

# **Shift of Part-time Workers to the Mainstream Workforce and Union Organizing Activities of Labor Unions in Japan**

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## **1. Introduction**

This paper explores issues of labor unions related to the union organizing of part-time workers, who constitute the majority of the workforce outside of regular employees, at a time when employment styles are diversifying. One of the characteristics of part-time workers observed recently in Japan is that part-time workers are making a shift in their status from the auxiliary workforce to the mainstream workforce (a shift to the mainstream workforce). Instead of examining only the union organizing of part-time workers, this paper also focuses on its relationship to the shift of part-time workers to the mainstream workforce. With this shift, labor unions are required to organize part-time workers, but they are not necessarily making a good progress. It is not that labor unions have no significance for part-time workers. On the contrary, labor unions have an important role to play with respect to part-time work. This paper positively evaluates the role of labor unions in part-time work and clarifies the issues associated with labor unions.

This paper is composed of the following sections. Section 2 discusses the meaning of the shift of part-time workers to the mainstream workforce and clarifies the reason why labor unions are required to organize them. Section 3 focuses on the reasons why part-time workers are not organize and discusses the difficulties of organizing them. Section 4 examines the effects of organizing part-time workers and evaluates labor unions. Lastly, future issues of labor unions are summarized based on the analysis.

## **2. Shift of Part-time Workers to the Mainstream Workforce and Labor Unions**

### **(1) Shift of Part-time Workers to the Mainstream Workforce**

The shift of part-time workers to the mainstream workforce can be divided into two different categories: quantitative shift and qualitative shift. Let us start with the quantitative shift. In Japan, as a result of an increase in the number of part-time workers, the term "shift to part-time workers" became popular. For example, an increase of part-time workers is notable in the wholesale, retail

and restaurant industries, which are the principal employers of part-time workers, with part-time workers consisting of 46.8 percent of the total number of employees and making up 28.9 percent of the total working time of all employees.<sup>1</sup> This shift of part-time workers on the macro basis only indicates quantitative expansion, while the quantitative shift to the mainstream workforce implies not only quantitative expansion but also an increase in the importance of labor provided by part-time workers. With an increase of part-time workers at workplaces or with a reduction of regular employees, part-time workers are playing a more important role in business organizations. Relying heavily on part-time workers, business organizations cannot exist without them, and for this reason, part-time workers can now be considered as the mainstream workforce. For example, family restaurant chains did not start with the quantitative shift of part-time workers to the mainstream workforce as they had as many or more regular employees than part-time workers, but today, they only have one or two regular employees in each location with the rest consisting of part-time workers. Accordingly, part-time workers are playing a more important role at their workplaces.

It is not only the quantitative shift of part-timer workers to the mainstream workforce that businesses are promoting. The shift of part-time workers to the mainstream workforce also has a qualitative aspect. Qualitative shift to the mainstream workforce signifies that tasks of part-time workers and their capabilities are becoming closer to those of regular employees. For example, in supermarkets, part-time workers are now in charge of merchandising in the fresh food section, which was once handled only by regular employees. In general merchandise stores, part-time workers are in charge of floor layout and face-to-face selling in the garment section.<sup>2</sup> Some part-time workers are also in positions to manage other part-time workers. These kinds of phenomena are more often identified with the term "mainstream," and therefore, the "shift to the mainstream" is sometimes used only to indicate qualitative shift of part-time workers to the mainstream workforce. As described above, however, the

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<sup>1</sup> Honda (2004). Information on the number of employment is based on the "Employment Status Survey" published by the Ministry of Public Management, Home Affairs, Posts and Telecommunications, and information on the working hours is based on "Monthly Labour Survey" published by the Ministry of Health, Labour and Welfare. Both from the statistics in 2002.

<sup>2</sup> See Honda (2002a). For details of the situation in chain stores, see Honda (2002b).

mainstream workforce also implies the quantitative shift at workplaces, and therefore, quantitative and qualitative shifts must be distinguished.

## **(2) Reaction of Labor Unions to the Shift of Part-time Workers to the Mainstream Workforce**

Labor unions are required to react to the shift of part-time workers to the mainstream workforce. Let us say that a shift of part-time workers to the mainstream is occurring at a certain workplace. Again, we will distinguish between the quantitative and qualitative shift of part-time workers to the mainstream. The effects of the shift, moreover, will be felt not only within that workplace but will go beyond it. Labor unions will also be affected.

As for the quantitative shift of part-time workers to the mainstream, the number of part-time workers at this workplace, which was small at the outset, grows to surpass that of regular employees. If there is a labor union within this company, it would no longer be considered as representing the workers since the majority of the workers are not organized. In concluding an agreement on a modified working time system, checkoff or overtime work (including work on holidays) or in changing working conditions through a change in the work rules or labor collective agreement, the question will arise as to whether the interest of part-time workers is taken into consideration. The labor union would not be able to ignore any sense of inequity that might arise at the workplace as a result of union activities that exclude part-time workers.

Let us now see how the qualitative shift is progressing. Part-time workers will begin to take over important jobs from regular employees. As this advances further, the workplace will potentially be managed to some extent by part-time workers. The question will arise on how the union can maintain bargaining power against the management. For example, when the labor union decides to go on a strike, part-time workers will become the key in determining whether or not the union will be able to exercise the bargaining power against the management by threatening a decline in productivity through restriction on labor supply.

Thus, the shift of part-timers to the mainstream will make the labor union behave differently from the past when its activities mainly involved regular employees. One of the major actions that the labor union is required to take is to include part-time workers as members of the labor union, in other words, union organizing.

