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General Survey

Widening Working Conditions between Part-Time and Regular Female Workers - 1996 White Paper on Working Women -

On December 4, the Ministry of Labour released its report on women at work (White Paper on Working Women), in which it annually introduces trends of working women using a wide variety of statistical materials published by government-related organizations. In this year's paper, the Ministry noted non-regular employees whose numbers in recent years have been dramatically increasing and whose employment forms have become diversified, to identify tasks for non-regular employment and future employment management. More specifically, it deals with "part-time workers," "dispatched workers" and "contract-based workers" of whom women are in the majority.

The number of non-regular employees was 10.43 million as of February 1996, 7.7 million of whom were women. The number of female employees in non-regular work increased 2.87 million over the past decade until 1996, making up two-thirds of the increased number of employed women during the 10-year period, according to a Management and Coordination Agency survey. Regarding the attitudes of non-regular employees toward their work, many worked on a non-regular basis to make the most of their lives. The percentage of those who were satisfied with working conditions such as appraisal and treatment and job stability was not so low, and around 80 percent wanted to continue working in their current form of employment. But 14.2 percent were dissatisfied with their present form of employment, wanting to switch to a regular, full-time job. By employment form, a relatively large number, or slightly less than 30 percent of dispatched workers expressed such dissatisfaction, a Ministry of Labour survey reported.

Furthermore, the wage difference between part-time and regular female workers has tended to widen annually. In June 1995, the average hourly wage for part-time female workers was ¥854, and if hourly earnings for regular women workers (a value obtained by dividing monthly scheduled earnings by the number of actual scheduled hours worked) are taken as 100, earnings for women part-timers remain at 70.4. In 1976, the figure was 80.6, the difference widening by more than 10 points in the two decades. In addition, the percentage of both part-time and full-time, non-regular women workers who received various allowances and benefited from a wage system with retirement allowance was extremely low, manifesting the wide disparity between them and their regularly employed counterparts in wages and benefits, according to the Ministry of Labour survey.

The government needs to improve an environment which allows female workers to choose, on their own, a non-regular employment form in tandem with their individual life styles and to go ahead with consolidation of working conditions so that this type of work may not prompt an increase in the number of women forced to work under lower working conditions, the paper pointed out.

Working Conditions and the Labor Market

A 1996 Survey on Wage Increases

The weighted average rate of wage hikes for private firms with a workforce of 100 or more employees stood at 2.7 percent in 1996, ending the fifth straight year of decline in wage increases, according to a Ministry of Labour report. The 1996 Survey on Wage Increases has been carried out every year since 1969 by the Ministry of Labour in order to clarify the structure of wage increases, such as the wage hike amount, the rate of raise, the system of raise and the situation involving wage increase, at private companies including those without labor unions and to gain deeper insights into the effects of wage hikes on corporate management. In 1996 the survey covered 3,155 private firms with 100 or more regular employees in the 9 major industries of mining, construction, manufacturing, utilities, transportation and telecommunications, wholesale and retail trades and eating and drinking establishments, finance and insurance, real estate and services. Replies were received from 2,122 of the 3,155 companies surveyed. In manufacturing, wholesale and retail trades and eating and drinking establishments, the survey was taken among private companies with 30 or more regular employees.

A preliminary report compiled on firms with 100 or more regular employees alone showed that the weighted wage increase in 1996 averaged ¥7,245, slightly up from the level of the year before at ¥7,206. The fifth consecutive year of decline in the wage hike rate since 1991 finally came to a halt in 1996 as the rate posted 2.7 percent, the same as last year's. Of the 9 sectors, the rate was the highest, at 3 percent, in wholesale and retail trades as well as in eating and drinking establishments while it was the lowest, at 2 percent, in finance and insurance.

