

“Our anger has reached a boiling point”

Protests against the Tokyo Olympics erupt across Japan as COVID-19 cases continue to surge

Emily Ochiai
23 July 2021

The Olympic Games began yesterday as COVID-19 continued to surge in Japan and in particular the host city Tokyo, one of the most densely populated cities in the world. Japan's seven-day average for new cases surpassed 3,500 on Thursday. The bulk of new cases were in Tokyo which had nearly 2,000 confirmed cases just one day before the opening of the Olympic Games. Currently, 2,544 people are hospitalized with COVID-19 in Tokyo alone.

Experts warn that the daily number of cases in Tokyo might exceed 3,000, but the government of Prime Minister Yoshihide Suga has repeatedly declared that it will not cancel the Games. A government official, whose identity has been kept anonymous by the media, was quoted as saying, that “[the number of projected daily cases] is just fine. There is no reason to cancel the Olympics” referring to a previously calculated projected daily infection number of over 2,400.

Though the ruling class of Japan has no intention of hiding its indifference to human life, the working class of Japan has been fighting back. Demonstrations erupted all over Japan this week. Hundreds, particularly youth, have been protesting in Tokyo in the weeks leading up to the Games that began yesterday.

During the opening ceremonies on the evening of July 23rd, around 700 people marched from Harajuku station and gathered outside of Tokyo's National Stadium in opposition. The demonstrators demanded immediate shutdown of the event and an effective “lockdown” of all non-essential activities in order to prevent a super spreader event.

Confronted with excessive police force, at least two

protesters were arrested as crowds denounced the immense health dangers that are being buried to prop up the geo-political position of the Japanese government and to stoke nationalism.

A nurse at Tokyo Metropolitan Hospital stressed the real dangers of the situation and its implications, stating, “Tokyo saw more than 1,300 cases today. What this means is that in the following week, we will have at least 30 people in the ICU.” He continued “we don't have a cure for COVID-19 and the vaccines are not perfect. So clearly, preventing infection must be the first priority. What is needed urgently in order to save lives is to stop the Olympics.” A banner held up by multiple people read “OLYMPICS KILL THE POOR,” an expression of how the decade-long Olympics preparation has affected the working class. Thousands were displaced and billions have been siphoned from public funds to cover the enormous costs of construction.

Over the past week numerous marches have taken place. Hundreds marched near the Olympics Village Plaza in Chuo City Tokyo last weekend. The demonstrators demanded, “Limiting the spread of COVID-19 must be the priority, not the Olympics.” Banners were held up stating, “Protect lives! We Oppose the forced hosting of the Olympics.”

On the same day 120 people also marched from Tsukiji to the headquarters of the Tokyo Olympics Committee. Protesters denounced the gutting of social services and indifference to loss of human life chanting, “Cancel it! We refuse the Olympics-induced-disaster,” “Olympics are killing us,” “Put effort in welfare

programs, not the Olympics.”

A doctor who attended the demonstration told the *Asahi Shimbun*, “In the past week, we had 6 airport employees visiting our hospital per day. At least one person tests positive for PCR every day. It’s definitely increasing.” She continued, “It was after the marathon test tournament in Sapporo on May 5th. I was dispatched for 5 days and the conditions were terrible. But I feel that this was one of the better cases of the government employing medical institutes. Considering this, it is scary how things will turn out in such a big city like Tokyo. The best way to prevent the spread of COVID-19 is to cancel the Olympics Games.”

Thirty-seven organizations opposing the Olympics released a joint statement addressed to the International Olympics Committee President Thomas Bach declaring, “Our anger has reached a boiling point.”

On July 17 hundreds gathered in Sapporo in Hokkaido Prefecture, site of the Olympics marathon. Cases in Hokkaido are on the rise with two consecutive days with case number over 100. The prefecture is quickly approaching the limit for a state of emergency.

A protester declared, “People’s lives are at risk because of the pandemic. Why should we prioritize the Olympics?” Another stated, “All the money spent on the games should be used for those affected by COVID-19 and for a better healthcare system infrastructure.”

Denouncing the enormous amount of money spent on the Games—now well over \$15 billion dollars, a graduate student told the *Asahi Shimbun*, “There are too many issues with the Olympics, even without the pandemic, such as the soaring operating costs, expulsion of residents for redevelopment, and unclear flow of money. How can they justify holding the Games while leaving all these problems unresolved?”

Further exposing the criminality of the ruling class, it was revealed that the Tokyo Government is refusing to vaccinate the estimated 8,000 Olympics and Paralympics staff and workers. The Tokyo government previously claimed that all personnel at the Games would be completely vaccinated. However, they notified the workers that they will receive their second round of shots after the Games.

The government stated this decision was made due to the possibility that “vaccine side effects during the Games have the risk of interfering with the operation.”

Outraged by this irrational decision, a staff member told the media, “I was completely astounded to know that they are prioritizing the Games over vaccination. I am infuriated with the decision to force workers to operate with only one dose of vaccine. Since each staff members’ timeframe of work is different, they could have shifted the time of vaccination accordingly.”

The public outrage against the Games has become the central focus of anger against the Japanese ruling class and social inequality in Japan. In a desperate attempt to appear as though their hands were tied, the Suga government has promoted the notion that Japan was only given the option to postpone by one year, and have been forced by the IOC to host the Games to avoid losing their hosting status, emphasizing that taxpayers would suffer if the billions of dollars pumped into the grand infrastructure remained unused, having been paid for with tax dollars.

However, this has been proven to be a lie. In reality the Japanese government has actively pursued hosting the Olympics this year, despite being given the option to postpone until 2022. Yasuhiro Sakaue, sociology professor at Hitotsubashi University specializing in sports told Jiji Press, “Former Prime Minister Abe requested to postpone it by 1 year, instead of 2 years which was proposed by the IOC. The IOC emphasized that the insurance that the Japanese Government would be eligible for would not be effective if they decide to postpone it instead of cancelling. It was a conscious decision of Abe to take this risk.”

Demonstrations and protests are anticipated to continue throughout the Games which are scheduled to close on August 8. The fight to stop this public health emergency must be joined by workers internationally in a common struggle against the capitalist system and the bourgeoisie of every nation who are carrying out herd immunity policies in the wake of new and more dangerous variants of the virus.



To contact the WSWS and the
Socialist Equality Party visit:

wsws.org/contact