### 3. Difficulties of Unionizing Part-time Workers

Although the shift of part-time workers will promote their union organizing, such union organizing has not been successful in Japan. In other words, it is assumed that labor unions have not sufficiently responded to the shift.

So, why are part-time workers not organized by labor unions? Previous research points out that it is difficult to coordinate between regular employees and part-time workers, the management resists against union organizing, part-time workers are not positive about union activities, unions are lacking in their efforts to provide information on and generate interest in the unions, and so on.<sup>3</sup> There might also be a problem with how regular employees perceive part-time workers.

Here, let us examine the difficulties of organizing part-time workers from recent surveys. The reference used here is "*Pato Taima no Soshikikani Kansuru Chosa* [Survey on union organizing of part-time workers]" (hereinafter called the "JILPT Survey."<sup>4</sup> In the JILPT Survey, the labor unions that have not organized part-time workers are asked the reasons why part-time workers are not organized, in a multiple-answer format. Using the result of the survey as summarized in Table 1, let us examine the difficulties of organizing part-time workers. The reasons mentioned included "Unable to communicate to part-time workers the advantages of being a union member," "Part-time workers are indifferent to the labor union," "It is difficult to coordinate between the interests of regular employees and part-time workers," "Do not have the know-how to organize part-time workers," "It is difficult to improve the working conditions of part-time workers," "There are no leaders among part-time workers," and so on.

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<sup>3</sup> Sato (1988), Tokyo Toritsu Rodo Kenkyusho (2001), Zensen Domei (1991), Kim (2001), Sato and Hara (2005).

<sup>4</sup> The survey was conducted on the head offices, branch offices and part-time officials of five industry-based unions: UI Zensen Domei (The Japanese Federation of Textile, Chemical, Food, Commercial, Service and General Workers' Unions), Japanese Federation of Co-op Labor Unions, Japan Federation of Service & Tourism Industries Workers' Unions, Japan Federation of Service and Distributive Workers Unions, and Federation of All Japan Foods and Tobacco Workers' Unions. The questionnaire was processed as follows: Head offices (453 sent and 143 collected with 31.6-percent response rate), branch offices (3,210 sent and 204 collected with 6.4-percent response rate), and part-time officials (966 sent and 86 collected with 8.9-percent response rate). The questionnaire sheets were sent by mail, and the questionnaire was conducted during the period from January 24 to February 20, 2005. The results of the survey are summarized by the Japan Institute for Labour Policy and Training (2006).

**Table 1. Reasons for not organizing part-time workers  
(multiple answers allowed)**

	(%)
Unable to communicate to part-time workers the advantages of being a union member	43.9
Part-time workers are indifferent to the labor union	36.4
It is difficult to coordinate between the interests of regular employees and part-time workers	33.3
Do not have the know-how to organize part-time workers	28.8
It is difficult to improve the working conditions of part-time workers	21.1
There are no leaders among part-time workers	21.1
Do not have the resources of organizing part-time workers	15.2
The management is strongly opposed to the union organizing activities	10.6
Some regular employees are opposed to union organizing of part-time workers	7.6
Lack of guidance and support from the higher labor organizations	3
Organizing part-time workers will hurt the financial condition of the union	1.5
Expectation on the role of laws and regulations to provide the solutions	1.5
No answer	1.5

**Source:** JILPT Survey. All information the charts hereinafter are based on this survey.

**Note 1:** n = 66

**Note 2:** Others 9.1%.

Among these answers, the answers of indifference of part-time workers and lack of leaders among part-time workers imply that the problem lies on the side of part-time workers. Details are not known why part-time workers are indifferent, but if they are truly indifferent without hostility or resignation toward the labor union, then the labor union needs to make efforts to promote itself. If hostility or resignation is behind the indifference, the labor union needs to positively avoid generating such hostility or resignation. Also, it is difficult to think that leaders will emerge among part-time workers who are excluded in their workplace by the labor union, and even if they do, such leaders are very much likely to oppose the labor union. However it seems on the surface, the problems are not just caused by part-time workers but are also the problems of the labor union.

Among other reasons, problems such as "unable to communicate the advantages," "difficulty in coordinating interests" and "difficulty in improving the working conditions of part-time workers" are in fact problems that need to

be solved by union organizing of part-time workers. When they answer that they "Do not have the know-how to organize part-time workers," does it mean that they have given up organizing workers, which is the top priority activity that make up the foundation of labor unions?

Previous researches indicate that reasons for the difficulty in organizing part-time workers are complex.<sup>5</sup> If we take a look at some of the minor reasons given in the JILPT Survey, it is noteworthy that the reason "The management is strongly opposed to the union organizing activities" is not a major reason for being unable to organize part-time workers. The management's disagreement would be a major impediment for labor unions to organize part-time workers, but it seems that the reasons for the difficulty in organizing part-time workers are based on other factors.

