

Labor Unions' Efforts in Organizing Part-time Workers

Summary

Contributing Authors

Yutaka Asao	Senior Research Director, the Japan Institute for Labour Policy and Training
Hitoshi Ohta	Former Assistant Fellow, the Japan Institute for Labour Policy and Training
Ayami Kamuro	Lecturer, Tezukayama University
Hiroyuki Fujimura	Professor, Hosei University; Senior Research Fellow, the Japan Institute for Labour Policy and Training; Chief Examiner
Kazunari Honda	Associate Professor, Kokugakuin University
Yasuo Murasugi	Visiting Researcher, Hosei University
Mitsuru Yamashita	Lecturer, Meiji University

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Objective of Survey and Research

This report compiles the results of a questionnaire survey on the “research on the unionization of part-time workers,” which was undertaken as part of the project research titled, “Research on the Reconstruction of the System for Determining Working Conditions,” to explore the future system for determining working conditions in light of diverse working styles, decline in the unionization rate, etc. Considering that the unionization rate of atypical employees is extremely low, the research focuses on part-time workers, who make up the largest percentage of atypical employees, and investigates on their unionization aiming to contribute to the overall project research.

Prior to the questionnaire survey, we sorted out the issues mainly from reviews of preceding studies and conducted an interview survey on unionization of part-time workers on national centers, industrial unions, and enterprise unions that are part of the industrial unions. (The results are compiled in the JILPT Reference Series No.9 “Report on the Case Studies on the Unionization of Part-time Workers and Setting of Working Conditions.”)

Based on these results, we conducted the questionnaire survey on enterprise unions (unit labor unions)’ headquarters and branches and part-time workers who serve as

union representatives (hereafter called the “part-time workers’ union representatives”) with the objective of 1) understand the current state of unionization of part-time workers and identify how labor unions are working on the unionization of part-time workers and what their future challenges are, 2) clarify the efforts made by labor unions regarding part-time workers’ wages and other working conditions, and 3) investigate how part-time workers’ union representatives evaluate such efforts made by labor unions regarding part-time workers’ working conditions and what their awareness of the situation is.

Method of the questionnaire survey

- (1) Survey subjects: enterprise unions (unit labor unions)’ headquarters and branches and part-time workers’ union representatives

Number of questionnaires sent to unit labor unions’ headquarters: 453

Number of questionnaires sent to unit labor unions’ branches: 3,210

Number of questionnaires sent to part-time workers’ union representatives: 966

*On the selection of the subjects and the number of questionnaires sent

We obtained lists of enterprise unions (unit labor unions) from five industrial unions that organized workers in industries that employed many part-time workers (the Japanese Federation of Textile, Chemical, Food, Commercial, Service and General Workers’ Unions; the Japanese Federation of Co-op Labor Unions; the Japanese Federation of Leisure-Service Industries Workers’ Unions; the Japan Federation of Service and Distributive Workers Unions; and the Federation of All Japan Foods and Tobacco Workers’ Unions). Based on the number of union members, the situation regarding unionization of part-time workers, etc. indicated, we selected the unit labor unions’ headquarters for the questionnaire survey on unit labor unions’ headquarters (hereafter called the “headquarters survey”). For the questionnaire survey on unit labor unions’ branches (hereafter called the “branch survey”) and the questionnaire survey on part-time workers’ union representatives (hereafter called the “part-timer representative survey”), we asked each headquarters of the unit labor unions that are subject of the survey to select the top 10 branches in terms of the number of union members and up to 3 part-time workers’ union representatives, to whom the questionnaires were sent via the headquarters.

- (2) Survey method: mail survey
 (3) Survey period: January 24 to February 20, 2005
 (4) Number of collected questionnaires

Headquarters survey: 143 (collection rate as percentage of the number sent: 31.6%)

Branch survey: 204 (6.4%)

Part-timer representative survey: 86 (8.9%)

*Because the number of questionnaires sent to the headquarters for distribution to branches and part-time workers' representatives was uniform (10 for branches and 3 for part-time workers' representatives), the collection rates of the last two surveys are not necessarily accurate.

