Buddhist Komei (clean government) Party, with more than 69% turnout of voters. Under the combined electoral system of single-seat constituencies and proportional representation, the DPJ has got 308 seats, 64.2 % of the total 480 seats, including 221 wins at the 300 single-seat constituencies, scoring 29,840,000 proportional-representation votes, 42.4% of the total votes, which surpassed the 25,890,00 votes obtained by the LDP under Jun'ichiro Koizumi's prime ministership at the previous general election in September 2005.

The general election brought the number of the LDP lower-house representation from the previous 300 seats to its current 119 seats, lots of former LDP heavyweights being defeated. As for the Komei, the party failed at all the single-seat constituencies where it run its candidates, thus its pre-election party president and general secretary being ousted from the lower house, and its representation decreased from pre-election 31 seats to 21 seats.

Overwhelmed by the DPJ landslide victory, the reformist Japanese Communist Party (JCP) and Social Democratic Party (SDP), for which we had called for voting, barely retained their previous numbers of 9 seats and 7 seats respectively, with the 4,943,000 and 3,006,000 proportional-representation votes, and their parliamentary representation can be utilized as an important footing for the workers and popular mass movement.

The LDP and Komei coalition government had brought about the present social situation of deepening income-gap and poverty through its neoliberal "structural-reform" policies, which promoted "privatization" and "deregulation" of the social services, industries and economy under the globalization of international economy, and which intensified competitions at the level of lower social tiers under the banner of "self-responsibility"; and the coalition government had pursued the course for revision of the constitution and realization of a new-phase "Japanese state which can wage its war", following the US "counterterrorist-war" policy of the former Bush administration. This LDP and Komei government was knocked down at the last general election.

The Japanese masses had found an illusionary outlet of their political frustrations and social discontents in the former prime minister Koizumi's demagogic and neoliberal "reform" discourse at the September-2005 general election. The same masses found vent for their further aggravated frustrations and discontents in another "government-change" discourse of the DPJ at the last August-2009 general election.

At the time of the upper-house election in July 2007, putting forward the "priority to the people's lives" as its main populist banner, the DPJ made significant inroads upon the LDP's traditional electoral bases of broad petit-bourgeois layers, and it gained the massive victory over the LDP and Komei coalition. In this regard, the last

general election was an amplified reproduction of the July-2007 upper-house election. The LDP's traditional support bases, dependent on its notorious favor-based politics, were thrown into a disintegrating situation, and there was a wide-spread LDP-to-DPJ shift among various local interest groups of farmers/fishermen, small merchants, medical practitioners and so on.

The LDP and Komei were ousted from the government by the general electoral masses. As had been the case at the July-2007 upper-house election, their anger was against the terrible results of the neoliberal "structural reform" policies: the worsened and further destabilized situation of employment, damages to the social welfare and medical services and the sacrifices enforced on the local municipalities and communities; worsening poverty, widening social disparity and blatant social injustice; and the desperate social situation produced through the restriction of basic human and democratic rights under the banner of "ubiquitous competition in the whole society [every body in competition with every other person]". The anger was also against the big businesses, which accumulated their immense profits in striking contrast to the impoverishing situation of workers and popular masses, especially that of women, elderly and youth.

The 2008 explosion of global financial and economic crisis triggered the contraction of general business activities, the widespread dismissal of regular and non-regular workers, and the deterioration of general living conditions, consequently the political distrust of the coalition politics being deepened among the popular masses.

Immediately before the last general election, there were short-lived administrations under Shinzo Abe, Yasuo Fukuda and Taro Aso's prime ministership successively after Koizumi's resignation in September 2006. The public approval rating of the LDP and Komei coalition had been going down successively, and the final outcome was the "government change".

The actual consciousness of the Japanese popular masses, which brought about the landslide victory for the DPJ, reflects our principal political fact that the popular resistance under the ongoing crisis of international capitalism has not been formed as an autonomous mass movement of workers and popular masses yet since the final disintegration of the postwar reformist movement of the Japanese working class during the 1980s.

Meanwhile, the US policy of "counter-terrorist" war had been the international framework of the LDP-Komei-coalition's orientation toward the constitutional revision and the new-phase war-ready state, but the US "counter-terrorist-war" policy was thrown into the failure and the US unipolar hegemony has collapsed. With the new framework of the international situation, Barack Obama's "change" discourse of presidential campaign had a certain impact on the Japanese electorate to the DPJ's advantage.

At the first election-campaign speech after the lower-house dissolution, the DPJ president, Yukio Hatoyama, who is to become the new prime minister now, asserted that the last general election would be revolutionary. Of course, the last general election was not a "revolutionary" one, but its political significance should not be underestimated. The important fact is that, through their own choice, the workers and popular masses have brought about the governmental change and thrown the LDP, de facto perennial ruling party since the mid-1950s, into its new oppositional minority in the lower house.

