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Jun'99

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300Yen

Vol. 9, No. 32

NEWSLETTER FROM JAPAN COMMITTEE OF ASIAN PACIFIC WORKERS' SOLIDARITY LINKS

## A Sampo through Japan: Impressions of the NZ-Japan Postal Workers Exchange Visit

by John Maynard

After the May Day rally and street march in Tokyo, we walked together through the crowded streets to catch the bullet train to Osaka. We were joined for the walk by 10 Japanese postal workers and guided by a postal worker with his head-scarf tied to a pole. The Japanese have a word for the action of 'walking and talking together' that we could not find in English: "sampo". So workers from two very different countries followed the same flag, in the same direction, and arrived at the same destination together in very good spirits. Walking and talking among ourselves on the way to the Tokyo railway station best symbolised our 10-day visit to Japan.

The visit of our group of five postal workers follows a series of workers' exchanges between Aotearoa/New Zealand and Japan over the last three years coordinated and organised by the Asia Pacific Workers Solidarity Links (APWSL) network. The Japan Asia Pacific Workers Solidarity Links network provided financial support, coordination, organisation, transport and in particular the interpreting. APWSL Japan also hosted a special welcome party for us in Tokyo including representatives from all three of the previous groups which had visited New Zealand. While we were in Japan we felt we were always among friends - the Zenrokyo Postal Workers Union and others from the Zentei postal union in Japan who organised and hosted our visit, and of course APWSL Japan. The generosity, hospitality, friendship and attention to all our needs by our hosts guaranteed that our time in Japan would be very happy. Wherever we went there was always a group looking after us.

Our visit to Japan gave us an insight into and experience of the daily life, living, working and social conditions, and the culture and history of Japan. We especially appreciated the opportunity to stay in the homes of workers in Japan and meet their family members. However one aspect of the life of postal workers in Japan particularly shocked us. Ten postal workers in Tokyo have killed themselves during the last two years following bouts of depression and feelings of powerlessness after being required to transfer against their will to other branches. The workers feel that because public servants cannot be dismissed without good reason, forced transfers are used to try and get them to resign from their jobs. Many postal workers have resigned after being transferred. They believe that forced transfers are also used by the Ministry of Post to attempt to break up the union by transferring union activists and also to keep workers obedient and intimidated by the fear of a transfer.

Most postal workers in Japan belong to the large



May Day rally of Zenrokyo in Hibiya Park, Tokyo

Zentei postal workers union which does not actively oppose the forced transfers of workers. The smaller Zenrokyo Postal Workers Union is campaigning and organising to try to prevent postal workers being transferred to other branches without their agreement. The strong spirit, determination and comradeship of the members of the Zenrokyo Postal Workers Union members greatly encouraged us. Like most of the Japanese postal workers who hosted our visit, our group of five postal workers also belonged to a small union - the Postal Workers Union - also established to actively and democratically represent its members.

During our 10-day visit to Japan we discovered a number of other similarities between the postal workers of

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both of our countries:

\* Workers are proud of their work in the postal service and want to contribute to an efficient postal service which meets the needs of the country's citizens.

\* Opposition to the 'administrative reforms' being carried out by the government in Japan, and postal deregulation in New Zealand, both of which could lead toward the private ownership of Japan Post and New Zealand Post.

\* The larger postal unions in each country are seen to be too remote from the daily life of the workers, and not active enough on the issues that most concern their members.

\* Workers look forward to spending time after work with their families and enjoying fishing, music, playing sport and other hobbies and activities. Not surprisingly some were keen bonsai growers!

However we saw that postal workers in Japan were subjected to rigid rules. They were required to wear a uniform which included a tie and name tag -and thin-soled black dress shoes. (All the posties we met in Japan rode 90cc Honda motorcycles - at one branch we saw 140 motorcycles lined up in the basement). Wearing our style of comfortable walking footwear brought a warning to one of the postal workers while we were in Japan. Another worker was disciplined for 'an indecent act' when he took his socks



*John Maynard and Ian Benge at a rally in front of the Ministry of Postal Services*

off at work after they got wet. His pay was deducted by 10% for one month. We were impressed by the courage and determination of workers to organise themselves and take action where they could to oppose such restrictive rules.