Outline of the Research Results

1. Sorting out the issues (Part I)

We reexamined the mechanism for determining part-time workers' working conditions from the points of view of factors that influence determination of working conditions, factors that are external to firms, factors that are internal to firms, and the role of labor unions within firms. We then clarified the objectives of the research.

As ways to approach the determination of part-time workers' working conditions, we can focus on the external labor market and moves within firms. The approach of focusing on the external labor market is to investigate on legal provisions, competition with other firms over human resources, and the movement of the national centers and industrial unions, and measure the effect of each element on part-time workers' working conditions. Through this, we can clarify the mechanism for determining the working conditions when firms employ part-time workers from the outside. The approach of focusing on moves within firm is as follows: There is a growing tendency where the working conditions are determined by the situation within firms when part-time workers are employed as the core labor force. This is also evident from the fact that firms are determining pay raise based on improvement in ability, the number of years of experience, the level of difficulty in performing the work, etc. By observing firms in which labor unions have been organized, we can more clearly see how these internal factors influence determination of working conditions. This is because labor unions collect and analyze part-time workers' opinions before they negotiate with the management. Of these two approaches, we focus on the latter moves within firms for this research and particularly on labor unions' efforts in unionization.

2. Outline of the results of the questionnaire survey (Part II)

We summarize the findings from the questionnaire surveys of the headquarters survey, branch survey, and part-timer representative survey, from the viewpoints of

efforts made in unionizing part-time workers, difficulty in their unionization, how part-time workers' working conditions are determined, etc. The main findings are as shown below.

1) Basic attributes of unit labor unions responding to the headquarters survey

Among 143 unit labor unions that responded to the headquarters survey, the average number of employees at the firms where the headquarters were located was 6,266. The percentage of the firms that employed part-time workers was 86.0 percent (123 unit labor unions), and the average percentage of part-time workers among all employees was 8.7 percent for male part-time workers and 52.6 percent for female part-time workers. The principal work of part-time workers at firms where the unit labor unions' headquarters were located (multiple answers) was "vending and attending to customers" with 86.2 percent, followed by "clerical work" with 68.3 percent, "production and construction" with 23.6 percent, and "sales" with 19.5 percent.

2) Various characteristics about unionizing part-time workers

(1) Situation of organizing part-time workers

At the firms where the unit labor unions' headquarters were located and that employed part-time workers (123 firms), 74.8 percent (92 firms) had part-time workers who were union members. Among them, 87 unit labor unions (70.7 percent) organized part-time workers in the same union as regular employees, and 5 unit labor unions (4.1 percent) organized part-time workers exclusively in a separate union.

As for the time of organizing part-time workers, 46.0 percent unionized them when the labor union was formed and 51.7 percent did so after the union was formed. As for the decade in which they were organized, the largest percentage of them, at 36.8 percent, did so during the 1990s, followed by 2000s with 25.3 percent and 1980s with 18.4 percent.

With regard to the scope with which part-time workers are organized, 54.0 percent said "all part-time workers" and 31.0 percent said "part-time workers with many working hours and days." When working hours are used as a standard for unionization, the largest percentage of unit labor unions, at 40.7 percent, said 20 to 30 hours a week, followed by 30 to 40 hours a week with 25.9 percent.

(2) Firms' response to unionization of part-time workers

On whether the unit labor unions discussed with the management about the unionization of part-time workers, 74.7 percent said they "had sufficient discussion in advance," 8.0 percent said they "notified the management immediately before unionizing part-time workers," and 4.6 percent said they "notified the management after unionizing part-time workers." As regards the management's response, 5.7 percent said they "strongly approved," 51.7 percent said they "approved," 23.0 percent

said they “neither approved nor were opposed,” 5.7 percent said they were “opposed,” and 3.4 percent said they were “strongly opposed.” At firms where part-time workers had been unionized, the management showed approval or was neutral in most cases, and the percentage of those who were opposed was even less than ten percent.