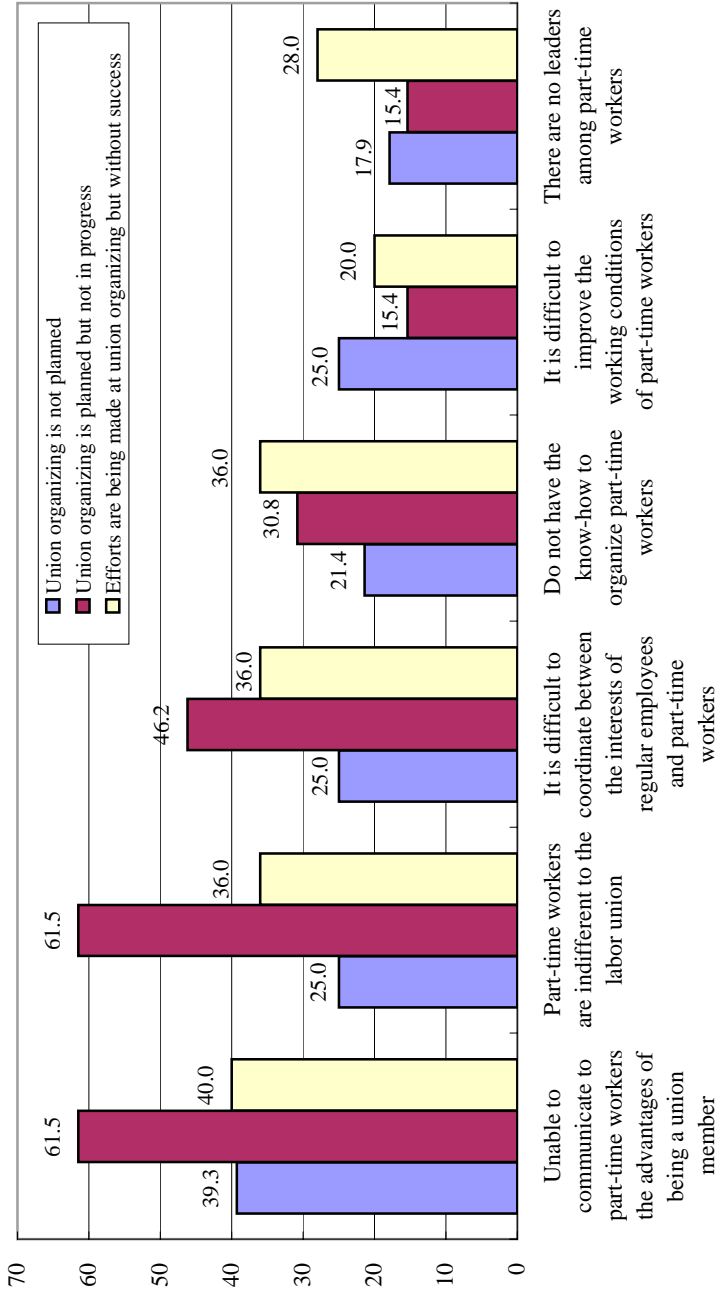
Not many respondents choose the reason "Do not have the resources of organizing part-time workers." There are much fewer respondents selecting the reasons "Some regular employees are opposed to union organizing of part-time workers," "Lack of guidance and support from the higher labor organizations," "Organizing part-time workers will hurt the financial condition of the union" and "Expectation on the role of laws and regulation to provide the solutions." Even if there is inconsistency of interest with regular employees, they are not likely to express straightforward opposition to the extent that will prevent union organizing of part-time workers. The issue of organizing part-time workers is also less to do with the external factors of the guidance and support provided by higher labor organizations, but more to do with how it is dealt with within the individual labor unions. There are views that express concerns that the financial condition of labor unions may be endangered if part-time workers join the labor union since their fees are often set at a lower value than that paid by regular employees, but this is nevertheless a minor reason for not organizing part-time workers. And not many expect laws and regulations, instead of union organizing, to solve the problem of part-time workers.

While we say part-time workers are not organized, there are different stages of union organizing for each labor union. Let us look at this in more detail. Figure 1 shows the different stages of union organizing in relation to six reasons (reasons given by more than 20 percent of the respondents) given as to why part-time workers are not unionized. It shows three different stages: (1)

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<sup>5</sup> For example, Tokyo Toritsu Rodo Kenkyusho (2001).

**Fig 1. Reasons for not organizing part-time workers**  
(answers with 20% or more, for different stages of union organizing)



Union organizing is not planned, (2) Union organizing is planned but not in progress, and (3) Efforts are being made at union organizing but without success.

The sample size is too small for a detailed analysis, but the major trends are clear. That is, for the reasons cited by many, "Union organizing is not planned" is very close to "Efforts are being made at unionization but without success" in terms of the response ratio. It is important to note a slightly higher ratio of responses for "Union organizing is planned but not in progress." To be specific, labor unions that say "Union organizing is planned but not in progress" often give such reasons as "Unable to communicate to part-time workers the advantages of being a union member," "Part-time workers are indifferent to the labor union," "It is difficult to coordinate between the interest of regular employees and part-time workers," and so on. These labor unions see the difficulties of union organizing, such as gaining the understanding of part-time workers on the advantages of being a member, part-time workers' indifference to labor unions, and coordination of interest with regular employees, before they actually face the difficulties. It is the labor unions that say "Union organizing is planned but not in progress" that are most affected by factors hindering the union organizing of part-time workers.

More importantly, these problems that hinder union organizing of part-time workers are not necessarily solved after union organizing actually takes place. Table 2 shows answers given by the labor unions that have organized part-time workers about issues that they face after union organizing. Labor unions that have "No particular issues" after the union organizing of part-time workers constitute less than 1 percent. Almost all labor unions point out that they face certain issues after the union organizing of part-time workers. These issues include "Raising part-time workers' interest in union activities," "Having part-time workers feel the effects of union organizing," "Training part-time workers to become union leaders," "Coordinating the interests of regular employees and part-time workers regarding working conditions," "Promoting closer communication between regular employees and part-time workers," and so on.<sup>6</sup> There are common issues before and after union organizing.

