

Abstracts

Employment Status Types and Trade Unions in Japan

Norio Hisamoto (Kyoto University)

This paper mainly discusses two themes: Firstly, the relationship between employment status and trade unions; and secondly, Japanese union activities and their changes. In terms of the first theme, the employment relationship is an authority relationship, and it is a relationship between a commander (employer, master) and a follower (employee, servant). Four employment classification types are derived on the basis of two axes of analysis, namely degree of collaboration and clarity of individual performance. I will also examine the relationship between them and the enterprise unions. In the first half of the discussion of the second theme, the actual state of trade unions in Japan will be clarified through recounting and measurement analysis of individual questionnaires on the nature, activities, evaluations and effects of union members and union officers. Regarding the need for trade unions, union members were more positive than non-members; based on this, they confirmed many positive effects such as annual income and career development opportunities. Lastly, as a new enterprise union image that differs from the past, we propose an enterprise union type that accepts the guidance of higher organizations, organized mainly by UA Zensen. They often include a large number of women and non-regular employees, indicating that the existence of such unions stops the decline in union membership in Japan.

Changes of Processes in Labor Market Policy Formation and Labor Unions' Roles

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This article provides an overview of the changes of processes in labor market policy formation during the postwar period in Japan and analyzes how labor unions took part in the process. During the 1970s and 1980s, the tripartite Labor Policy Council took the lead and exhibited high performance in policy formation. In the 1990s, the Prime Minister's office came to lead the process, which contributed to preventing a sharp rise in the unemployment rate, but at the same time induced negative side effects such as working condition gaps between regular and non-regular employees. This is because trade unions tried to stop deregulation measures that were regarded as being disadvantageous for their member employees instead of cooperating to create a new system suitable for new realities. From a comparison among advanced countries, two elements can be identified as being necessary for high performance of labor markets: one is policy formation through tripartite cooperation, and the other is the existence of a "positive-sum" stance taken by labor unions. It could be said that tripartite policy formation without direct political intervention, which enables restructuring the incumbent framework in accordance with the changing world, is important. In order to realize these reforms, the key factor is thinking and behavior by labor unions that would overcome old ideas.

How Are Labor Unions Involved in the "Spring Wage Offensive"?

Yoshiro Kutani

Japan's "spring wage offensive" (shuntō) is not only an annual opportunity for labor and management to deliberate and determine wages and other such labor conditions, it is also a highly significant means for both sides to learn. The consultations and negotiations pursued at these annual talks allow labor representatives to obtain information on economic and business conditions from the macro- to the micro-level, as well as receiving an explanation of the future plans for the company. Company representatives gain insight into the ideas, thoughts, and concerns of the workers from the workplace, and recognize those areas in which they were lacking sufficient understanding. It is also a forum for discovering what workers envision for Japan as a country. This learning about one another leads to mutual understanding and in turn stability in industrial relations. Japan's stable industrial relations have developed in the context of the experiences and history of 60 years of the "spring wage offensive."

Who Does the Trade Union Represent? An Analysis of Changes in the Shuntō over Time

Wakana Shuto (Rikkyo University)

With a specific focus on the shuntō—the annual “spring wages offensive” in which trade unions within a specific industry join forces to negotiate a base salary—this paper will investigate the extent to which Japanese trade unions represent their membership. In the past, trade unions served to represent a wide variety of workers. This model has also been seen within the shuntō: back in the 1960s, a rise in wages in those industries and companies regarded as pattern-setting was felt, through various routes, by all Japanese citizens. However, half a century later, in the 2010s, the wage raises of the shuntō movement are not of interest to many workers. In that sense, it could be said that the representational scope of trade unions, which play the key role in the shuntō, is in fact diminishing. This paper will consider two case studies—the General Federation of Private Railway and Bus Workers’ Unions of Japan (PRWU) , and the Japanese Electrical Electronic and Information Union (EEIU) —in shedding light on the changes to this united campaign. Centralized collective negotiations in the PRWU, which had continued for thirty years, ceased in 1997. Consequently, the settlement agreements at the shuntō began to vary, resulting in wage differences between companies. With the EEIU, deterioration in industry profits led to a zero increase in wages in the 2000s, but there have been no major changes to the functioning of the united campaign. Based on an examination of both of these case studies, this paper considers who the trade unions are representing today.

The Dismissal of Top Managers in Japanese Corporations: The Roles That Labor Unions and Middle Managers Have Played and Need to Play

Norihisa Yoshimura (Osaka City University)

The purpose of this paper is to investigate the functions of forced dismissal of top managers by labor unions and middle managers observed in Japanese corporations. “Management” is an action concerning the selection of various strategies and tactics to achieve the purpose of each company. Top managers are ultimately responsible for management. “Corporate governance” is a concept related to the selection and monitoring of top managers, and dismissal is a particularly important process. Currently, reforms are under way with a shareholder-primacy approach, but concrete results have not been seen yet. The premise of the revised UK corporate governance code, which is used as a reference, is also in the midst of a major change. In this paper, we focus on the process of dismissal by employee groups in Japanese companies. These employee groups have had enough information and incentives to lead to the dismissal of top managers. Several cases have been observed, including the case of Mitsukoshi Department Store, Yamaha (musical instruments) and major financial institutions (Nomura Securities and so on) . Currently, reforms that emphasize the role of (independent) outside directors are in progress. In order for reform to be effective, it will be necessary to have a mechanism to appropriately convey information held by employee groups to higher levels.

Labor Unions and the Law: Can Anybody Unionize Anywhere at Any Time?

Hifumi Okunuki (Sagami Women's University)

I teach labor and social insurance law at the university level. I am also the executive president of the Tozen Union, a union which is now in its tenth year of existence. This union's most distinctive feature is its multinational and multi-ethnic membership. We have fumbled our way forward with no particular theory or predecessor to guide us. We reaffirm the meaning and power of a labor union through our actual practical engagement. Labor unions are in no way a relic of the past. From my limited experience, I feel strongly that it is up to us to make sure unions remain relevant. We must face the fact that labor unions have faded dramatically in the consciousness of workers. However, it is also an undeniable fact that, legally, a labor union is an organization with rights that are universal and ironclad, and this has remained unchanged for decades. This paper will take a look back at labor unions from a legal perspective, will consider how to

organize them as well as background issues generated by various types of labor unions, and finally look ahead to a vision for what labor unions should be like in the future.