(3) Guidance and support from upper labor unions

On guidance and support provided by upper labor unions in organizing part-time workers, 29.9 percent said “there were strong guidance and support,” 34.5 percent said “there were some guidance and support,” and 24.1 percent said “there was no guidance or support.” On the effectiveness of such guidance and support provided by upper labor unions on unionization of part-time workers, no unit labor unions were in the negative, and more than 80 percent were positive about such guidance and support.

(4) Reasons for unionizing part-time workers

On the reasons for unionizing part-time workers (multiple answers), the largest percentage, at 60.9 percent, said they “wanted to improve part-time workers’ working conditions,” followed by those who said they “wanted to strengthen the union’s negotiating power” with 58.6 percent and those who said “because the number of part-time workers at the workplace increased” and those who said they “wanted to represent the majority of employees at the workplace,” each with 50.6 percent.

(5) Specific measures taken to organize part-time workers

On specific measures taken to organize part-time workers, the largest percentage, at 66.7 percent, said they “fully explained to part-time workers the advantages of joining the union,” followed by those who said they “fully explained to part-time workers the union’s activities” with 59.8 percent, those who said they “carried out the union’s PR activities by distributing pamphlets” with 46.0 percent, those who said they “organized meetings and other occasions for exchanging opinions with part-time workers” with 41.4 percent, and those who said they “fully explained to regular union members the advantages of having part-time workers join the union” with 33.3 percent. In the branch survey, the responses to this question were “fully explained to part-time workers the advantages of joining the union” (50.8 percent), followed by “actively collected the opinions of part-time workers” (45.8 percent), and “fully explained to part-time workers the union’s activities” (40.7 percent).

(6) Unions' self-evaluation about unionizing part-time workers and current challenges after unionization

On the self-evaluation of the unions about organizing part-time workers (multiple answers), 79.3 percent said they “were able to reflect the views of part-time workers on the union’s activities,” 73.5 percent said they “could secure the representation of the employees at the workplace,” and 70.1 percent said “part-time workers’ working conditions improved.”

On the current challenges in organizing part-time workers (multiple answers), the largest percentage, at 74.7 percent, said it was to “raise part-time workers’ interest in the union’s activities,” followed by those who said “train union leaders who are part-time workers” with 66.7 percent, those who said “promote closer communication between regular employees and part-time workers” and “adjust interest between regular employees and part-time workers regarding working conditions,” each with 44.8 percent, and those who said “have part-time workers feel the effect of unionization” with 43.7 percent. In the branch survey, the responses to the question were “raise part-time workers’ interest in the union’s activities” (69.5 percent), followed by “have part-time workers feel the effect of unionization” (49.2 percent), and “train union leaders who are part-time workers” (48.3 percent).

3) Efforts made by labor unions that have not organized part-time workers in unionizing part-time workers

(1) Views about organizing part-time workers

On the views of labor unions that have not organized part-time workers on unionization of part-time workers, the majority, at 54.8 percent, said they “are working on unionizing part-time workers but it has not realized,” and 19.8 percent said they “intend to organize part-time workers but are not doing anything for that at the present.” Those who said they “do not intend to organize part-time workers” made up 25.8 percent.

(2) Reasons for not organizing part-time workers

On the reasons that unionization of part-time workers has not been realized (multiple answers), the largest percentage, at 38.7 percent, said “the management is strongly opposed,” followed by those who said “there is no elbowroom for organizing part-time workers” with 35.5 percent, those who said “it is difficult to adjust interest between regular employees and part-time workers” and “the advantages of joining the union do not get across to part-time workers,” each with 25.8 percent, and those who said “it is

difficult to improve part-time workers' working conditions" with 22.6 percent. In the branch survey, the largest percentage, at 43.9 percent, said that the reason that unionization of part-time workers has not been realized was "the advantages of joining the union do not get across to part-time workers," followed by those who said "part-time workers are not interested in the union" with 36.4 percent and those who said "it is difficult to adjust interest between regular employees and part-time workers" with 33.3 percent. The differences in the results between the headquarters and branches of unit labor unions are probably due to differences in the standpoints of the headquarters and branches, but they may also reflect the differences in terms of having opportunities for direct contact with part-time workers.