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<sup>6</sup> In addition to unionization, Oh (2004) focuses on a system for reflecting the opinions of part-time workers. Here, it is important to note that, even if a system is established to reflect the opinions of part-time workers, such issues as the extent to which such a system is used and how effective such a system is will remain. According to Kanai (2006), the level of involvement of part-time union members in union activities is



**Table 2. Issues after union organizing of part-time workers  
(multiple answers allowed)**

	(%)
Raising part-time workers' interest in union activities	69.5
Having part-time workers feel the effect of union organizing	49.2
Training part-time workers to become union leaders	48.3
Coordinating the interests of regular employees and part-time workers regarding working conditions	39.8
Promoting closer communication between regular employees and part-time workers	39.8
Increasing union organizing of part-time workers	34.7
Carrying out union activities by taking into consideration non-member workers in addition to part-time workers	22.5
No particular issues	0.8
No answer	8.5

**Note 1:** n = 118

**Note 2:** Others 1.7%.

There is other evidence indicating that various issues remain after the union organizing of part-time workers. Table 3 shows one way in which the labor unions that have organized part-time workers have evaluated the organizing activities. For improvements made in the relationship between regular employees and part-time workers, there is about an equal number of positive answers and answers with doubt about the effects of union organizing (both between 30 and 40 percent). Not many deny the effects of union organizing, but it shows that organizing part-time workers does not solve all the problems that existed before union organizing.

The above observations suggest that the reasons mentioned by the labor unions that have not organized part-time workers and particularly those that have plans to organize them but have not taken any action are issues that cannot be solved simply by organizing part-time workers. These are issues that need to be properly addressed even after union organizing. Could it be that the labor unions that have not organized part-time workers know this and are not organizing them to avoid addressing the various issues that will continue to

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generally lower than that of regular employees, when minor differences in the process of union organizing associated with the methods of organizing of part-time workers and the like are excluded.

exist after union organizing?

**Table 3. Answers to the question "Relationship improved between regular employees and part-time workers after union organizing"**

	(%)
Yes	11
Probably yes	23.7
Neither yes nor no	40
Probably no	0.8
No	11
No response	12.7
Total	100

In any case, recent surveys indicate that opposition or resistance of the management is not the definitive reason for the difficulty in organizing part-time workers. Also, it is not part-time workers but labor unions that potentially have the problems. At present, labor unions are possibly avoiding approaching part-time workers and addressing the issues that they will need to deal with continuously before and after union organizing. There is probably a wide range of reasons for labor unions to avoid this, but one of the underlying reasons, it is believed, is the difficulty in coordinating the interests of regular employees and part-time workers.

#### **4. Effects of Union Organizing of Part-time Workers**

##### **(1) Self-evaluation of Labor Unions on Union Organizing of Part-time Workers**

Union organizing of part-time workers does not solve all the issues related to part-time workers, and union organizing is not the final objective of labor unions. Therefore, we need a viewpoint from which to consider the effects of organizing part-time workers. To be specific, let us examine how labor unions evaluate union organizing of part-time workers and whether or not union organizing of part-time workers has any effect on improving the working conditions of part-time workers.

The JILPT Survey includes questions on how labor unions evaluate union organizing of part-time workers. The questionnaire provides five levels of evaluation for each question, and the respondents must select just one for each

question. For the answers to the questions, five points are given to the answer "Yes," four points to "Probably yes," three points to "Neither yes nor no," two points to "Probably no," and one point to "No." The points are added up for the evaluation on union organizing of part-time workers. In this method of calculation, one is the minimum point and five is the maximum, indicating that the higher the points, the higher the evaluation of the labor unions, and three points or below indicates negative evaluation.

Before taking a look at how union organizing is evaluated in each question, we calculate the total points of ten questions on the evaluation of union organizing. The minimum total of points is 10 and the maximum 50. Table 4 shows the total points on the evaluation of union organizing by industry and by type of shift to the mainstream. The total points are in the range of between 34 and 37, which indicate that when we look at the responses to the 10 questions, the labor unions with organized part-time workers do not give low ratings in their evaluation of union organizing. By industry, the retail industry gives a slightly higher rating than other industries, but otherwise the differences are minimal between industries and by type of shift to the mainstream workforce. However, when we add up the ratings on individual questions by industry and by type of shift to the mainstream workforce, we can observe certain characteristics as shown on Table 5.<sup>7</sup>

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<sup>7</sup> The shift to the mainstream workforce is categorized into different groups, based on the JILPT Survey. The quantitative shift of part-time workers to the mainstream workforce is defined, based on the number of part-time workers compared with three years ago (increased/reduced). To be specific, the questionnaire includes questions about the number of part-time workers, excluding students on part-time, and respondents must select one item among "1. Increased by 30 percent or more," "2. Increased by 10 to 20 percent," "3. No change," "4. Reduced by 10 to 20 percent," "5. Reduced by 30 percent or more," and "6. No part-time workers either now or three years ago." The responses of item 6 and no responses are excluded. Those selecting items 1 or 2 are defined as "having made a quantitative shift," and those selecting items 3, 4 or 5 are defined as "not having made a quantitative shift." For the qualitative shift of part-time workers, the respondents must select one among "1. Almost all part-time workers perform simple, fixed work," "2. The majority of part-time workers perform simple, fixed work, but some perform work that is not simple or fixed (administration, management, sophisticated professional work, work that requires decision making)," "3. Half of part-time workers perform simple, fixed work, and another half perform work that is not simple or fixed," "4. The majority of part-time workers perform work that is not simple or fixed," "5. Almost all part-time workers perform work that is not simple or fixed," "6. Not known to the head office." The responses of item 6 and no answer are excluded. Those selecting item 1 are defined as "not having made a qualitative shift," and those selecting items 2, 3, 4 or 5 are defined as "having made a qualitative shift."