Among items to which firms attached the most importance in determining the amount of wage increase, the survey pointed out that the characteristic trend in 1996 was that "business results" was rated the highest ever while "general trends" was rated the lowest ever. Asked which items they attached the greatest importance to in determining wage hikes, 75 percent of firms cited "business result," up 3.7 points from the previous figure of 71.3 percent, the

highest ever recorded since the Ministry started compiling these statistics in 1969. Meanwhile, 15.9 percent put the highest emphasis on "general trends," down 2.7 points from the 18.6 percent previous years' level. The figure dropped further down to a record-low level from 18.2 percent in 1979 and 18.4 percent in 1987. Other factors cited were "stabilization of the workforce"(4.4%), "price increases"(0.1%) and "stable industrial relations"(3.4%). The percentage of firms which put the highest emphasis on "business results" tended to rise in a recession and fall during a business expansion. In 1996 wage increases tended to improve thanks to a mild economic recovery; despite this, however, the percentage of firms which attached the greatest importance to "business results" shot up. Future survey reports on whether factors behind determining the amount of wage increase will take on a new trend deserve much attention.

"Recruiting Accord" Axed

Companies in abroad recruit personnel whenever vacancies become available in some jobs and duties. Japanese companies, on the other hand, generally adopt the mass-hiring of new graduates just out of high school or college. They interview high-school or college seniors seeking employment and inform the applicants of their tentative hiring decisions, with the newly hired regular employees starting work on April 1 the following year. Students graduate in March.

College seniors, for instance, conduct job-search activities for companies they aspire to join. However, problems arose from Japanese firms' intensified employee-hiring activities and the bad effects on college education. To solve these problems, a so-called employment agreement that governs the recruiting of college graduates was first concluded in 1953 among businesses, universities and related government agencies. In 1962 it was abolished, however, high growth and labor shortage prompted many companies to scramble for outstanding new graduates. Company recruiting intensified, promising juniors employment more than full year before graduation. To rectify the extremely serious situation, the agreement was concluded again in 1972 among four parties of the Ministry of Education, the Ministry of Labour, universities and businesses. The Ministries of Education and Labour later pulled out of the agreement, with colleges and companies keeping it as a gentleman's agreement up to the present while over-hauling it each year. The agreement, though it varies in its contents each year, stated basic principles, such as allowing college seniors seeking jobs to approach company employees who are alumni of their colleges and allowing companies to start interviewing them on July 1, beginning to select them on August 1 and starting informing applicants of a decision on October 1. To make it practically meaningless, the agreement,

however, has often been ignored by companies, and whether to keep it has been debated every year.

In recent years, amid the wave of deregulation, business organizations including Nikkeiren (Japan Federation of Employers' Associations) vigorously encouraged colleges to abolish the employee hunting accord. Concluding that further talks with businesses will not produce any accord with them, in January 1997 the Round-Table Conference on Employment Issues on the side of universities decided not to follow the present hiring rules for fiscal 1997. The agreement is thus expected to be abolished.

The abolition of the accord may create a turmoil among students seeking employment. Minister of Labour Yutaka Okano told a news conference on January 14 that the government is ready to take any action, such as publicly disclosing the names of companies that malevolently canceled employment promises to new school graduates after the abolition of the accord, adding that he will cope adequately with the situation following the scrapping of the agreement should the need arise.

Labor-Management Relations

Basic Survey on Trade Unions

The estimated unionization rate as of June 1996 sank 0.6 point to 23.2 percent, the Ministry of Labour said in its 1996 Basic Survey on Trade Unions. It hit a postwar record low, renewing its postwar lowest level annually since 1976. A marked decrease in the number of union members was the major cause of the declining unionization rate. In 1996, the number of union members stood at 12.41 million, a decrease of 162,000 from the year earlier, the largest drop since 1975.

By industry, the manufacturing sector has 3.821 million unionists, accounting for 31 percent of all union members, followed by services (1.927 million, or 15.6% of all unionists), transportation and telecommunications (1.607 million) and government (1.331 million). Construction witnessed a 25,000 increase in membership of, compared with the level of the previous year, but unions in all the other sectors saw a fall in their numbers.

In both manufacturing and services, the number of employees has increased but that of unionists has shown a decrease, dwarfing the unionization rate. A growing number of companies, affected by job reductions brought on by restructuring, have relied on part-time and dispatched workers. Despite this, efforts to organize these non-regular workers have been

inadequate, and have apparently led to an annual drop in the unionization rate, the survey said. Rengo (Japanese Trade Union Confederation), strongly feeling a sense of crisis over the situation, has launched comprehensive 3-year plan to expand the size of union membership.