The DPJ claims that it will break down the excessive dominance of the administrative bureaucracy and establish a new working mechanism of "politics first" in dealing with the problems and tasks of administrative reform, local self-government, economy and public finance, et cetera. However, the DPJ's fundamental orientation is for building of a "strong state" through neoliberal reformist policies, much in line with the basic interests of the ruling bourgeoisie.

As for the foreign policy, the DPJ's major catchword is "a new-era Japan-US alliance", in which framework the DJP

government is said to strive for an "independent-minded and proactive foreign-policy strategy" and an "Japan-US partnership on an equal footing", and to raise the problems of revising the Japan-US Status-of-Forces Agreement, enforced in 1960, and reexamining of the current US realignment plan of its armed forces and the present state of US armed forces in general in Japan. Meanwhile, the DPJ is much positive on the Japanese Self-defence Forces' participation in the UN "peace-keeping" operations and on the counter-piracy activities.

At the moment, it is not clear how a new alignment of political forces and tendencies will unfold under the DPJ government. However, it is quite possible that the severely defeated LDP would intensify its ultrarightist and exclusionistic stance, which it took during the last election campaign, in opposition to the new DPJ government, and that ultrarightist forces themselves would intensify their campaigns hand in hand with the oppositionist LDP. As for the petit bourgeois Komei party, it is much likely to work for reestablishing its relationship with the DPJ under the new party president and general secretary.

The workers and popular mass movements have to face up to the new situation under the DPJ government, and it is the fundamental tasks to maintain their own standpoints and demands independently of the parliamentary parties and their politics, to strive to build themselves as autonomous mass movements for their causes, and to elaborate their own political and social alternative. With this orientation of mass movement, we are to continue our much protracted long-term effort to build an anti-capitalist left current that would be rooted in the new mass movement of workers and broader popular masses: this is our basic task which we had originally formulated in the 1990s after the disintegration of the postwar reformist movement of the Japanese working class in the 1980s.

(Jun'ichi Hirai, September 2, 2009)

On September 16, the DPJ president Yukio Hatoyama was designated for the prime minister at the parliament, and a new Hatoyama coalition government of the DPJ, People's New Party (PNP), and SDP was set up. The DPJ-led government, as the one which has replaced the former LDP-Komei government, is going to stage its activities for "change" effects. Ministers of the Hatoyama government have issued various policy announcements on abolition of the notorious latter-stage elderly healthcare system, withdrawal of the stoppage of the mother-child family additional of the livelihood-protection, abolition of the notorious Services and Supports for Persons with Disabilities Act, suspension of certain public works such as construction of water-control dams, commitment of 25% greenhouse-gas reduction from 1990 levels by 2020, and so on. The Hatoyama coalition government has certainly formed with a considerable determination for a new start, having its more-than-70% approval rating. Meanwhile the US Obama administration seems to be taking a wait-and-see attitude toward the new Japanese government, pressuring the latter on the question of the US armed forces in Japan and particularly at Okinawa.

How long will the Hatoyama government be able to continue the "change-effect" activities? There should not be any illusion in this regard.

The Democratic Party of Japan is a hybrid bourgeois formation, comprising ultraright nationalists, deregulationist graduates of the neoliberal Matsushita Institute of Government and Management (Matsushita was the original founder of the Panasonic Corp.), right-wing social democrats, et cetera. There are also former leaders of the pro-management trade unions of big businesses, who represent the interests of those business-workers communities. Although there are various nuances in the party, the DPJ stands for the Japan-US alliance firmly, and its official position is for the constitutional revision and the oversea deployment of the Japanese Self-Defence Forces.

Accordingly, confronted with the situation of the ongoing crisis of international capitalist economy and the growing unemployment and poverty, and faced with the political pressure of the US, the DPJ government does not have any room to move against the interests of big capitals. It will be obliged to adopt a policy of tax increase, including the major hike of consumption-tax rate, and the process may go hand in hand with a large-scale political realignment, including the crisis-ridden LDP.

Taking advantage of certain rooms for mass movement brought about by the popular expectation on the DPJ-staged "changes" and through possible disturbed situation of the state bureaucracy under the DPJ government, we must work for building up of the popular mass movements around the issues of the Manpower Dispatching Business Law, the poverty question, the alignment plan of US armed forces and the question of US bases at Okinawa, the oversea dispatch of the Japanese armed forces, the constitutional revision, the climate change and others. Through these processes, we will continue our effort to build a new current of left-wing alternative to confront the historical crisis of international capitalism.

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