**Table 4. Total points on the evaluation of union organizing of part-time workers (by industry, by type of shift to the mainstream)**

		Total point
Industries	Manufacturing (n=6)	35.7
	Retail (n=61)	37.9
	Others (n=17)	34.2
Types of shift to the mainstream	Without quantitative shift (n=22)	37.3
	With quantitative shift (n=49)	37.4
	Without qualitative shift (n=30)	35.7
	With qualitative shift (n=54)	37.7

**Note:** The calculation excludes no-answer responses.

Firstly, the highest points are given to "It allows us to reflect the opinions of part-time workers in the activities of the labor union." As it has been suggested in the analysis of the questionnaire survey on issues that may arise after union organizing, there is still a need to make a further progress in reflecting the opinions of part-time workers. On the other hand, the lowest points are given to "We are able to maintain the working conditions of regular employees." The points on "Higher retention rate of part-time workers" and "Higher productivity of part-time workers" are also above three points. As it has been noted above, some unions undertook union organizing of part-time workers with the purpose of improving the retention rate of part-time workers or their productivity. The present survey on the evaluation after union organizing indicates the effectiveness of activities performed by such advanced labor unions.

By industry, the retail industry, which gave a slightly higher point on the total evaluation of union organizing, has higher points on individual questions as well. In the retail industry, the following items had four points or more: "We are able to continue to represent the employees at the workplace," "Improved the working conditions of part-time workers," "Reorganization of the wage system of part-time workers," and "It allows us to reflect the opinions of part-time workers in the activities of the labor union." On the other hand, in the manufacturing industry and other industries, only two items and one item had four points or higher, respectively.

By type of the shift to the mainstream workforce, there is no significant

**Table 5. Evaluation on union organizing of part-time workers (by industry, by type of shift to the mainstream)**

	Industries			Types of shift to the mainstream			
	Manufacturing (n=6)	Retail (n=61)	Others (n=17)	Without quantitative shift (n=22)	With quantitative shift (n=49)	Without quantitative shift (n=30)	With quantitative shift (n=54)
Improved the negotiating power against the management	3.67	3.93	3.47	3.68	3.94	3.60	3.94
We are able to continue to represent the employees at the workplace	4.17	4.08	3.94	4.09	4.04	3.90	4.15
We are able to maintain the working conditions of regular employees	3.00	2.92	2.59	3.05	2.71	2.83	2.87
Improved relationship between regular employees and part-time workers	3.50	3.62	3.47	3.55	3.59	3.53	3.61
Improved the retention of part-time workers	3.50	3.46	2.94	3.50	3.35	3.37	3.35
Improved the productivity of part- time workers	3.50	3.44	3.24	3.27	3.51	3.37	3.43
Improved the working conditions of part-time workers	4.00	4.25	3.65	4.14	4.12	3.93	4.20
Reorganization of the wage system of part-time workers	3.17	4.13	3.53	4.05	3.98	3.77	4.04
It allows us to reflect the opinions of part-time workers in the activities of the labor union	3.83	4.30	4.00	4.32	4.29	4.03	4.30
Enhanced union activities	3.33	3.79	3.41	3.68	3.84	3.37	3.85

**Note:** The calculation excludes no-answer responses.

difference in the evaluation between unions that have and that have not made a quantitative shift. It can be noted that the labor unions with quantitative shift to the mainstream workforce did not give low ratings on such items as "We are able to continue to represent the employees at the workplace," "Improved relationship between regular employees and part-time workers," and "Improved the working conditions of part-time workers." This indicates that union organizing of part-time workers is effective to a certain extent in the unions' representation of employees and in maintaining the organizational order of the workplace, which are required of labor unions that make a quantitative shift of part-time workers to the mainstream workforce.

On the other hand, the labor unions with the qualitative shift give higher ratings on union organizing of part-time workers. Except for the lowest points given to the item "We are able to maintain the working conditions of regular employees," which are at about the same level as those of the labor unions without the qualitative shift, the labor unions with the qualitative shift had higher ratings for all other items than the labor unions without the qualitative shift. Naturally, the unions with the qualitative shift give higher ratings on such items as "Improved the negotiating power against the management," "Improved relationship between regular employees and part-time workers," "Improved the working conditions of part-time workers," and "Reorganization of the wage system of part-time workers." It seems that labor unions are responding effectively to meet what is required of unions that make the qualitative shift of part-time workers to the mainstream workforce.

## **(2) Labor Union Activity to Improve Working Conditions of Part-time Workers**

Let us now examine the activities for improving the working conditions of part-time workers. In the JILPT Survey, the degree of formality is used to assess activities of labor unions in improving working conditions. In the questionnaire, formality is classified into 3 levels on 12 items. For evaluation, two points are given to "Considered as an item of formal negotiation/discussion with the management," one point to "Not considered as an item of formal negotiation/discussion with the management, but information/opinions are informally exchanged," and zero point to "No activities in particular." For all of 12 items, the maximum points are 24, and the minimum 0.

Table 6 shows the distribution of points on the 12 items on improvement of

working conditions. Labor unions with a score of 0 made up 10.8 percent. If we look at the percentages for every five points, labor unions are slightly more concentrated in the score range between 5 and 9 points and between 15 and 19 points with 29.0 percent and 22.6 percent, respectively. There are also 8.6 percent of unions with a score of 20 points or above. This shows that there is a wide range of labor unions, from those that are not engaged in any activities for improving the working conditions of part-time workers to those that are working eagerly in such activities.