Some workers have been resisting the daily ritual of chanting together the company work rules. A management response is to stop anyone working until the chant is completed, causing other workers to become agitated over wanting to get started on their daily work. Some senior management of Japan Post have left to work for other companies which have contracts for supply back to Japan Post - an arrangement known in Japan as "amakudari". Workers were strongly opposed to these arrangements.

All the Zenrokyo Postal Workers Union members we met - both men and women, young workers and older workers - were very enthusiastic members of their union. They were also very interested in our visit and in what was happening in New Zealand - especially about postal deregulation and the possibility of the private ownership of New Zealand Post. (The so-called "New Zealand way" is actively promoted in Japan). The postal union members

are keen to exchange information about the issues facing postal workers on a regular basis - especially by items in each other's newsletters. A story about Wellington management wanting posties to wear their uniforms not only on delivery, but also while sorting mail inside, will be the first item which will be sent to Japan for their newsletter. New Zealand Post's collective employment contract requires workers to wear their uniforms "at all required times". The Postal Workers Union is advising its members that the company cannot unilaterally require the wearing of uniforms for inside sorting if the 'custom and practice' has been for uniforms not to be worn inside.

Another issue which made a deep impression on us in Japan was the strong anti-war feeling of the ordinary people of Japan. The Japanese Prime Minister was in the United States during our visit to Japan discussing the new "Defense Guidelines" between Japan and the United States. There was deep concern that this arrangement could lead to Japan becoming involved in another war, or "emergency", - this time on the side of the United States possibly against a neighbouring Asian country.

We saw the people's opposition to war expressed in a number of ways. Many homes of people in Hiroshima had an old clock stopped at 8.15am. In Nagasaki similar clocks in people's homes were stopped at 11.02am. The clocks record the exact times the two atom bombs were detonated above each city - in Hiroshima on 6 August and Nagasaki on 9 August 1945. We were deeply moved by our visit to the atom bomb memorials in Hiroshima and Nagasaki and the terrible suffering of civilians. However our hosts wanted us to remember that there were other victims of the war - victims of the Japanese army. We were also taken to memorials for the victims of atrocities of the Japanese military in China, Burma, Malaya, the Philip-



*Koko Parkinson speaking at the Zenrokyo May Day in Hibiya, Tokyo*

ppines and the Pacific.

A visit to the Nagasaki Peace Fountain helped us to better understand the feelings of the Japanese people about war. The fountain in memory of the victims of the 1945 atom bomb continuously sprays water in the shape of a doves' wings. The wording at the Peace Fountain says that the fountain was built to encourage all people in their "striving for world peace". The sign explains how appropriate the fountain is: "...thousands of people suffered terrible burns and died begging for water". The Hiroshima group met a woman postal worker who survived the 1945 atom bomb. However her father and sister working at the

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*John Maynard playing music with Mr. Noguchi at a Welcoming Party in Tokyo.*

same time in the same central branch of the Hiroshima Post and Telegraph office died.

After 10 days in Japan we moved to Hong Kong for a few days joined by Japanese postal worker Hiroshi Watanabe who had also been a member of the 1998 group to visit New Zealand. During our time in Japan we had learned some new words in Japanese. "Arigato" for thank you. "Kampai" when greeting each other before 'drinkies' (and we had plenty of opportunities to practise saying

"Kampai!"). And of course "sampo" for the walking and talking we did during the 10 days together. After our visit to Japan (and Hong Kong) the challenge for us now is to move on from the 'sampo' - from 'walking and talking together' - to 'talking and acting together'. Acting together for example to exchange information about work-place issues, health and safety, union organising strategies, participating in the reform process to ensure an efficient postal service, and to discover ways for workers to help maintain the postal service in public ownership - especially against the pressure of big business and APEC for the private ownership of postal services.

Our visit to Japan demonstrated the unique character of the Asia Pacific Workers Solidarity Links network in being able to assist in bringing workers from different countries together to build understanding, friendship, awareness of each other's daily life and work, union organising and structures and discussing strategies for workers' action in a spirit of genuine international workers solidarity. Although English does not have a word like 'sampo' for walking and talking together, the way we want to continue 'acting together' is as well known in Japanese as it is in English - "solidarity".