The unionization rate was high in government (63.4%), utilities (53.3%) and finance and insurance as well as real estate (44.9%). The unionization rate for private companies alone stood at 20.2 percent. However, the gap in the rate between large and smaller-scale enterprises was wide and the rate stood at 58.1 percent for companies with 1,000 or more regular employees and a mere 1.6 percent for those with 100 and fewer regular employees.

Of the 53.67 million employees, 41.22 million, or 76.8 percent remain unorganized; 7.66 million were affiliated with Rengo; 860,000 were under the umbrella of Zenroren (National Confederation of Trade Unions); 280,000 were members of Zenrokyo (National Trade Union Council); and 3.65 million were non-affiliated.

Public Policy

Overhauling the Equal Employment Opportunity Law

Ten years have passed since the 1985 Equal Employment Opportunity Law (EEOL) was enacted in 1986. The EEOL was enacted for reasons of women's greater roles in society and the need to consolidate domestic laws to ratify the UN Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination. The EEOL banned sex discrimination in training, welfare provisions and mandatory retirement age, retirement and dismissal, but only stated that employers should endeavor to treat both men and women equally in recruiting and hiring, assignments and promotions (the so-called "should endeavor to avoid discrimination against women" clause without legal sanctions against violations of the EEOL). This prompted criticism that the EEOL lacked effectiveness, creating a social problem of employment discrimination against women especially after the collapse of the speculative economic bubble.

The Women's and Young Workers' Problems Council, a tripartite organization of the Ministry of Labour, had been reviewing the EEOL and on December 17, 1996, made its proposal in an opinion paper submitted to Minister of Labour Okano. The Council proposed the four major points calling for revision of the EEOL. First, discrimination against women in recruitment, hiring, placement and promotion will be prohibited. Formerly, the Law only obligated employers to "endeavor" to treat both genders in these stages of employment and did not bring sanctions against violators. Second, preventive measures to publicize the names

of companies violating the Law to secure equality in hiring and promotion for both men and women. Also, mediation, which called for approval of both parties concerned to enter into can be conducted if one of the parties requests so. Furthermore, disadvantageous treatment resulting from an application for the mediation will be prohibited. Third is the abolition of a "female protective provision" in the Labour Standards Law (LSL) that restricts women from working overtime, on holidays or late at night. The provision had been an impediment to equal treatment between the sexes. Fourth is legal measures taken for workers to be extended from late-night work (from 10 pm to 5 am) if they so request to raise a child or care for elderly parents or sick family members. Furthermore, the Council clarified the concept of sexual harassment to fight against it and also referred to spreading the spirit and the letter of the legislation preventing it.

Labor (Rengo) evaluated the Council's proposal, saying that it largely agrees with what Rengo called for. But the issue of work-hour restrictions for both genders which it had demanded on the condition that protective provisions for women workers be lifted was postponed. The issue will be deliberated at the Central Labor Standards Council. Meanwhile, management (Nikkeiren) highly valued elimination of protective restrictions for women, noting that it will come in line with deregulation. Armed with the proposal, the Ministry of Labour drafted an outline of a bill revising the EEOL on January 14, 1997, to make a recommendation to the Council. The revised laws, with some exceptions, will become effective on April 1, 1999. Revisions to the EEOL and draft revisions to the LSL (scrapping of the female protective provision) will be submitted to the current Diet session by the Women's and Young Workers' Council and the Central Labour Standards Council, respectively.

Special Topic

The Mid-career Unemployed in Japan

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Alienated from "Japanese-Style Management"?

Japanese-style management, it is said, features lifetime employment, protection of employees through company-based labor unions and a system of promotion and pay based on seniority.

However, some workers at small companies do not enjoy the benefits of Japanese-style management. After the burst of the so-called "bubble economy," numerous numbers of middle-aged and elderly workers have been let go or as on their way out from small companies. These workers are relatively lesser-known, compared with their counterparts in big-name companies or those companies affiliates who are assured of employment until compulsory retirement, normally at age 60. In the midst of the prolonged recession, they are less likely to find re-employment.