**Table 6. Distribution of points on improvement of working conditions**

0 point	10.8%
1 to 4 points	11.8%
5 to 9 points	29.0%
10 to 14 points	17.2%
15 to 19 points	22.6%
20 points and above	8.6%
Total	100%

**Note:** The calculation excludes no-answer responses.

Thus, the average total points are calculated by industry and by type of shift to the mainstream in Table 7. By industry, the retail industry has the highest points at 13.49, followed by other industries with 11.71 points and the manufacturing industry with the lowest points of 7.33. By type of shift to the mainstream, labor unions with the shift have higher total points. Labor unions with quantitative and qualitative shifts have 13.58 points and 13.74 points, respectively, which are 3 points higher than labor unions without quantitative shift (10.67 points) and without qualitative shift (10.37 points). This implies that labor unions are responding to the requirements of improving the working conditions of part-time workers, which is necessitated by the shift of part-time workers to the mainstream workforce. In particular, the retail industry, in which such need is strongly felt, is making active efforts in meeting this need.

Here, let us examine the individual efforts made in greater detail on Table 8. By industry, the retail industry, which had the highest total points, also has high points on individual activities. With the exception of the item on the promotion of part-time workers to the status of regular employees, the retail industry has

**Table 7. Total points on activities for improving the working conditions of part-time workers (by industry, by type of shift)**

		Total point
Industries	Manufacturing (n=15)	7.33
	Retail (n=78)	13.49
	Others (n=21)	11.71
Types of shift to the mainstream	Without quantitative shift (n=30)	10.67
	With quantitative shift (n=66)	13.58
	Without qualitative shift (n=43)	10.37
	With qualitative shift (n=70)	13.74

**Note:** The calculation excludes no-answer responses.

higher points for all individual activities compared with manufacturing and other industries. For 9 out of 12 activities, the retail industry has a score of 1 point or higher. In the order of points, these include "Increase of hourly wages" (1.55), "Introduction/improvement of the evaluation system" (1.46), "Introduction/increase of periodical pay raise" (1.35), "Introduction/increase of bonus payment" (1.33), "Improvement in holidays" (1.20), "Continuation of employment" (1.15), "Optimization of working hours" (1.13), "Introduction/improvement of the qualification system" (1.04), and "Promotion to regular employees" (1.00), showing that they are conducting a wide range of activities in improving working conditions. In particular, they are vigorously engaged in activities related to hourly wages, evaluation system, periodical pay raise, and bonus payment. Meanwhile, the retail industry has relatively higher points for "Change of tasks" (0.94) and "Division of work with regular employees" (0.82), when compared with other industries. Although the scores are still below one point, the unions in the retail industry are very close to having informal talks with the management. They are also motivated about improving the work of part-time workers, including setting the range of work and changing tasks for part-time workers.

For individual activities by type of shift of part-time workers to the mainstream workforce, labor unions with the shift have higher points than those without. In particular, labor unions with quantitative shift have higher points for "Increase of hourly wages" (1.46), "Introduction/increase of bonus payment" (1.41) and "Introduction/improvement of the evaluation system" (1.39). Labor unions with qualitative shift also have higher points for "Increase



**Table 8. Total point on activities for improving the working conditions of part-time workers  
(by industry, by type of shift)**

	Industries			Types of shift to the mainstream			
	Manufacturing (n=15)	Retail (n=78)	Others (n=21)	Without quantitative shift (n=30)	With quantitative shift (n=66)	Without qualitative shift (n=43)	With qualitative shift (n=70)
Increase of hourly wages	1.07	1.55	1.19	1.38	1.46	1.33	1.50
Introduction/increase of periodical pay raise	0.60	1.35	1.00	1.13	1.25	0.98	1.33
Introduction/increase of bonus payment	0.93	1.33	1.19	1.16	1.41	1.09	1.37
Introduction/increase of retirement allowance	0.47	0.90	0.43	0.68	0.83	0.74	0.79
Introduction/improvement of the evaluation system	0.53	1.46	1.24	1.18	1.39	1.09	1.46
Introduction/improvement of the qualification system	0.40	1.04	0.95	0.74	1.07	0.70	1.09
Optimization of working hours	0.53	1.13	1.05	0.86	1.07	0.81	1.19
Improvement in holidays	0.53	1.20	1.00	0.91	1.91	0.82	1.25
Promotion to regular employees	0.67	1.00	1.29	0.94	1.09	0.80	1.16
Division of work with regular employees	0.67	0.82	0.62	0.65	0.84	0.70	0.81
Change of tasks	0.40	0.94	0.71	0.65	0.99	0.65	0.95
Continuation of employment	0.53	1.15	1.05	0.91	1.16	0.79	1.22

**Note:** The calculation excludes no-answer responses.

of hourly wages" (1.50), "Introduction/improvement of the evaluation system" (1.46)" and "Introduction/increase of bonus payment" (1.37). In response to the shift of part-time workers to the mainstream workforce, labor unions are working on improving part-time workers' working conditions with a particular emphasis on wages.

### **(3) Activities Related to Wages**

Based on the results of the JILPT Survey, it is evident that labor unions focus on wages in their activities to improve the working conditions of part-time workers. Therefore, let us now concentrate our analysis on the wage system. The JILPT Survey presents four types of wage systems as shown below and asks questions on the current wage systems of part-time workers and on the wage systems that labor unions aim to introduce as part of their policy.

1. Providing part-time workers with a wage system that is different from that of regular employees and treating all part-time workers almost equally (collective wage system of part-time workers)
2. Providing part-time workers with a wage system that is different from that of regular employees and treating individual part-time workers differently based on their skills, etc. (individual wage system of part-time workers)
3. Minimize the wage gap between regular employees and part-time workers if they are doing the same work (equilibrium wage system)
4. The same wage system for both regular employees and part-time workers (integrated wage system)

Table 9 shows the result of cross tabulation between the current and future wage systems of part-time workers. For the current wage system, the "individual wage system of part-time workers" has the highest percentage at 65.7 percent. It is followed by the "collective wage system of part-time workers" (29.4 percent). Individual treatment is already more widespread than collective treatment of part-time workers. The percentage is small for the "equilibrium wage system" and "integrated wage system," indicating that these systems are still exceptional.