*John Maynard, a New Zealand postal worker and APWSL member, has participated in many Japan-NZ APWSL exchange programs over the past few years. This was his first visit to Japan.*

## NZ Postal Workers visit Japan: A Successful Example of Workers Meeting

by Yamasaki Seiichi

5 postal workers from New Zealand visited Japan from April 26 to May 6. They were met by more than 150 Japanese counterparts across the nation. This exchange program was a return visit of the Japanese postal workers' visit to New Zealand one year ago. The Zenrokyo Postal Workers' Union has been preparing for the return visit with the support of APWSL-Japan. The two groups together with other workers formed a Welcoming Committee and invited the New Zealand workers to come to Japan in late April so that they may join the Zenrokyo May Day.

The visiting group, who were all members of the Wellington Postal Workers' Union, started their stay in Tokyo. The main program in Tokyo was taking part and giving solidarity messages at the May Day rally and at the protest rally in front of the Ministry of Postal Services commemorating the 20th year anniversary of the dismissal of 61 postal workers. Through these two actions, the visiting group was able to share their experience in fighting against postal deregulation and privatization in New Zealand with many Japanese workers. The other focus was on visiting various post offices and meeting postal workers in the workplace. It was a very hard schedule in Tokyo but the New Zealand posties had the opportunity to stay in a cottage outside Tokyo to enjoy the beauty of a Japanese countryside and also to have some close discussions on possible future programs between the two postal unions.

The group then visited Osaka to meet with postal

workers in the Kansai area and also with APWSL Japan members. After spending a relaxed day in the ancient capital, Kyoto, the group divided into two to visit Hiroshima and Nagasaki. Both cities suffered the atomic bomb 54 years ago, so the main issues there were war and peace. The visitors were able to experience a home-stay in a workers house in a typical Japanese town.

The 10-day visit was a great success and a good example of what a workers' exchange program could achieve. The reasons for this success were, first, the similarity of the situation surrounding postal workers in both countries. Postal services in the two countries were both facing privatization and deregulation. Both unions were genuine but minority local unions trying to unite nationwide. Second, the success was due in part to the continuity of exchange and accumulation of experiences between the workers of the two countries through the APWSL network. Experiences from the previous three visits to New Zealand and last year's visit of New Zealand workers to Japan were indispensable for the success of the fifth visit.

APWSL Japan is proud to have taken part in this memorable postal workers exchange program. We hope to continue our support in strengthening the ties between the postal workers' unions in the two countries.

*Yamasaki Seiichi is Co-Coordinator of APWSL-Japan.*

# Introducing Mr. Umatani of APWSL-Japan: His Dealings with his Public Workers Union, the Japan Communist Party, and NAW

by Isu Nahoko

Umatani Norichika is a prefectural government worker in Osaka. He has been involved in APWSL Japan since its foundation in 1990, and is also an active member of NAW (Network for Asian Workers in Kansai).

*- Firstly, how did you get involved in the labour movement?*

I joined the Prefectural Government Workers Union when I started working for the Osaka Prefectural Government in 1973. I decided to go into the Prefectural Government Office because I was concerned with pollution issues, and I wanted to do something about it myself. The union organisation ratio in the public sector was quite high, especially in urban areas like Osaka, and it was only natural for me to join - although I would have done so even if they were only handful of people!

At the time I joined the Prefectural Office and the union, it was still the days of Sohyo, but the mainstream in the union was the Japan Communist Party (CP). We did not really get along with the leadership, as the CP had an anti-Buraku liberation league attitude [editor's note: the Buraku are a discriminated outcaste of Japanese who used to work with animal products] and we had a different position on discrimination issues. However, we were lucky because in our particular branch of the union, the CP had only a slight majority, so when we argued for our positions, the leadership did listen.

I enjoyed my work at the Prefectural Office. It was quite a young workplace as the Prefectural Government used to take on a lot of young workers at the time, and I found my job very interesting and worthwhile. Then one day in 1977, I found out about "The Hanshin Education Struggle." It was a battle fought by the Korean people living in Japan in 1948 when GHQ tried to crack down on Korean national education, and when demonstrators flooded the Prefectural Government Office to protest, the police opened fire, killing a 16-year-old Korean man. It was quite a shock for me as I only learnt that all this happened at my own workplace for the first time after working there for several years. I felt the union should be doing something to change the situation, so I went over to the union to raise the question. After that, we organised a memorial meeting for The Hanshin Education Struggle.

