

Japan Restoration Party (Nippon Ishin) backpedals on policies

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OSAKA – Nippon Ishin no Kai (Japan Restoration Party) officials released an outline of their new platform over the weekend that contained no mention of its original promises to support the Trans-Pacific Partnership free-trade accord, get out of nuclear power by the 2030s and halve the number of Diet seats.

The absence of these goals reflects the growing power of party leader Shintaro Ishihara over its founder and deputy chief, Toru Hashimoto, who doubles as Osaka mayor, and the original members of Nippon Ishin, who had included those goals in their previous platform.

Ishihara opposes the TPP, advocates continued nuclear power for energy and for diplomacy, and does not think halving the number of Diet seats is practical.

The full platform for the Dec. 16 general election is expected to be released Thursday.

But fundamental differences between the original members of Nippon Ishin, centered around Hashimoto, Osaka Gov. Ichiro Matsui, Osaka-based Ishin no Kai members and the nine Diet members who defected to Nippon Ishin last month, and Ishihara and his allies, who merged with the Hashimoto camp earlier this month, are creating the image of a disunited, divided party.

The outline released over the weekend calls only for the expansion of an unspecified free-trade area, and for changing the rules regarding nuclear plants. The platform now calls for reactors to be restarted as long as certain conditions are met.

While the goal of ending nuclear power by the 2030s was never an official part of the premerger platform, Hashimoto had strongly pushed for it just before joining forces with Ishihara.

However, despite Ishihara's opposition, Matsui told reporters Sunday there would be a line in the final platform about participating in the TPP. Under the Hashimoto-Ishihara merger pact, Nippon Ishin will only take part in the TPP negotiations if it is judged the agreement will not negatively impact the nation's interests – again, a bow to Ishihara's concerns.

As Nippon Ishin members struggle to reach final agreement on their platform, relations with Your Party, with whom they had been attempting to coordinate candidates, took a turn for the worse over the weekend.

Hashimoto, frustrated at what he felt was Your Party's disorganized approach to selecting candidates, said late last week the party should make its final choices by playing the rock-paper-scissors game.

That earned him a sharp rebuke from Your Party leader Yoshimi Watanabe, and it remains unclear if the parties can reach an agreement either before or after the election to work together.

ERIC JOHNSTON, *Japan Times* staff writer

P.S.

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<http://www.japantimes.co.jp/text/nn20121127a2.html>