In fiscal 1994, we at the Tokyo Metropolitan Institute for Labour Research (TMILR) conducted a mail survey of middle-aged and older unemployed men over the age of 50. The survey team, in which the author served as senior researcher, sent questionnaires to middle-aged and elderly males seeking jobs at public employment services offices in Tokyo and those undergoing job-training at public job-training schools to find re-employment. Of them, 351, or one in three respondents, quit work, affected directly by the effects of the recession. They included workers who lost their jobs due to their companies' bankruptcy and shutdown, those who were laid off, those who responded to an early-retirement program as a corporate downsizing method and those who retired voluntarily because of deteriorating business performance. And 71 percent of the 351 had yet to reach 60 at which they would become eligible to draw the annuity in full under the national pension plan.

Fifty-nine percent of the respondents were formerly employed by companies with 99 or fewer employees, which were very small to medium-sized companies. They received low lump-sum retirement and severance payments, and 35 percent never received lump-sum retirement payments.

Despite harsh treatment, most of these middle-aged and elderly persons did not fight against their employers before they were forced to quit their jobs. 53 percent said "I knew how the company was losing money and I thought I'd better give up my job. It couldn't be helped it." Furthermore, 21 percent answered "I thought of leaving the company as soon as possible to find a new job." Only 6 percent said "I protested that the employer should keep me employed." In addition, a mere 4 percent replied that "I protested together with my co-workers to the employer."

What role did the labor union play for middle-aged and older persons who were out of work at smaller-scale companies? 66 percent said "we had no labor union." The unionization rate in Japan is extremely low at smaller companies. Even if labor unions argue that they will protect employment, they are powerless at small- and medium-sized non-union companies.

Were the job ~~be~~-saved, then, if there were labor unions? The majority of unemployed persons who were separated from smaller companies which had labor unions responded that "the labor union did nothing for me."

Ambiguous Psychology of the Unemployed

How were the mental states of middle-aged and older persons who left jobs, unable to protest against their companies individually or in a group? Replies from them were as follows, and multiple answers were allowed.

- Felt anxious, immediately after quitting work, about whether I could find another job (51%)
- Regarded my former company as cold-hearted (35%)
- Felt anxious, about my future (32%)
- Felt hopeless (29%)
- Resented the company (27%)
- My life is out of step (25%)
- Felt isolated with fewer social activities (23%)

As we have seen, the respondents strongly feel anxiety, hopeless and anger for being let go from the company. Do they have only negative attitudes toward their current state? Not exactly.

We asked middle-aged and elderly males who were left unemployed because of an economic slump about how they feel now and what changes have occurred in their lifestyle (Multiple answers were allowed).

- Consider the period of joblessness a time for refreshing myself (52%)
- Have a chance to rethink my way of life (48%)
- Feel freed from a corporate prison (25%)
- Get help from my family and have a stronger family bond (21%)

As seen above, many respondents positively accepted their unemployed life.

During the long postwar high-growth years, Japan witnessed a largely continuing annual rise of real wages. In this period, even among workers at smaller-scale companies, some could receive a surplus of wages and others could purchase homes in an era when housing acquisition costs were relatively low. Therefore, seeing all jobless persons as ~~desperatedly~~desperately poor is one-sided. Not all the unemployed do hold such two-sided psychological states, however. They seem to be divided into two groups, the needier people and the more comfortable people.

One of the factors separating these people into two groups is the cause of unemployment.

Those who were among voluntary retirees recruited by the company are relatively comfortable. They strongly feel that they can have time for refreshing themselves, that they can have a chance to rethink about their way of life, that they are freed from a corporate prison and that they can recover from extended exhaustion. In times of recession, not many Japanese companies, not even smaller ones, immediately break off long-term employment commitments they made when they hired workers and fire them. When necessary to get workers to quit, some companies offer lucrative early retirement packages. Those who were separated from these companies, even if from smaller ones, can enjoy a relatively comfortable life.

In actuality, however, tiny companies do not have such leeway in their corporate management and many have gone bankrupt or close down. In fact, large numbers of tiny companies in Japan have vanished over the past several years. The workers knocked out of the companies which went bankrupt and shut down are psychologically in bad shape. They strongly feel their life is out-of-sync, that they have lost psychological leeway, that they are more dissatisfied with society and that they have lost faith in all sorts of companies.

People Who Cannot Retire

In Japan, people get public pensions largely at age 60. Large companies offer employees additional benefits. However, middle-aged and elderly people who become jobless before age 60 or who were let go from smaller companies without their own pension programs find it hard to secure sufficient living expenses. First, many of the unemployed still have children to look after. Those who said that they have a child or children who are still in school reached 40 percent. Japanese parents are very eager to give their children higher education. This, in a sense, has contributed to providing a workforce, but it means that Japanese parents must keep pumping money into their children's needs.

