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*Original article written by Satomi Horikiri, Labor Net, which can be found at the following URL: <http://www.labornetjp.org/news/2020/0208futaba>.*

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**“Visit to Futaba-chou before ‘Recovery Olympics’, tobacco field converted into space for storing contaminated waste”, 13 February 2020**

Recording the highest level of radiation, a town near the Fukushima Daiichi Nuclear Power Plant will soon be lifting its evacuation order against all odds. On March 4, an evacuation order will be removed on the area around Futaba Station, allowing the Olympic torch to pass through the town. However, none of the residents of Futaba-cho whom I spoke to voiced joy about the event. I went to Futaba-chou to investigate the current situation as preparations for the Tokyo Olympics steadily progress.

Evacuation orders still apply to 96% of Futaba-chou, and people cannot enter these areas without prior approval. On February 8, I accompanied Mr. Shinichi Tanaka on his visit back to his hometown. However, Mr. Tanaka actually does not have a home to return to because he sold his house, property, and farm to the Japanese government. He even moved his family graves to Koriyama, where he currently resides. Although he has no reason to return to Futaba-chou, he got approval for me to visit his hometown together because he wanted to “create a record of the current situation.”

The car ride between Koriyama and Futaba-chou is approximately 1.5 hours. Containers with contaminated dirt endlessly line National Route 288. Mr. Tanaka explains that the containers were filled with sand dug from the mountains. I asked, “Isn’t the radiation level high in the mountains as well?” He did not answer my question, instead replying, “It’s easy to dig up the mountains here because they are made of sand.”

As we arrive in the town of Okuma after leaving Tamura city, the radiation level increases from 0.05 micro Sv/h to 1.45 micro Sv/h. The average radiation level to which a person should be exposed in one year is 1 mil SV/h, or 0.114 micro Sv/h over a one-hour period.

When we finally enter Futaba-chou, we see an enormous white building. At first, the structure—with a stair frame under construction—looks like a shopping mall. However, a closer look reveals that it is a temporary storage facility holding the contaminated water produced by the Fukushima Daiichi Nuclear Power Plant. The warehouse stores 1,000 tanks with contaminated water.

Futaba-chou has 2,600 property owners, and Mr. Tanaka was among the first to sell his property to the government for the construction of the temporary storage facility. He says, “Someone had to make a sacrifice.”

Before the earthquake and tsunami, Mr. Tanaka owned a tobacco farm that was operated by his large family of 10 spanning four generations. They owned a house built from timber that they hand-selected and lived in the village of Hosoya, close to the Fukushima Daiichi Nuclear Power Plant. Mr. Tanaka’s family owned four hectares of property that included his home, farm, and parts of a nearby mountain. About his decision to sell the land to the government, he said, “I thought it would help the government to have all of this land.” Immediately after he sold his tobacco farm, the government began to place containers with the contaminated waste on his property. Last July, his home was demolished and

converted into an empty plot of land. Although he had intended to return to Futaba-chou at some point, he did not come back on the day that his family home was demolished. Since then, he has repeatedly told himself, “This land no longer belongs to me.”

“It looks like an outdoor concert stadium,” Mr. Tanaka said as he peered at massive steel frames, which had been erected where his home once stood. He had been told that they were part of a building to store the ashes from burned-up waste containers.

On a tablet, he showed me photos of his former home, explaining where everything had been located. He appeared to be etching those details into his memory. “We’d built our home over generations, and it just so happened that it was destroyed during my time. I think about all of the people who died in the tsunami, and I tell myself that I just lost ‘things’.”

The village of Hosoya has long cherished the Funayama Shrine. Mr. Tanaka fondly remembers the time he used to dance in the obon festivals at the shrine in his youth. Urged on by the residents to protect this landmark, the government rebuilt a small shrine, a *torii* gate, and even a stone monument. From Funayama Shrine, I get an entire view of Hosoya, including the Daiichi Nuclear Plant #5 and 6 and #4... I can also see the spires of smoke rising from the decontamination work in progress. For the residents of Hosoya, the nuclear power plants were a common sight. Except for the nuclear facilities, the village was entirely green; now the landscape has been covered in white and grey. The radiation level at this spot was high, rising to 3.8 micro SV/h.

Mr. Tanaka and I walk a little further from the site of his former home, and our conversations cannot be heard over the sound of dump trucks. He says that the noise is not as bad today as it is Saturday. It is far worse on the weekdays.

We find a large pool of concrete that stores clean dirt that has been separated out from the contaminated waste in the storage containers. Mr. Tanaka says, “This dirt is only clean in that they’ve removed trees and roots. It’s still contaminated. No one will know unless you say that it’s been exposed to radiation.” This dirt will be used for public construction projects all over Japan.

Around us, we notice horizontal banners that say, “Restore beautiful Fukushima.” Mr. Tanaka remarks, “They’re not bringing it back. They’re destroying it.” However, he corrects himself, saying “By sacrificing our town, we can restore Fukushima. Someone has to make a sacrifice. That’s what I think the banner means.”

Futaba Station is in the midst of construction. It is charming with a marionette clock and does not appear any different from the JR stations around Japan. After a nine-year hiatus, the Jyohan train line will begin operating. The small shop in front of the station remains the same. Mr. Tanaka remembers how the store owner used to silently judge but nevertheless allow high school students to smoke nearby. She still lives in Saitama Prefecture as an evacuee.

The Olympic Torch runner is expected to pass in front of this station. When I ask Mr. Tanaka whether this event would mark a happy occasion for the Futaba residents, he replied, “I knew from the start that these changes would happen. After all, the Tokyo Olympics are meant to revitalize the areas affected by the earthquake and tsunami. We can’t exclude only Futaba from the Olympic events.”

The Futaba Station lies merely one kilometre from the temporary storage site of the contaminated waste from the nuclear plants. In one month, the station will be the only part of town to host the brilliant Olympics ceremony.