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been expressed. As a result, the FY2016 minimum wage hike was 25 yen (an increase of 3.1% from the previous year), the largest increase since 2002.

After deliberating the rise for FY2017, the Central Minimum Wages Council decided on a target national average of 25 yen (3.0%) on July 25. Following deliberation on the revision of regional minimum wages by the councils in each prefecture, the revised national weighted average was to be 848 yen, an increase of 25 yen (3.0%) over the previous year. The government's Action Plan for the Realization of Work Style Reform, decided in March 2017, stated explicitly that "we will raise the minimum wage at an annual rate of approximately 3%, and through this, we will aim for the national weighted average to reach 1,000 yen." This year's revision was in line with that principle. Since 2007,

therefore, revisions of the minimum wage could be said to have been promoted through dialog between the government, labor, and management and academic experts, in addition to the basic principle of the Minimum Wage Act, giving comprehensive consideration to targets and others set by successive administrations.

#### Note

1. <http://www.mhlw.go.jp/toukei/list/97-1.html>.
2. In Japan, the Amended Minimum Wage Act was established on November 28, 2007 (enforced on July 1, 2008). As a result of this amendment, the living expenses of workers considered when determining regional minimum wages shall be balancing in consistency with social security benefits; the extended application system of labor agreements was abolished; a specified minimum wage was established; and penalties for nonpayment of wages were raised (up to 500,000 yen).

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## NEWS

# Rengo Holds 15th Biennial Convention, Re-Elects President Koze

## Aims to Establish "Rengo Vision 2035" as It Nears 30th Anniversary

The Japanese Trade Union Confederation (JTUC-JTUC-Rengo, hereinafter Rengo), a trade union national center in Japan with 6.75 million members, hosted its 15th Biennial Convention in Tokyo on October 4-5. Its new action policies for the coming two years include the task of formulating the "Rengo Vision 2035 (provisional name)," which will act as a medium- to long-term compass for labor union action as Rengo approaches its 30th anniversary in November 2019. In the election of executives, president Rikio Koze (Kikan Roren<sup>1</sup>) and non-full-time deputy president Atsushi Kawamoto (Jichiro<sup>2</sup>) were re-elected. General secretary Naoto Ohmi (UA Zensen<sup>3</sup>) was elected to the new post of full-time deputy president, and Yasunobu Aihara (JAW<sup>4</sup>), became his successor as general secretary.

### Renewed tax reform and formulation of a new social security vision

The slogan for action in FY2018-2019 is "A

Significant Step toward the Next Stage." The action policies decided in anticipation of Rengo's 30th anniversary are to "make it a time when we will call more comrades to join our action and hone our 'strength and policy,' as well as striving to form a decent consensus, promoting action in solidarity within Rengo, and increasing our basic strength as we aim for the next step forward." As well as this, the Convention set out priority tasks designed to accelerating the process towards a "secure society based on work," the image of society that has always been Rengo's aim.<sup>5</sup> These tasks are defined as (i) to build up the influential strength to achieve policies made from the standpoint of workers and consumers, and (ii) to maintain and increase organizational power and the driving force to promote action.

It was also proposed that a new vision for society should be formulated with the medium- to long-term perspective in light of progressive trends such as population decline and the Fourth Industrial

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Revolution. Debate will be based on the Interim Report of the “Review Committee on Vision for Population Shrinkage and Super-Aging Society with Declining Birthrate” delivered at the Convention, and the “Rengo Vision 2035” will be established at a central committee meeting to be held in October next year. The Report proposes “the principle of direct employment with non-fixed employment term” and “reducing working hours while securing equal and balanced treatment among work styles,” among others as the path to be taken from now on. Based on this vision, Rengo will formulate the “Fourth Basic Outline of Tax System Reform” and a “Medium- to Long-Term Policy on the Education System.”

### **Membership increase by 330,000 in two years, aiming to be 10 million by 2020**

Rengo aims to “accelerate efforts” to strengthen its organization, partly because it has set the target of 2020 for achieving the present unionization strategy of “Rengo with 10 Million Members.” Rengo issues appeals inside and outside the organization to the effect that establishing collective labor relations is essential to achieving progress in the work style reform currently under debate. Rengo approaches to non-unionized workers inside companies, non-unionized companies within corporate groups, etc. to accelerate future unionization drive.

According to figures for organizational expansion over the last two years reported at the Convention, membership grew by 333,426 (target attainment rate 37.2%) and the number of unions increased by 428 in that time. These are the largest increases over the last decade. On the other hand, it is seen as problematic that only 35 out of 50 industrial unions recorded increases, and that only 19 achieved unionization or increased membership of part-time workers. Meanwhile, it was reported on its unionization in media-related industries since 2010 that two member unions –the Federation of All-NHK Labour Unions

(NHK Roren, approximately 9,000 members) and the National Cinema and Theater Workers’ Union (Zen-Eien, approximately 500 members) – had merged and formed a new industrial union “Federation of Media, Advertising, Cinema and Theater Workers’ Unions (Media Roren)” as of October 2.