Labor unions that selected the "individual wage system of part-time workers" for the current wage system, which make up the majority, can be divided into

**Table 9. Cross table between the current wage system and future wage system**

		Future wage system				
		Collective wage system of part-time workers	Individual wage system of part-time workers	Equilibrium wage system	Integrated wage system	Total
Current wage system	Collective wage system of part-time workers (n=30; 29.4%)	16.7	40	40	3.3	100
	Individual wage system of part-time workers (n=67; 65.7%)	3	46.3	47.8	3	100
	Equilibrium wage system (n=4; 3.9%)	0	0	50	50	100
	Integrated wage system (n=1; 1.0%)	0	0	0	100	100
	Total (n=102; 100%)	6.9	42.2	45.1	5.9	100

**Note:** The calculation excludes no-answer responses.

two groups with respect to their future actions: one group sticking with their current system (46.3 percent) and the other moving toward the "equilibrium wage system" (47.8 percent). Among the labor unions that selected the "collective wage system of part-time workers" for the current system, not many are willing to stick with their current system (16.7 percent), and many aim at moving toward the "individual wage system of part-time workers" (40.0 percent) or "equilibrium wage system" (40.0 percent). But only a few labor unions wish to move toward the "integrated wage system." A small number of labor unions that selected the "equilibrium wage system" or "integrated wage system" for the current system do not intend to go back to conventional wage systems for part-time workers.

Let us examine in more detail how they are moving from current to future wage systems for part-time workers. Instead of collectively managing part-time workers in the conventional way, there is a trend toward the individual management style and further to a management style that clearly takes into consideration the regular employees. Focusing on this point, let us conduct a quantitative analysis by calling the "collective wage system of part-time workers" as Stage 1, the "individual wage system of part-time workers" as Stage 2, "equilibrium wage system" as Stage 3, and "integrated wage system" as Stage 4.

Table 10 shows the result of calculation of the stages of the current and future wage systems, by industry and by type of shift to the mainstream. With regard to the stages of the current wage system, other industries (2.05) are slightly more advanced toward the "equilibrium wage system," and they are followed by the retail industry (1.75). The table indicates that the manufacturing industry still remains somewhere between the "collective wage system of part-time workers" and "individual wage system of part-time workers." For the stages of the future wage system, on the other hand, the retail industry (2.63) has the highest points, indicating that it is positively moving forward beyond the "individual wage system of part-time workers" and toward the "equilibrium wage system." The manufacturing industry (2.00) is aiming to reach the stage of the "individual wage system of part-time workers." The other industries (2.29) also aim to reach the stage of the "equilibrium wage system" but are not as motivated as the retail industry.

By type of shift to the mainstream, the labor unions with quantitative shift (1.83) are more advanced than those without (1.69), and the labor unions with

**Table 10. Stages of the current and future wage systems of part-time workers (by industry, by type of shift)**

		Stage point	
		Current	Future
Industries	Manufacturing	1.53	2.00
	Retail	1.75	2.63
	Others	2.05	2.29
Types of shift to the mainstream	Without quantitative shift	1.69	2.23
	With quantitative shift	1.83	2.54
	Without qualitative shift	1.67	2.26
	With qualitative shift	1.84	2.65

qualitative shift (1.84) are further ahead than those without (1.67). For the future wage system of part-time workers, even the labor unions without quantitative shift (2.23) and those without qualitative shift (2.26) are motivated in reorganizing the wage systems. They are, however, slightly less committed than the labor unions with quantitative shift (2.54) and those with qualitative shift (2.64). Anyhow, labor unions are showing their commitment toward the future wage system as a result of the quantitative and qualitative shift of part-time workers to the mainstream workforce. Their target, however, has not yet been set at the stage of the "equilibrium wage system."

#### **(4) Analysis by Union Organizing of Part-time Workers**

Let us examine whether union organizing of part-time workers contributes to activities for improving the working conditions of part-time workers and to the change of wage systems for the future. We compare labor unions with organized part-time workers and those that have not unionized part-time workers on the efforts made in improving the working conditions of part-time workers.

Table 11 shows that the labor unions with organized part-time workers have much higher total points (15.10) than those that have not organized part-time workers (3.74). As for individual activities, while the labor unions with organized part-time workers have a low of no less than 0.90 and have a high of 1.75, the labor unions that have not organized part-time workers have points as low as 0 and a high of not more than 0.59, showing a large gap between the

two. Although the labor unions that have not organized part-time workers are also engaged in activities for improving the working conditions of part-time workers, the level of their activities is nowhere near that of labor unions with organized part-time workers. Based on these results, the expectation that improvement will be made in the working conditions of part-time workers at companies that have no labor unions is mere illusion.

**Table 11. Activities for improving the working conditions of part-time workers (by union organizing)**

		Labor unions with organized part-time workers	Labor unions without organized part-time workers
Total point		15.10	3.74
Individual point	Increase of hourly wage	1.75	0.37
	Introduction/increase of periodical pay raise	1.50	0.19
	Introduction/increase of bonus payment	1.57	0.23
	Introduction/increase of retirement allowance	0.97	0.14
	Introduction/improvement of the evaluation system	1.53	0.59
	Introduction/improvement of the qualification system	1.11	0.33
	Optimization of working hours	1.26	0.32
	Improvement in holidays	1.33	0.32
	Promotion to regular employees	1.16	0.54
	Division of work with regular employees	0.90	0.33
	Change of tasks	1.00	0.32
	Continuation of employment	1.29	0.29

**Note 1:** The total points are the average of the labor union totals and may not match the total of all individual items.

