

The Montreal Bulletin is an independent publication established in 1946 to meet the needs of the time—the re-establishment of community life for Japanese Canadians after their World War II internment. Published in English, French and Japanese 10 times yearly by a volunteer staff, the Montreal Bulletin's goal is to serve all organizations and interested persons within the Greater Montreal area.

The English section of the Montreal Bulletin is directed by the following editorial collective:

Mary Fujiwara Burke, Alan Itakura, Laura Kobayashi, Colette Nishizaki, David O'Hashi, Yoko Sayeki, Yosh Taguchi and Don Watanabe

Japanese & English Staff:

Yoshino Aoki, Sachiko Ayukawa, Mary Fujiwara Burke, Michael & Tatsuko Cooper, Filipe Fukutani, Seigo Futamura, Kumiko Hagiwara, Valerie Hongoh, Mariko Ikeda, Mitsuo Inoue, Alan Itakura, Irene Kerisit, Laura Kobayashi, Akemi Mallette, Mariko Nishi, Colette Nishizaki, David O'Hashi, Yoko Sayeki, Carol Shinya, Yosh Taguchi, Toshihiko Tsuji, Nobuyuki Tsujimoto, Don Watanabe, Terry Yasunaka

DISCLAIMER: Where opinions are expressed they do not necessarily reflect the views of the *Montreal Bulletin*.

Bulletin Subscriptions

Phone: 438-797-2426
montrealbulletin@bellnet.ca

Bulletin Advertising

montrealbulletinads@gmail.com

JCCCM Contacts

514-728-1996
centrejaponais@bellnet.ca
jcccm_yh@bellnet.ca

What can we do from Montreal for Fukushima and beyond?

By Junko Shimura

Editor's Note: The views expressed in this commentary are those of the author.

On Friday, November 1, 2019 a small film club event took place in Montreal. The film, "Beyond the Waves," produced by a media company in Belgium, captured the story of actor-turned-politician, Taro Yamamoto. Soon after the disastrous accident in Fukushima, Japan he won a seat in the House of Councillors in the Tokyo electoral district in 2013 and later became a member of a newly developed minor party. Yamamoto has been advocating against nuclear energy and the Trans Pacific Partnership Agreement and has been trying to rescue those affected from the vested interests of private, big business and Japanese conservatives.

More recently, at the 25th election of Councillors, Yamamoto obtained the highest number of votes under the proportional representation election system. The Reiwa Shinsengumi party (with 4.6% of the vote, this party was recognized as a legitimate political party after the election) elected both a wheel chair-bound man and woman as members of the House of Councillors; however, Yamamoto himself lost his seat in the House of Councillors. Currently he leads the Reiwa Shinsengumi party without being an elected member of parliament.

This film captures his actions with grass-root supporters and includes numerous scenes of people who are suffering from the tragedy in Fukushima and beyond, including the highly concentrated US military bases in Okinawa, homeless people in urban cities, the spread of apathy among the working class, and the difficult life styles of the young, women, children and the elderly. These are all examples of real life in Japan and include the voices of the vulnerable who are largely ignored by the central government.

After the screening many of the participants expressed their surprise and seemed to be emotionally moved by the negative impact of Japan's current national policy against ordinary people. Later, I learned that some of the individuals captured in the film were acquaintances of members of Kizuna Montréal, a voluntary grassroots support group in Mon-

tréal whose mission is to improve the life of those suffering in Fukushima (see <http://kizunajapan.web.fc2.com/index-en.html>), and there is no doubt that the film made us feel closer to the issue and generated sympathy for those affected.



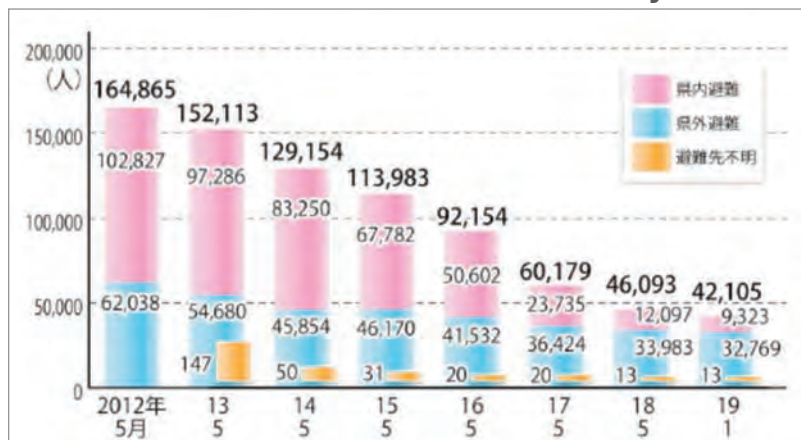
A screen shot of the video message from Mr. Taro Yamamoto at the occasion of Montreal screening event of "Beyond the Waves", 1 November 2019. Video is accessible at https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=TA0ye6_cN5M&t=31s Photo credit: Reiwa Shinsengumi, Subtitles: Junko Shimura

Although we are physically distant from Fukushima, the lives of evacuees continue to deteriorate after the forced evacuation, according to communication with the members of Kizuna Montréal. The numerous government interventions to control the so-called harmful rumours on contamination in Fukushima seem to be to protect the government and the ruling parties but they are not so kind for the evacuees.

In addition, many scientists have pointed out the health risks posed by the contamination. For sufferers, recovering sufficiently to lead one's day-to-day

See Fukushima on page 3

Return of Evacuees to Fukushima by Year



The number of evacuees in Fukushima Prefecture has gradually declined from 164,865 in May 2012, but 42,105 people (9,323 in the prefecture, 32,769 outside the prefecture, 13 unknown locations) are still shelter at the end of January this year. Amongst the evacuees in this year, children under 18 years old are 10,487 people (as of 18 April) are still outside the prefecture. According to a survey of residents' intentions undertaken by the reconstruction agency and prefectures, and by municipalities, the respondents who expressed their wishes to return to the prefecture were 10.8% of former residents in Futaba Machi; 12.5% of former residents in Okuma Machi (in fiscal 17). Over 60% of the evacuees from both of the towns expressed not willing to return to the prefecture.