(3) Efforts made in organizing part-time workers

On the efforts made in organizing part-time workers (multiple answers), the largest percentage, at 48.4 percent, said they "did nothing in particular," followed by those who said "actively collected the opinions of part-time workers" with 35.5 percent, those who said "organized meetings and other occasions for exchanging opinions with part-time workers" with 22.6 percent, and those who said "fully explained to regular union members the advantages of having part-time workers join the union" and "appointed a union official responsible for issues related to part-time workers," each with 19.4 percent. There were also 16.1 percent that "collected part-time workers' requests to the union." In the branch survey, close to half, or 48.5 percent, said, in response to this question, that they "did nothing in particular," while there were those who said "actively collected the opinions of part-time workers" with 31.8 percent, those who said "collected part-time workers' requests to the union" and "carried out the union's PR activities by distributing pamphlets," each with 21.2 percent, and "organized meetings and other occasions for exchanging opinions with part-time workers" with 18.2 percent.

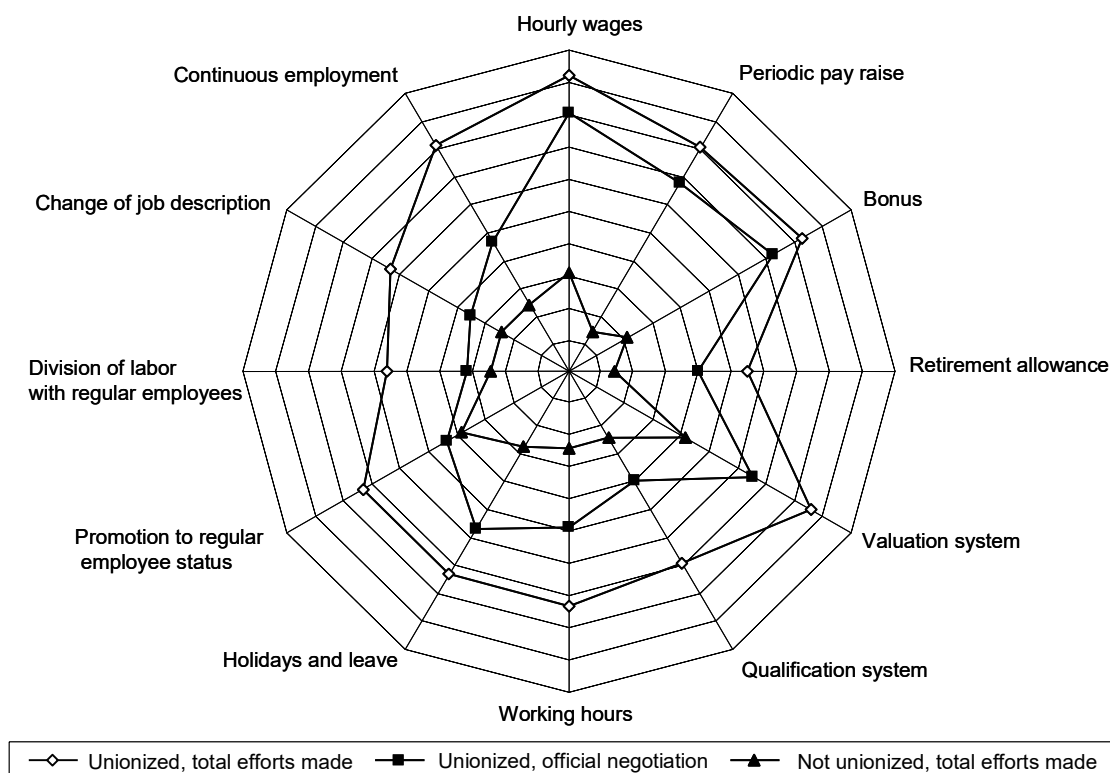
4) Labor unions' efforts regarding part-time workers' working conditions and policies

