

How an Anonymous Blog Went Viral and Forced Japan's Abe to Respond

①An anonymous Japanese blogger's tirade about failing to secure a daycare place for her child has spurred Prime Minister Shinzo Abe into action.

②In a Feb. 15 blog post titled "I couldn't get daycare --die Japan!!!" a person identifying as a mother said she was preparing to quit her job as she had nowhere to leave her child. "So what am I supposed to do now?" she wrote using unusually coarse language in the post shared about 50,000 times on social media. "Give me a damn break Japan."

③After initially brushing off the post, Abe has promised remedies. On Friday, he pledged to add detailed measures in legislation this spring to reduce waiting-lists for daycare --the figure climbed to 23,167 in April last year. The same day, his ruling party set up a task force to propose fixes, and the head of his coalition partner suggested using extra budget funds for the issue.

④"Applications for nursery schools have increased at a pace faster than we can provide places for," Abe said in parliament Monday, in response to one of a raft of questions throughout the day on the issue. "We will do our utmost to cut waiting lists to zero so that people can both work and raise children."

⑤Grappling with an aging and shrinking population, Abe has made boosting women's participation in the workforce a pillar of his economic policies. He may have decided to take action to stem a sagging support rate among women --37 percent compared with 47 percent for men in a Mainichi newspaper poll this month --ahead of upper house elections this summer, said Mari Miura, a professor of gender and politics at Sophia University in Tokyo.

⑥"It's clear that Abe has little understanding of the hardships faced by working women," Miura said. "The LDP is scrambling to ensure that this issue doesn't blow up before the elections."

Mom's Dilemma

⑦Long waiting lists at publicly-run daycare centers have forced many mothers to stay at home, and made women hesitant about switching jobs due to concerns they may lose places for their children. Baby-sitters aren't widely available --and are very expensive: full-time care can cost several thousand dollars a month.

⑧"While the number of daycare facilities has increased, there are also more working women," said Toshihiro Nagahama, chief economist at Dai-Ichi Life Research Institute in Tokyo. "Given how quickly the working population is projected to decrease, we need to ensure that people who want to work, but currently can't due to childcare issues, can actually work."

⑨Unleashing the labor of that population would mean big gains for the workforce. Last year, 950,000 women cited childbirth and childcare as reasons why they weren't searching for a job, even though they had a desire to work.

⑩When first questioned about the post in parliament on Feb. 29 by opposition lawmaker and working mother Shiori Yamao, Abe refused to address the issue, saying the anonymous nature of the post meant he "couldn't verify the content." That struck a nerve with working parents on Twitter, where people who sympathized with the blogger used a hashtag saying: "It was me who was rejected from daycare." The response to the blog spurred a protest outside parliament on March 5.



⑪The blogger, a mother of one living in Tokyo, said she wrote the post just to express how she felt about being rejected from daycare when she needed to go back to work. Contacted by Bloomberg through a Twitter handle she included in her blog post, she said it was important for people to speak up about this issue instead of accepting the current situation.

Low Pay

⑫Nearly 30,000 people have signed a petition on change.org for the government to reduce waiting lists by improving working conditions for daycare workers --a separate blog highlighting the sector's meager pay was also picked up by the mainstream media. A daycare worker makes about 214,200 yen (\$1,880) per month, compared with the average across sectors of 325,600 yen. 以下後略【Mar 14, 2016/Bloomberg】

tirade 長い攻撃 [弾劾] 演説 *coarse* 粗野な, 下品な *brush off* 無視する *remedy* 救済策 *a raft of* 《米口》多量, 多数 *stem* 食い止める *unleash* 解放する *verify* 確かめる *strike a nerve with* (人)の神経に障る *handle* 《俗》名前 *change.org* 変えたい気持ちを形にするソーシャルプラットフォーム *meager* 不十分な

☆Ice breaker for active discussion

1. Have you read the blog? What do you think made the blog stand out and gain much public attention?
2. Do you know anybody who has a similar dilemma between parenting and working? Please share his/her experience.
3. The number of day care workers is not enough. What do you think can be done to solve this problem?
4. Mothers tend to bear more burdens in child-rearing. How can other family members help in this situation?
5. What are some positive effects of child-rearing?
6. Make sentences using the following words: *tirade*, *remedy*, *stem*, *strike a nerve* and *meager*.

一人の若い母親の衝撃的なブログが政治を動かした。自民党は「待機児童問題等緊急対策チーム」の立ち上げを発表した。