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Japan

Anti-militarisation protests in Japan: An interview with Chie Matsumoto.

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On August 30, tens of thousands of people (120,000, according to organizers), protested outside the Japanese parliament against new military legislation that would allow the military to fight abroad. This would happen for the first time since World War II to Japanese troops. According to its constitution, Japan is barred from using force to resolve conflicts except in cases of legitimate defense. But a re-interpretation of the law will now allow "collective self-defense"- using force to defend allies under attack. The demonstrators protested in front of the Japanese Diet to the cry of "Save Japan from Abe." Mattia Gallo interviews journalist and activist Chie Matsumoto.

What is the content of the new Japanese military legislation? Is it true that it is an historic change?

The legislation basically allows the Japanese military, which is a self-defense force, to join the collective force at times of war. Although it limits the capacity of the Self Defense Force (SDF) to providing logistical support to allied forces, it allows Japan to join the offensive forces outside of the country, which is unconstitutional, according to constitution experts.

The U.S.-drafted constitution restricted the Japanese military to be only a defensive force, and so yes, this is a historic change.

Which slogans were chanted during the demonstration on August 30 outside the Japanese Parliament? What are the main criticisms from those who took to the streets to protest? Why do you think there was such widespread participation in the event?

People protested outside of the Diet building against the security bills, which they call "the war legislation" because it leads Japan into war of aggression. They demanded that Prime Minister Abe strike the war legislation and step down.

They are against the security bills, but they are also angry about how the bills are (not) deliberated in a democratic way. That's why they also chant, "Tell me what democracy look like," "This is what democracy looks like."

I think that there was the largest number of people gathering in protest ever since the 1960s demonstration against the U.S.-Japan Security Treaty because this is not just about the security bills. This movement is about taking democracy back in our hands.

From your point of view, why is the Japanese government approving this new and epochal Japanese military legislation?

The Japanese government is aware of the opposition. But more important than the majority opposition is the pressure from the U.S. government. Prime Minister Shinzo Abe announced and promised that he would pass the security bills in summer when he was invited to speak before the U.S. Congress. He did this before deliberation started in the Japanese parliament.

Do you think that the protests by the population in Japan will continue?

Yes. They are still going almost every day, every week.

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