Another issue I wanted the union to take up was the campaign to get rid of the "Nationality Requirement" for public employees. In Japan, you have to be a Japanese national to work for the local government. I knew about it as information, but it did not quite hit me as something "real" even though I took the exam to become one myself! Then I saw a campaign started by Japanese Koreans in Yao City in Osaka and thought this is something we should be doing from within the local governments, so I proposed it to the union executive with my friends. As the union executive committee was not completely dominated by the CP, the proposal was accepted. However, when we proposed it at an annual conference, it was turned down by the CP majority for "contradicting the principle of self-determination of a nation"! I thought it was ridiculous, then I decided to go on to the executive committee myself.



*This is a photo taken on a mountain in Japan, but I more or less looked like that on a demonstration in Melbourne, when I visited Australian Asian Workers Link conference in Autumn 93. It was the time when APWSL in Japan was still not quite established, so visiting an existing section gave me a lot of ideas on what it is all about and I really enjoyed it. We participated in a demonstration organised by local government workers in Victoria, at the time in dispute with the local government. But because it was our last day in Australia we had to carry our luggage on the demo!*

would go into Rengo, which was dominated by ex-Domei, mainly right-leaning company unions, rather than setting up something else. Then the activists involved in various campaigns, such as international solidarity campaigns, anti-nuclear power campaigns, etc., started to discuss the possibility of setting up inter-union forums. This is how NAW was started, and then APWSL Japan Committee after that.

*- So what exactly is NAW?*

NAW stands for Network for Asian Workers in Kansai.

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We called it "in Kansai" because we hoped that there were going to be branches in many other regions of Japan, but so far we have only got Kansai! Preparation was started in Autumn 1988, just before the reorganisation of the labor movement, with a number of local trade unions, with the aim to provide a forum for international solidarity campaigns and alternative movement stretching across the boundary of different unions and union federations. It was formally founded in July 1989.

Originally, when I was looking for a broader base for the campaign to eliminate the Nationality Requirement for public employees in the early 1980s, I came across "Japan-Korea Joint Struggle," short for "Osaka Prefectural Citizens' Joint Struggle Congress in Support of Independent Peaceful Unification of Korea and Democratization Struggle in South Korea." This consisted of Sohyo, the Buraku Liberation League and the Socialist Party of that time, but in my area, it was actually a local trade union organisation. So we started to collaborate with them, then during the 1980s and 1990s with the upsurge of the campaign against the Alien Registration Law, we built up quite a broad network of activists.

In 1985, there was the "First Asia Swany Struggle" as we called it, when the union formation at Asia Swany, a Korean subsidiary of a Japanese company led to bitter union bashing, with the company hiring thugs who attempted to rape the female union leader. We organised a support campaign in Japan against the parent company. Although we could not get the union activists reinstated and the battle was lost, we learned a lot about the role Japanese companies are playing abroad. With this, we realised the need to strengthen the links with workers in other countries, especially in Asia where a lot of Japanese companies are operating. In 1988 and 1989, we invited Filipino protest song singers over and put on a concert with another group working on the Philippines solidarity campaign. This was because we thought discussions were important, but getting to know the culture and other social aspects of the country will bring the issues closer to us. This, in a sense, led to the formation of NAW - as we say, "international solidarity you can see and touch" or "where faces are visible."

NAW's main activity has been monthly meetings, where we invite speakers who visited Asian countries to report on the situation of the workers' movement over there. This was quite significant at the time, as it was not as common as it is now for Japanese activists to be able to

visit foreign countries, and we were starved of information.

Then, it was proposed that we form APWSL Japan Committee, though we were not sure what exactly it was, but we welcomed the idea because it would link us up with workers in a wider area than just Korea and the Philippines that we had links with previously.

*-How does NAW differ from APWSL?*

The main difference between NAW and APWSL is that NAW is basically a trade union organisation while APWSL also involves "supporters of the labour movement" as well as the trade unions. This may sound a bit strange, but if you look at Korea at the time when the labour movement was underground, there was a wide layer of people who are not in the trade unions, but sympathise and support the trade union activists. So the concept is actually not as unfamiliar as it may sound, and this kind of situation is probably more common in the majority of the Asian countries.