(1) Efforts made regarding part-time workers' working conditions

On the situation regarding holding negotiations and consultations with the management about part-time workers' working conditions, a large percentage of unit labor unions that organized part-time workers were working on improving part-time workers' working conditions mainly by having "official negotiations and consultations" with the management, even though there were differences in the depth of how each item on the agenda was discussed. At unit labor unions that have not organized part-time workers, on the other hand, only a few had "official negotiations and

consultations” except on some issues, and the majority “did nothing in particular.” At unions that have organized part-time workers, a large percentage of them were working on wage-related items such as “hourly wages,” “bonuses,” and “periodic pay raise” mostly through “official negotiations and consultations.”

Figure 1. Situation regarding Negotiations and Consultations with the Management (Headquarters Survey)



Note:

1. The center of the circle is zero, and each scale from the center increases by 10 percent. The outermost scale is 100 percent.
2. "Total efforts made" is the total of "official negotiations and consultations" or "unofficial exchange of information and opinions."
3. Most of the remainder after subtracting the percentage of the "total efforts made" from 100 percent is the percentage of "doing nothing in particular." The difference after subtracting "official negotiation" from "total efforts made" is the percentage of "unofficial exchange of information and opinions."

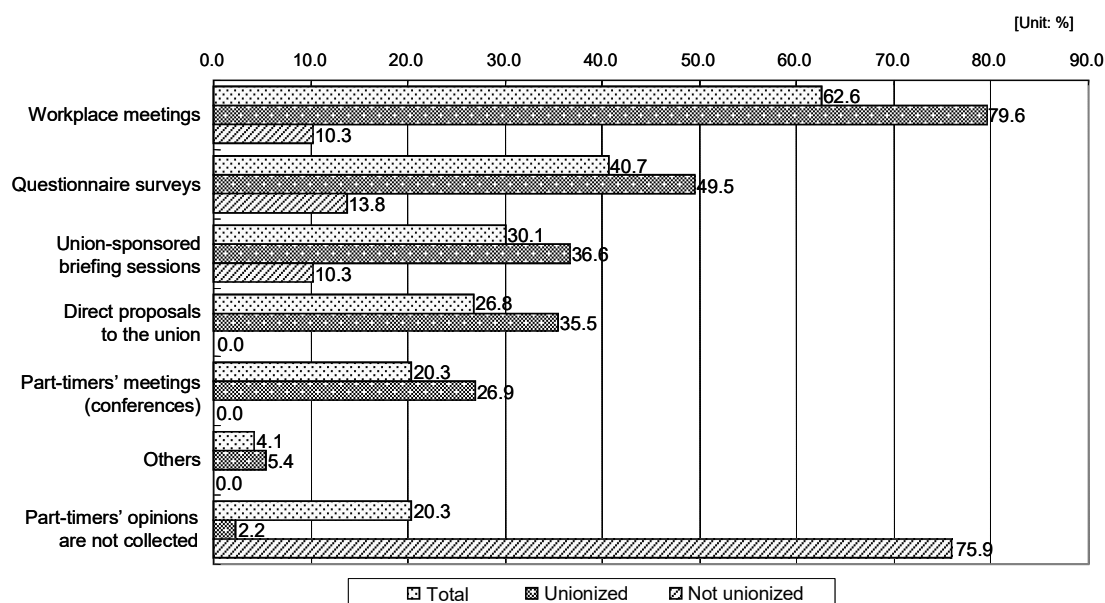
(2) Method of collecting part-time workers' opinions about working conditions

On how part-time workers' opinions on working conditions are collected (multiple answers), the largest percentage, at 62.6 percent, said they did so through "workplace meetings," followed by those who said through "questionnaire surveys" with 40.7 percent, and those who said through "the union-sponsored briefing sessions" with 33.7 percent. There were also 20.3 percent that said they "did not collect the opinions of part-time workers in particular," but these were mainly labor unions that had not organized part-time workers.

