
Introduction

The System of Labour Relations Commissions in Japan: Retrospects and Prospects

Japan's Labour Relations Commissions (LRCs) were established in March 1946. As such, 2016 will mark their 70th anniversary. LRCs, instituted by the Labor Union Act of 1945 and reinforced by the amendment of 1949, have made a great contribution to the formation and dissemination of cooperative and stable industrial relations in Japan. Moreover, in the face of structural changes such as the stabilization of labor-management relations and the rise of individual employment disputes from the 1990s, the 2001 Act empowered LRCs to provide counseling and conciliation services for individual employment disputes. With this, they started to launch into the new field of labor disputes. We analyze the 70-year history and actual situations of LRCs in Japan, and examine the relationship between the roles of LRCs and characteristics of Japan's labor-management relations.

The Significance of Labour Relations Commissions in Japan's Labor Dispute Resolution System by Kazuo Sugeno examines the roles and significance of Japan's LRCs from a historical viewpoint. To clarify the transitional roles of LRCs in their 70-year history, the author first portrays a profile of LRCs, then illustrates their achievements as institutions for resolving collective labor disputes in the upheavals of postwar industrial relations, and finally describes the challenges they face amid structural changes in labor disputes. By means of this historical approach, he clarifies the significance of LRCs in the overall system of labor dispute resolution in Japan.

Yasuo Suwa's *The Present Situation and Issues of the Labour Relations Commission System* clarifies the structure and roles of Japan's LRCs. The LRC system has made a huge contribution to the formation of industrial relations and labor practices in Japan since World War II. Today, however, both the industrial structure and the labor market have changed, the organization rate of labor unions is in gradual decline, and collective industrial disputes have also decreased in number. In view of this, continuous efforts are being made to improve the LRC system and review its deployment, in order to identify how the system should be maintained and developed in future.

Labour Relations Commissions and Industrial Relations: The Era of Great Conciliators by Michio Nitta describes the involvement of the Central Labour Relations Commission (CLRC) in adjusting major nationwide disputes over a period of about 15 years from its creation in 1946 until 1960. Following the course of four important disputes adjusted under the guidance of the CLRC's 2nd Chairman Izutaro Suehiro and the 3rd Chairman Ichiro Nakayama—specifically, the 1946 Densan dispute, the 1946–47 wage dispute by public sector employees, the 1952 Tanro-Densan dispute, and the 1959–1960 Miike Mine dispute—the author clarifies the historical role played by LRCs in Japan's industrial relations.

Ryuichi Yamakawa's *The Law of the Labour Relations Commission: Some Aspects of*

Japan's Unfair Labor Practice Law examines the distinctive features of the LRC system in Japan. Modeled on the National Labor Relations Act in the United States, the Labor Union Act of Japan provides for a system of prohibiting and redressing unfair labor practices. Also, like the National Labor Relations Board in the United States, the Labor Union Act established a system of LRCs as independent administrative agencies in charge of unfair labor practice procedures. The features of LRCs, such as their nature as administrative agencies and their tripartite composition—differing from the rules of private law under the Civil Code—appear to have influenced Japan's unfair labor practice law.

Unfair Labor Practice Cases Handled by the Tokyo Metropolitan Government Labor Relations Commission by Takashi Araki clarifies the characteristics of cases in the Tokyo Metropolitan Government Labor Relations Commission. As characteristics of the cases handled, the author reveals that even when unfair labor practices are committed outside Tokyo, cases against those practices are often filed with the Tokyo LRC because the union's head branch or the company's head office is located in Tokyo, and that many cases are filed by community unions because many of these unions exist in Tokyo. Meanwhile, he clarifies that cases often take a considerably long time to process because settlement is often preferred and cases are often complex, and the need to expedite processing of cases is therefore a constant challenge.

These papers, written by important figures who have assisted and themselves developed LRCs in Japan over many years, could contribute to an understanding of the historical roles and changing models of Japan's LRCs, and provide some lessons for comparative studies on labor law and industrial relations.

Yuichiro Mizumachi
The University of Tokyo