

# Protests grow against the Tokyo Summer Olympics as COVID-19 cases surge

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With three weeks until the Olympics, new COVID-19 cases in Tokyo are on the rise, after the government ended the state of emergency on June 20. The following week saw a doubling of infections. On July 1, Tokyo had more than 670 new cases, at least 63 of which were the more infectious delta variant.

In response to the sharp increase in cases, Prime Minister Suga stated: “If the state of emergency is reissued, games without an audience may be a possibility.” The Tokyo Olympics Committee and the International Olympics Committee have shown no intention of cancelling or further postponing the Games, which are expected to bring more than 15,000 athletes and thousands of coaches, trainers and officials from all over the world.

Earlier this year, in an attempt to convince the population that the Olympics will be safe, Prime Minister Suga announced that Japan would finish vaccinating all elderly citizens by the end of July. As of now, however, only 12 percent of the adult population is fully vaccinated.

A poll in May showed that 83 percent of people in Japan do not want the Olympic Games to take place. There have been numerous protests against them.

On June 23, a demonstration was organised in front of Tochomae—the Tokyo Metropolitan Government Station—calling for the cancellation of the Tokyo Olympics and Paralympics. Numerous signs were held up reading: “Use the [Olympic] funds for COVID” and “Olympics destroy lives. End them now” were held up. The demonstrators then marched throughout the Shinjuku district with more people joining. By 9 p.m. the gathering had swelled to more than 850.

On June 26, nurses and medical staff protested in Sapporo to demand the cancellation of the games. Placards included “Cancel the Olympics. We must do

everything to fight COVID.” They told the media: “We have to cancel the Olympics Games and put all our efforts into medical care, so that we do not have a healthcare crisis.”

An online poll conducted, on June 29, revealed that the overwhelming majority of the nurses are opposed to the games, with 54 percent calling for postponement and 32 percent for cancellation. One person commented: If they force us to have the Olympics now, it would be completely chaotic. I cannot stand a worse healthcare crisis”.

The ruling class has responded by deploying police to intimidate and discourage people from voicing their opposition. In May, the home of an anti-Olympics protester was raided by police and her computer and smartphone taken away. Her lawyer told the media, “There is nothing illegal in the protest. It is likely that the aim of the police in raiding her house was to investigate the anti-Olympics movement and also to set an example—a scare tactic for others as a deterrent.”

A day after the Tochomae protest, 140 police raided a Kyoto University dorm and arrested a member of a pseudo-left group, Zengakuren, for using a false address when renewing his driver’s license in October 2020. Throughout the pandemic, Zengakuren has been prominent in opposing the Olympics and criticizing the administration.

A petition to cancel the Olympics games on Change.org now has over 445,000 signatures from all over the world. Its organizer, Kenji Utsunomiya, submitted the petition to the Tokyo governor on May 14, with more than 350,000 signatures at the time, and a letter requesting the cancellation of the Games. In June, it was revealed that the Tokyo governor had never reviewed or considered the request, despite having received it.

Another Change.org petition was initiated stating: “We appeal for the cancellation of the Tokyo Olympics, where the danger is becoming more and more apparent!” In just over three days, the petition has had more than 44,500 signatures.

One person commented: “Now that the spread of variant strains is becoming more and more serious, if the Olympic Games are held forcibly, Japan could become a source of further explosive infections. If that happens, the lives of people, not only in Japan, but around the world will be endangered. Decide to cancel now!”

Another declared: “We strongly oppose the Olympics, which is an event that serves the interests and profit of the organizers and those closely related, and not for the majority of the people! Preventing COVID and stabilizing people’s lives must be a priority!”

It is clear that the interests of the capitalist elites and the working class are in direct contradiction internationally. The ruling class is willing to sacrifice millions of human lives to COVID-19, in pursuit of profit, while workers are demanding rational and scientific measures to stop the pandemic.

In Japan, the pandemic is creating a crisis in the health system, which has already been hard hit by funding cuts, resulting in the elimination of more than 20,000 public hospital beds between 2008 and 2018. Hundreds of people, infected with the virus, are waitlisted to be admitted to hospital, forced to quarantine at home with no adequate care.

Okinawa has experienced one of the sharpest increases in COVID cases, and the occupancy rate of hospital beds for COVID patients is 92 percent.

The social crisis has also dramatically worsened. It is estimated that more than 100,000 people have lost their jobs during the pandemic. Homelessness has increased to the highest level since the economic crisis associated with the collapse of the asset bubble in the early 1990s.

Last Friday, fearing protests, particularly by athletes, the International Olympics Committee announced new rules, supposedly allowing for athletes to express their views at venues. At the same time, however, all demonstrations on medals’ podiums, fields of play during competitions, and at the opening and closing ceremonies are strictly banned.

on July 1,



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