(3) Current state of part-time workers' wage system and unit labor unions' policies

We asked about the current state of part-time workers' wage system and the unions' future policy goals. On the current state of the wage system, the largest percentage, at 60.2 percent, said "the wage system is different from that of regular employees, and wages differ for individual part-time workers based on ability, etc.," followed by those who said "the wage system is different from that of regular employees, but the wages are about the same for all part-time workers" with 27.6 percent. On the unions' future policy goals, the largest percentage, at 38.2 percent, said they would aim to "narrow the wage differential between regular employee and part-time worker as much as possible if they are engaged in the same job," followed by those who said they would aim to adopt "the wage system that is different from that of regular employees and in which wages differ for individual part-time workers based on ability, etc." with 35.8 percent.

Figure 2. Method of Collecting Part-time workers' Opinions on Working Conditions (multiple answers):
By Union that has and has not Organized Part-time workers (headquarters survey)



On the question of whether unionization of part-time workers would be effective in implementing the above wage systems in the future, 68.3 percent thought "it is effective" and 16.3 percent said "it is more or less effective." Together, more than 80 percent of the unit labor unions saw the effectiveness of unionization.

3. Analysis of the results of the questionnaire survey (Part III)

In Part III, the participating researchers made analyses on the following six topics based on the results of the questionnaire survey: (1) the current state of using part-time

workers as the core labor force and union activities, (2) labor unions' arrangements regarding union members who are part-time workers, (3) comparison of the actualities of unions that have and that have not organized part-time workers, (4) unionization of part-time workers and its effect on unions, (5) unionization of part-time workers and workplace regulations in the retail industry (comparison between consumers' cooperatives and supermarkets), and (6) findings of the surveys on reduced employment of regular employees, increased employment of part-time workers, and organization.

Of (3) above, analyses were made on the differences between unions that have and that have not organized part-time workers, from the points of view of how much should labor unions involve themselves regarding part-time workers' working conditions, how different is the situation regarding collection of part-time workers' opinions, are there differences in the current state of the wage system, etc. As a result, there were some interesting findings such as that there were labor unions that had organized part-time workers but whose level of involvement in part-time workers' working conditions was low, that there was no marked difference in the current state of the wage system between firms in which part-time workers were organized and firms in which part-time workers were not organized, etc. Of (4) above, labor unions in the headquarters survey said that the reasons for not unionizing part-time workers were that there was strong opposition by the management and that there was no elbowroom for organizing part-time workers, which were mainly issues related to labor-management relations and organizational management. In contrast, labor unions in the branch survey gave the reasons as that the advantages of joining the union did not get across to part-time workers, that part-time workers were not interested in the union, and that it was difficult to adjust interest between regular employees and part-time workers, which were mainly about issues associated with the gap between part-time workers' interest and union activities. It was also found that close to half of labor unions that had not unionized part-time workers did nothing in particular to work on part-time workers.

Structure of the Report

Part I. Increase in atypical employees and restructure of determination of working conditions (Hiroyuki Fujimura)

Part II. Outline of the results of the questionnaire survey (Yutaka Asao)

Chapter 1. Outline of the results of the questionnaire survey on unit labor unions' headquarters

Chapter 2. Outline of the results of the questionnaire survey on unit labor unions' branches

Chapter 3. Outline of the results of the survey on union representatives who are part-time workers

Part III. Analysis of the results of the questionnaire survey

Chapter 1. The current state of using part-time workers as the core labor force and union activities (Kazunari Honda)

Chapter 2. Labor unions' arrangements regarding union members who are part-time workers (Hitoshi Ohta)

Chapter 3. Cross-analysis: comparison of the actualities of unions that have and that have not organized part-time workers (Yasuo Murasugi)

Chapter 4. Unionization of part-time workers and its effect on unions (Mitsuru Yamashita)

Chapter 5. Unionization of part-time workers and workplace regulations in the retail industry: comparison between consumers' cooperatives and supermarkets (Ayami Kamuro)

Chapter 6. Findings of the surveys on reduced employment of regular employees, increased employment of part-time workers, and organization (Yutaka Asao)