Furthermore, with a longer life expectancy, middle-aged and older workers have elderly parents to support. Of the unemployed, 20 percent support their parents.

Regarding a source of income, meanwhile, only 8 percent have an income from pensions. Japanese women in this generation did not or could not work long-term, and spouses of a small portion of the jobless have an income from work. Only 55 percent get an income from public employment insurance and many live by withdrawing their savings. Interest rates for savings are presently at a record-low level. The low-interest policy thus directly hit those generations.

They have to keep working to make a living and they are seeking re-employment with

lower working conditions. More specifically, 66 percent of them do not care about business categories; 86 percent are not choosy about positions; 55 percent do not stick to job categories; and 22 percent do not oppose long working hours.

The nation's unemployment rate is actually at a recent peak, 3.4 percent, but is considerably lower than that in other industrialized countries. One reason for the low unemployment rate, it seems, is these jobless persons' behavior. In short, the middle-aged and elderly unemployed, unable to find re-employment under the same conditions as for their previous job, lowered their demands for re-employment.

Need for Redevelopment of Ability of Middle-Aged and Elderly Workers' Skills

In other advanced industrial nations and especially in many EC-member nations, the unemployment rate for youths is often higher than that for middle-aged and older workers. In Japan, however, youth unemployment is lower. Pay based on seniority is sometimes responsible for that. That means that companies want youths because wages for middle-aged and older workers are fairly higher than those for younger workers. But wages for middle-aged and older persons may correspond to their skills acquired; and it follows that if their skills are marketable, then they are employable. However, with rapid changes in Japanese industry, companies, it seems, do not highly evaluate middle-aged and elderly workers' skills and instead they value younger workers' flexibility.

In what areas do the middle-aged and older unemployed find themselves skilled? Asked to point out "your merits, or strong points which you consider the edge to find jobs," they answered as follows (multiple answers were allowed).

- Hardworking (72%)
- Loyalty to job, no absence (61%)
- Strive for good relations at work (54%)
- Concentration at work (51%)
- Physical strength (47%)
- Willingness to work overtime (43%)
- Willingness to take a job turned down by younger workers (31%)

The middle-aged and older workers certainly demonstrate a high "work ethic," one of productivity factors which supported Japan's high growth. While having confidence in such general skills as attitudes and work ethic shown above, they have little confidence in the following areas.

- Strategic mind and business planning skills (16%)

- Business networking skills (14%)
- Accounting and financial skills (11%)
- Computer operating skills (10%)

However, only a fraction of the mid-career unemployed are learning to prepare themselves for re-employment. But those attending public vocational training schools highly evaluate the training programs there. It seems necessary to expand and strengthen public or private opportunities for vocational retraining for middle-aged and older workers.

Growing Importance of Family Bond

Even for Japanese male workers who are often called "workaholics," being jobless provides a chance to re-discover the meaning of personal and family life. Asked who "presently encourages you in your family," 65 percent cited "my spouse," followed by "child (children)(35%) and "other relatives" (31%). On the other hand, when questioned about "who they lost touch with" (multiple replies), they answered "former bosses" (49%) and "former co-workers" (33%), indicating that unemployment involves reorganization of the jobless people's social relations.

It is tragicomical that unemployment made possible a "re-balance between work and private-" which, social critics often argue, is necessary for many Japanese workers.

The Happily Retired and the Fired Seniors

In our TMILR study, we compared 380 older persons over 60 who reached the compulsory retirement age (hereafter called "the retired") and 102 workers over 60 who lost jobs due to a recession (hereafter called "the fired").

Seventy nine percent of the fired worked for smaller companies with 299 or fewer employees, higher than the 37 percent of the retired who were with small- and medium-sized companies. The fired were on the payrolls for an average 16.2 years, while the retired were or for an average 28 years, showing a wide gap in length of service. It is apparent from this that the "Lifetime-Employed Worker Model" idealizes that of large companies. Smaller companies for which the fired had worked were in a business slump and were already taking a variety of restructuring measures. Thus, 58 percent of the fired said "Knowing the company was facing bad business performance, I considered it inevitable for me to quit." They received an average ¥4.99 million as a lump-sum retirement allowance, one third of the ¥13.19 million on average the retired received.