**Note 2:** The calculation excludes no-answer responses.

Table 12 shows the stages of the wage system of the labor unions with organized part-time workers and those that have not organized part-time

workforce is occurring are actively involved in activities for improving the working conditions of part-time workers. Labor unions in the retail industry are also eager in individual activities, promoting improvements in the working conditions of part-time workers in a wide range of areas. Labor unions of the companies in which the quantitative and qualitative shift of part-time workers to the mainstream workforce is progressing are engaged in individual activities with a particular focus on issues related to wages.

If we focus on the wage system of part-time workers within the context of activities for improving the working conditions of part-time workers, the "individual wage system" is currently more widespread than the "collective wage system." As for the future wage system, labor unions in the retail industry show the strongest interest in going beyond the "individual wage system" and moving toward the "equilibrium wage system." Labor unions that are at more advanced stages in the quantitative and qualitative shift of part-time workers to the mainstream workforce are not only more advanced with regard to the current wage system, but are also more active with respect to the future wage system.

When we look at labor unions that have and that have not organized part-time workers, labor unions with organized part-time workers are more active than those that have not organized part-time workers in both general and individual activities for improving the working conditions of part-time workers. Also, labor unions with organized part-time workers are more advanced with respect to the current wage system and are also eager to improve the wage system in the future. While labor unions recognize the value of the union organizing of part-time workers, labor unions should also be recognized for their achievement in improving the working conditions of part-time workers.

## **5. Conclusion**

According to the analysis of the questionnaire survey, union organizing of part-time workers is necessitated by the shift of part-time workers to the mainstream workforce. In addition, union organizing of part-time workers proves to be an effective factor in advancing activities for improving the working conditions of part-time workers. Based on these observations, we can draw the following implications for union organizing of part-time workers.

Firstly, the role of labor unions should not be underrated even if progress is not made in union organizing of part-time workers. In relation to the shift of

part-time workers to the mainstream workforce, labor unions not only respond to the needs that arise as a result of the shift, but also monitor the activities of the management to see if it is also responding to needs that arise as a result of the shift. In some cases, labor unions respond to those needs on behalf of the management. If so, it is the labor unions that hold the key to bringing about an appropriate shift of part-time workers to the mainstream workforce. The labor unions have an important role to play.

Secondly, the analysis of the union organizing process of part-time workers indicates that the labor and management have common interests, such as in improving the retention rate and productivity of part-time workers. To realize union organizing, it seems effective for the labor and management to clarify the advantages and disadvantages of union organizing of part-time workers and then arrive at a common understanding. It will probably be the labor unions that will take the initiative in the formation of this common understanding by convincing the management about the advantages of organizing part-time workers.

Thirdly, if part-time workers are organized, the next step in forming the appropriate shift to the mainstream workforce is to increase the involvement of part-time workers in labor unions as labor unions start to take on full-scale activities for improving the working conditions of part-time workers. Then the question will be how to encourage part-time workers to join the labor union and how to collect and reflect their opinions on the union activities. In short, the shift of part-time workers to the mainstream gives pressure to labor unions to organize part-time workers, but after union organizing is realized, the involvement of part-time workers will be required. From this viewpoint, the mutual relationship between the shift of part-time workers to the mainstream and labor unions will continue.

The above three points all require positive reevaluation on the role of labor unions. The most important issue for labor unions will not only be to accept the advancement of the shift of part-time workers to the mainstream workforce, but also to review, without being bound to the conventional union principles, labor unions' functions and activities as they take on the central role in the appropriate shift of part-time workers to the mainstream. Starting from this viewpoint, repeated discussions will clarify the significance of labor unions in relation to part-time work and activate labor unions.



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workers. The labor unions with organized part-time workers are at a more advanced stage (1.81) than those that have not organized part-time workers for the current wage system of part-time workers as well as for the future wage system (2.59). Clearly, the labor unions with organized part-time workers have a well-organized wage system and are also more advanced with respect to the future target.<sup>8</sup>

**Table 12. Stages of the current and future wage systems of part-time workers (by union organizing of part-time workers)**

	Stage point	
	Current	Future
Labor unions with organized part-time workers	1.81	2.59
Labor unions without organized part-time workers	1.57	2.17

**Note:** The calculation excludes no-answer responses.

### (5) Summary of the Analysis of the Survey

On the evaluation of union organizing, the labor unions with organized part-time workers recognize the effect of union organizing on improving the retention of part-time workers and their productivity. These reasons often drive labor unions to organize part-time workers. Improvement of the retention and productivity of part-time workers can be considered essentially as part of the duties of the management as part-time workers make the shift to the mainstream workforce. If that is the case, labor unions can be regarded as having functions to monitor the management's response to the shift of part-time workers to the mainstream workforce or to respond to the shift on behalf of the management.

Judging from the calculation of points representing the labor unions' activities for improving the working conditions of part-time workers, we see on the whole that there is a wide range of labor unions, from those that are not engaged in any activity to those that are extremely active in their commitment. Labor unions in the retail industry and labor unions of the companies in which quantitative and qualitative shift of part-time workers to the mainstream

<sup>8</sup> A sample analysis based on materials provided by labor unions also indicates that the labor unions with organized part-time workers tend to have individualized wage systems, implying that the presence of labor unions has an effect on improving the wage systems of part-time workers. See Honda (2002a).

Zensen Domei (The Japanese Federation of Textile, Garment, Chemical, Mercantile, Food and Allied Industries Workers' Unions). 1991. *Ryutsu Sabisu Sangyo ni Hataraku Hitobito no Ishiki* [Perception of people who work in the distribution and service industries].