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11.07.2022

Former Japanese Prime Minister Shinzo Abe assassinated

Japan's former Prime Minister Shinzo Abe died yesterday after being shot while delivering a campaign speech in the city of Nara ahead of Sunday's upper house election. Abe, a far-right nationalist closely connected with the ruling class's remilitarization drive, was Japan's longest serving prime minister, serving a stint from 2006 to 2007, and then from 2012 until stepping down in 2020.



Japan's Prime Minister Shinzo Abe on, August 31, 2020. (AP Photo/Koji Sasahara)

Abe, 67, was shot around 11:30 Friday morning near Nara's Yamato-Saidaiji Station. According to eye-witness and video accounts, an assailant fired two rounds at Abe from a homemade shotgun, striking him in the neck and left collarbone, and causing injuries to his heart. Abe then collapsed and was rushed to a hospital. He was pronounced dead at 5:03 p.m.

Security personnel detained Tetsuya Yamagami, an unemployed 41-year-old man, at the scene of the incident. He was subsequently formally arrested. According to police, a search of Yamagami's home turned up additional homemade guns and explosives. He was previously employed as a dispatch worker at a manufacturing company since the fall of 2020, but reportedly quit in May, saying he felt "tired."

Government officials stated that Yamagami also served in the Marine Self-Defense Force—Japan's navy—for nearly three years until 2005.

The exact motive for the shooting is unclear. According to police, the suspect stated that he was "dissatisfied with former Prime Minister Abe and aimed to kill him" due to the belief that Abe was involved with a "specific organization." The police said it is a religious organization, though it has not been identified. Yamagami is also reported as saying, "It's not a grudge against the political beliefs of former Prime Minister Abe."

Prime Minister Fumio Kishida of the ruling Liberal Democratic Party (LDP), responded to Abe's assassination, saying, "This attack is an act of brutality that happened during the elections—the very foundation of our democracy—and is absolutely unforgiveable."

The killing takes place amid deepening social tensions and growing anger towards governments, both in Japan and internationally. Political leaders and the media have eulogized Abe, while painting a picture of Japan as a nation in mourning. Though shocked, many, however, were quick to criticize the former prime minister. Speaking to the media in Kyoto, a woman identified only by her family name Otake, stated, "I think that various problems that Japan has now were brought about during his administration. I'm against Abe."

For two-and-half years the COVID-19 pandemic has raged around the world, causing death, as well as impacting people's health and ability to work as governments, including

in Tokyo, refuse to take measures to stop the virus's spread. The United States/NATO-instigated war against Russia in Ukraine and the war drive against China is also enflaming these tensions.

Regardless of the exact reason for the assassination, the Japanese government will use Abe's assassination to intensify its attacks on democratic rights, as it ramps up its preparations for war against China in particular. It plans to double military spending to make Japan the third-largest spending country on the armed forces in the world.

Abe and the Japanese ruling class have had long-standing goals to revise the constitution to give the government emergency powers that could be used to silence political opposition and to alter Article 9, known as the pacifist clause, which formally bars Japan from fielding a military or deploying it overseas.

Abe's second term in office marked a significant shift to the right in the Japanese establishment. Abe was a member of the ultra-nationalist organization Nippon Kaigi, which promotes remilitarization, historical revisionism to cover up the crimes of the Japanese military in the 1930s and 1940s, and the restriction of democratic rights. Many other leading government figures, including Prime Minister Kishida, also belong to this organization.

Abe regularly addressed Nippon Kaigi, pledging to push through constitutional changes that would explicitly recognize the legality of Japan's military, the Self-Defense Forces (SDF), in a move that would pave the way for Article 9's eventual abolition. This would allow Japanese imperialism to more aggressively assert itself overseas in coordination with US war preparations aimed at China.

During his tenure in office, Abe oversaw a so-called reinterpretation of the constitution in 2014 to allow Japan's SDF to engage in "collective self-defense" overseas alongside an ally. His government then pushed legislation through the National Diet to formalize the "reinterpretation" the following year, running roughshod over mass public opposition and demonstrations.

His government pursued a policy of downplaying or falsifying Imperial Japan's war crimes. As a result, Abe was particularly reviled in China and South Korea. These crimes

included the forced recruitment of as many as 200,000 “comfort women,” a euphemism for sex slaves, throughout Asia, who were stationed in military “comfort stations” during World War II. His government also downplayed the Rape of Nanjing, when in 1937–1938 Japanese soldiers rampaged for six weeks through Nanjing, killing an estimated 300,000 people.

Abe’s key economic policy which bears his name made deep inroads into the social position of the working class. Consisting of “three arrows,” Abenomics included a mixture of limited pump-priming measures, quantitative easing, and corporate restructuring and attacks on working conditions. These policies helped large businesses increase profits considerably, as wages stagnated. As a result, when the COVID-19 pandemic began in 2020, the hardest hit were non-regular workers, who had greatly expanded to comprise 38 percent of all employees in Japan.

Though Abe resigned as prime minister due to ill health, he remained a lawmaker in the National Diet’s lower house as well as incredibly influential within the LDP. Abe was replaced by Yoshihide Suga, who lasted a year as prime minister, followed by Kishida. Abe did not remain quiet, but instead became an even more belligerent antagonist of Beijing, challenging the “One China” policy over Taiwan. In February, Abe called for introducing US nuclear weapons to Japan, on the pretext of the threat posed by China and North Korea, triggering open debate on the matter within the LDP.

Abe leaves behind a legacy of attacks on the working-class at home and the sharp rise of militarism and tensions in the Indo-Pacific region that are pushing Japan ever closer to war.

Word Socialist 08.07.2022