Japanese workers are said to have a strong sense of corporate loyalty; however, compared

with those who worked long-term until retirement age, many of those who were fired in their old age pointed out, "Lost trust in the company," "Am increasingly upset with society," "My life is out-of-sync" and "Have greater fear of lower ability to work."

The fired tend to have lower working conditions for re-employment.

Mid-career Unemployed Women More Underprivileged Than Their Male Counterparts

In our TMILR survey, we further compared women who are underprivileged in the Japanese labor market with men - 233 unemployed females age 45 and older who left work in and after 199 with 88 male counterparts under the same conditions.

The middle-aged and elderly female unemployed left a company which is much smaller than that of their male counterparts and therefore, which has lower working conditions and were more severely hit by the recession.

Of the mid-career women unemployed, 43 percent worked at their former job for less than 4 years, an extremely smaller percentage for their male counterparts. It is often said that Japanese workers "work long-term" for a company, but this cliché grew out simply of an emphasis on male workers. Half of the female jobless persons were directly affected by the effects of the present recession. In addition, women were dismissed earlier than men even though their companies were similarly in bad shape. The average wage for women was around half the amount for men. What was more, unemployed women who were not offered a single yen as a retirement allowance stood at 40 percent, higher than their male counterparts. The average amount of retirement allowance was only one fifth of that for the men.

The negative impact of unemployment is greater on women. For instance, half of the middle-aged and older female unemployed, more than their male counterparts, are afraid that they could not find another job. Furthermore, they generally had a stronger sense of anxiety about their future lives. Unemployed women in significant numbers were breadwinners. Forty-three percent said that they had "no spouse" and thus could not rely on a spouse's income. On top of this, unlike male jobless persons many were unable to find someone to rely on while out of work.

Middle-aged and older jobless females, when re-employed, want an annual income of around 2 to 3 million yen, fairly lower than the amount their male counterparts seek. If ever these unemployed women find re-employment and contribute to keeping the jobless rate low, the result will be lower working conditions for workers. Simply put, the danger is that a

recovery in the economy, if it does not mean a jobless recovery, will generate more low-quality jobs.

Long-Forgotten Subject: Jobless People Study

Up until the 1970s one of the Japan's important subject regarding labor issues was unemployment. Production workers were let go in mass during the oil-supply crises, but a robust recovery in the Japanese economy tended to make unemployment studies anachronistic. The low jobless rate was seen as a sign of the success of "Japanese-style management." Long-term employment was taken for granted. However, the current prolonged slump indicates that an aphasical labor market is nothing unique. That means that with the sudden economic downturn and the rapid decline in corporate profits, hiring employees is not a sanctuary. Officially, Japan's unemployment rate is still low. However, it is perhaps because the unemployed under severe circumstances and those let go from tiny companies in particular may have inevitably shifted to jobs they did not want to do. Practically no tiny companies have labor unions. Virtually no labor unions, it is fair to say, conduct research on the unemployed. The government, too, seems to study the official jobless rate alone. Also, it seems that many scholars try to look at the mechanism of employment adjustment only through the figures. Thus, we have our TMILR study offers new data on the realities of jobless people. (As a TMILR researcher, the author is continuing questionnaire surveys of young women seeking employment and interviewing the elderly unemployed.)

Statistical Aspects

Recent Labor Economy Indices

	December 1996	November 1996	Change from previous year
Labor force	6,663 (10thousand)	6,709 (10thousand)	53 (10thousand)
Employed	6,455	6,497	56
Employees	5,375	5,349	68
Unemployed	208	212	3
Unemployment rate	3.1%	3.2%	0.1
Active opening rate	0.76	0.74	0.02
Total hours worked	161.2 (hours)	165.1 (hours)	0.9*
Total wages of regular employees	287.9 (¥thousand)	287.7 (¥thousand)	1.2*

Source: Management and Coordination Agency, Ministry of Labour.

Notes: 1.*denotes annual percent change.

2.From February 1991, data of "Total hours worked" and "Total wages of regular employees" are for firms with 5 to 30 employees.