The disaster relief law was applied to the whole Fukushima Prefecture in the nuclear power plant accident, and many residents were evacuated from the evacuation instruction zone, even outside of the zone (voluntary evacuees), to all over the country. "Deemed temporary housing", such as condominiums and apartments for private rentals, was provided free of charge at that time, but the rental subsidies for voluntary evacuees were cut off in March 2017.

Source: News article March 26, 2019 on Kahoku Shimpō Web news
https://www.kahoku.co.jp/tohokunews/201903/20190326_63043.html

life is slow, and keeping the vulnerable population, such as children, safe and healthy must be the priority, although people no longer pay much attention to Fukushima. Voices against nuclear energy and support for the evacuees have faded in Japan after eight long years of struggles. The twenty-plus years of economic recession in Japan has also stripped the pride and courage of many Japanese. Yes, the film captured the real Japan. I've noticed that whenever I visit Japan, people are exhausted and don't look like they are enjoying life. The entire mood of Japanese society seems to be suffocating and apathetic.

While I was watching the film, I remembered a YouTube video in which Taro was speaking loudly on a street in Tokyo during this year's election campaign — "Evaluating human value with his or her productivity is not acceptable. I want everyone to be able to live happily. Do not kill yourself, stay alive!"

Stay alive! — It struck me, and it remained in my ear. Living healthily and happily with a culturally satisfactory life style is a basic human right — and it's a constitutional right in Japan. Unfortunately, long business hours, cost cutting, emphasizing business efficiency and the pressures of society to achieve high productivity have made

everyone forget about their well-being in life. In such a dark shadow in life who can stay alive? I might have seen a glimmer of hope when I listened to the statement Taro gave to voters at a town hall meeting in a video on Internet.

We received a video message from Taro Yamamoto and the Reiwa Shinsengumi organization and it was projected after the film's screening. No one in the audience left the venue — their eyes were glued to the screen. I wondered why they did not rush home right after the end of the film. It was, in fact, a stormy and very cold evening in Montreal, and we knew that hydro power went

down in many parts of the city during the day so one would have expected the audience to check home and family as soon as the event was over; however they did not.

In the video message Taro called for actions to fix the crumbling social systems in Japan. He said "No wave of despair. I believe we can change the political agenda of Japan which is sick as hell. It is the Japanese people who must to do it. And when we do so, let's change it together with people from Japan and people like you who chose to live overseas but are thinking of Japan". None of us in the room, I believe, has watched the scenes of Fukushima as an event that is detached from us and as something far away in the distance. It can happen with an earthquake and tsunami at any coast, and we are thinking of Japan.

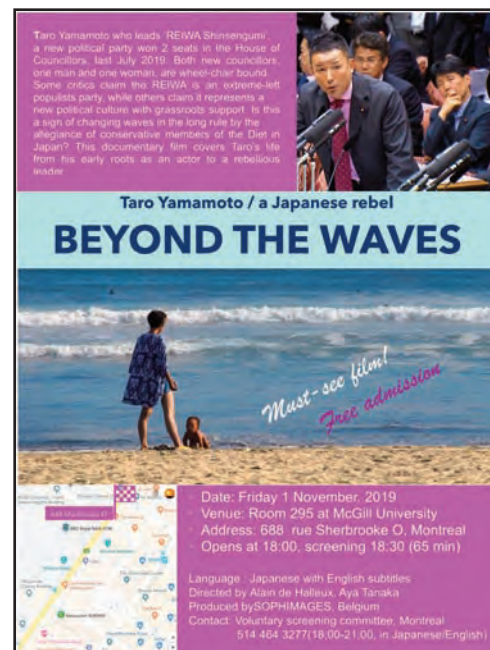
The next step for us may differ among audience members. What I perceived in the room was that everyone wanted to do something for Fukushima and beyond. One professor in attendance offered to hold another screening event in 2020 to disseminate this important documentary. Someone else suggested maintaining continuous dialog on Japan in general and Fukushima in particular. Others suggested keep-

ing each other more informed on what is happening in Japanese policy that has a critical effect on the people of Fukushima and expressed their interest in knowing more details about Japan's social systems, including available safety nets for the vulnerable.

I interpreted the comments from the floor in summary as follows — we as Montrealers are watching Japan with interest, and we are willing to help those in need at the local level throughout Japan. For some that help might come as voters and for others as supporters of grass root actions.

Finally, I would like to thank everyone who joined the event for watching and participating in the discussion. Despite the weather conditions, the venue was filled with enthusiastic debate and warm encouragement for Japan. I also acknowledge the support from Kizuna Montréal members with gratitude, especially to Ms. Ryoko Hashizume, Ms. and Mr. Miyuki & James Savelle, Ms. Miwako Uesaka, and Ms. Tomoko Ikeda for their tireless efforts in making this Montreal screening possible. I would also like to thank Ms. Koda and Ms. Arase in New York for contacting the film producer in Belgium for us.

About the author: Junko Shimura is a biologist and an international civil servant based in Montreal. She supports the activities of Kizuna Montréal in her personal capacity and helps voluntary removal of invasive alien species on Ile des Soeurs in her spare time. She loves hiking and exploring Canadian nature.



A flyer of the voluntary screening event announced via social media with screen shots of the "Beyond of Waves." Photo credit: Sophimage, Belgium.