### **Full-time Deputy President post and new “Labor Consultation Center” created**

In the election of executives, Rikio Koza (Kikan Roren) was re-elected as president. Although there was previously only a single non-full-time deputy president, a new full-time post was added. The previous general secretary Naoto Ohmi (UA Zensen) was appointed full-time deputy president while Atsushi Kawamoto, (Jichiro) was re-elected as non-full-time deputy president. Yasunobu Aihara (JAW) was appointed as the new general secretary. The ratio of female executives in the central executive committee reached 33.9% with this reshuffle.

Besides this, a revision of the organizational structure was decided in order to strengthen the functions of Rengo headquarters. Specifically, (i) the department of organizational affairs would be renamed the “department of organizing,” and educational functions in the PR/education division would be moved to it; (ii) a new team would be created to build and implement a foundation for mutual help and support action; (iii) a “labor consultation center” would be set up to clearly specify the functions and roles of labor consultation; (iv) the department of gender equality would be renamed the “department of gender and employment equality,” with a gender equality division and an employment equality division placed under it; (v) a data collection function would be added to the library with a view to creating an archive of labor action; and (vi) the Rengo political center attached externally to the headquarters secretariat would be repositioned as an internal department, while the political affairs department and the political affairs

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1. Japan Federation of Basic Industry Workers’ Unions.
  2. The All-Japan Prefectural and Municipal Workers Union.
  3. The Japanese Federation of Textile, Chemical, Food, Commercial, Service and General Workers’ Unions.
  4. Confederation of Japan Automobile Workers’ Unions.
  5. According to Rengo, “secure society based on work” is a participatory society “attaching the highest importance to ‘work’ based on self-reliance as well as mutual support with anybody being able to participate under fair working conditions and through various ways of working.”

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department would be abolished.

### **Confirmation of policy not to enter agreement with any party for the general election**

At a meeting of the central executive committee on September 27, Rengo had confirmed that it would endorse 174 mainly Democratic Party candidates in the next House of Representatives (Lower House) election. Subsequently, Prime Minister Abe announced that he would dissolve the House at the start of the extraordinary Diet session on September 28. In response to this, the Party of Hope was formed with Tokyo Governor Yuriko Koike as its leader. (But later on November 14, Koike subsequently resigned from her post as the leader.) Then the Democratic Party, which the Rengo had supported until that point, decided to enter a *de facto* merger with the Party of Hope in the general election to both houses on September 28. This alliance was opposed by Yukio Edano, Deputy President of the Democratic Party, who then launched the Constitutional Democratic Party. At this point, Rengo's confirmed policy (version 1) on the Lower House election was that it would continue to endorse all previously decided candidates, even if they had become official candidates of the Party of Hope or the Constitutional Democratic Party, or independent candidates, but that it would no longer endorse several candidates who had earlier broken away from the Democratic Party.

In response to new political developments, however, Rengo held an extraordinary meeting of its central executive committee after the latest Convention, at which it decided a new policy (version 2) on the Lower House election. On the merger of the Democratic Party with the Party of Hope, Rengo acknowledged that, "given constraints of time, the aim was to offer a new choice to replace Abe's power politics, which shows an even more pronounced stance of disregard for the Diet and the people." On the Constitutional Democratic Party launched by anti-merger lawmakers and candidates, meanwhile, Rengo regarded it as providing a single voice for a broad and diverse range of voters. Again, Rengo asserted that the manifesto announced by the Party of Hope "needs to be examined thoroughly," in that "although

the content can be understood in a broad sense, the fine details of policy are not clear." On the other hand, Rengo criticized the alliance between the Party of Hope and the Nippon Ishin no Kai (Japan Innovation Party), saying "it is extremely regrettable that things have gone as far as dividing candidates into Tokyo and Osaka to avoid electoral competition."

Based on these perceptions, Rengo made an unusual decision not to have a policy agreement with any of the parties though it normally formed agreements with specific parties before an election. Regarding no policy agreement with the Party of Hope, Rengo says "under the circumstances, we judge it difficult to align our basic policies and philosophy at the present time, and have no choice but to defer our conclusion of an agreement for the coming general election." Also, it decided not to form an agreement with the Constitutional Democratic Party. On the endorsement of official Democratic Party candidates, however, Rengo confirmed the principle that local Rengo organizations would individually form policy agreements, and that attempts would be made to achieve the policy and institutional demands asserted by Rengo through the endorsed candidates.

### **"Continuation of LDP-Komeito government extremely regrettable" Rengo General Secretary**

In the Lower House elections on October 22, the Liberal Democratic Party (LDP) won 284 seats and the LDP-Komeito coalition won 313, more than the two-thirds majority needed to initiate discussion on Constitutional amendment. By contrast, the Party of Hope only managed 50 seats, while the Constitutional Democratic Party made considerable advances with 55. Based on this, Rengo released a statement by General Secretary Aihara on October 23. In the statement, Aihara said, "although the opposition parties including independents increased their seats, it is extremely regrettable that the LDP-Komeito coalition will remain in government." Nevertheless, he praised the fact that 99 of the 196 Rengo-endorsed candidates won their seats, saying "I would like to see this as helping to form future policies and institutions."