Now the activities of the two organisations sometimes overlap, but NAW played its role while APWSL was still in the process of consolidation. Now that both organisations are well established, it may seem that the two are doing similar things but I think it is fine. NAW and APWSL are sister organisations and we work together sometimes. Many members are in both, and I think they should be able to pick and choose what they want to do in each organisation.

*- Is there anything you would like to do with APWSL?*

I think APWSL should be a network you can work in when you want to do something about some issue. It is a bit like a tool you can use when you want to. At last year's conference, we decided on a whole list of issues to take up, but I do not think we should worry about achieving all of them. We should do what we can do on the basis that each one of us will do what we want to do. Through my union, I got to know other activists working on issues like the environment, etc. We may not see each other for years, but when we need to, we can always get together for a joint campaign. I think I have been lucky that people in other groups and campaigns always accepted me when I took the issues my union's working on.

*Isu Nahoko is a member of the national steering committee of APWSL-Japan. She works as a translator in the Osaka area.*

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On Sunday morning, the Immigration Bureau drama put on by a volunteer group of Japanese lawyers and activists was well-done considering the minimum of props which were cleverly used. Afterwards, Rex Varona of AMC delivered his keynote address. First, he gave an overview of AMC's ten year history, and how it has changed from being a counseling center to one which tries to organize and empower migrant workers in groups. It now also publishes an annual yearbook of migration in Asia. After reviewing the statistics and situation of migrant workers in Asia, he focused on 4 high profile cases in Singapore, Malaysia, Korea and Japan over the past few years and the human rights issues they symbolize. Finally, he called on Japanese activists to monitor the activities of Japanese transnational corporations in Asia and the overseas development assistance (ODA) programs of

the government which have left many developing countries saddled with debt, because these come closer to the root causes of migration in the region. Furthermore, Japan must reflect on its treatment of sex slaves, both past and present. Since Japan has a lot of representation and influence in international organizations more pressure must be put on Japanese representatives to consider the rights of migrant workers in the region. It was good for activists in Japan to hear the perspective of an Asian NGO leader that people in the region look to Japanese groups with expectations of greater leadership in the world arena.

*John McLaughlin is President of the University Teachers Union, NUGW Tokyo South and Editor of the APWSL-Japan English newsletter.*

# The New Japan-US Defense Guidelines and the US Military Bases in the Tokyo Suburbs

by Noguchi Yutaka

I live in Kamitsuruma, Sagami City, in Kanagawa Prefecture about an hour west of Tokyo. My house is located near national highway No.16 where vehicles pass by day and night, and aircrafts from the nearby Atsugi US airbase constantly land and take off. Noise from the vehicles and roars of the planes annoy us so much so that we can't take it any more. I joined the third law suit against Atsugi Base Noise Pollution, demanding compensation for noise pollution and also a stop to the flights. A group of more than 5,000 people filed a suit with the Yokohama District Court in December 8, 1996. When an aircraft carrier comes into its home port at Yokosuka Naval Base, carrier-based planes cannot take-off from the carrier. So they take-off from the carrier on the Pacific Ocean and fly over to Atsugi Base and perform night light practices.

What is the real purpose of the updated Japan-U.S. defense cooperation guidelines? The carrier-based planes of the aircraft carrier Midway, based in Yokosuka, joined the first bombing operation in the Gulf War that erupted in January 1991. They made as much as 3,300 attacks, beginning with sinking three Iraqi navy patrol ships. Aircraft carrier-based planes, in case of war, shower bombs on the civilians of their enemy country. There is a link between the noise pollution from which we are suffering and the bombing of civilians.

Bases in Kanagawa are divided into two categories, navy and army. The former is represented by Yokosuka and Atsugi Bases, and the latter by Camp Zama and Sagami supply facility. These bases line Route 16, with the Yokota base in Tokyo being at the end of the line. It is not an exaggeration to say that these bases form a giant military base as a whole. Many citizens are living around these facilities, which are located in an urban area. What is the necessity of military practice and military base in a civilian residential area? In July 1998, when the members of the third law suit against Atsugi Base took actions at the U.S. embassy, the Defense Agency and the Foreign Ministry, we presented this question to them. The Japanese government answered, "It is to protect Japan from emergencies in areas surrounding Japan", and "our national interests are the first priority." Is the purpose of the Japan-U.S. Security Treaty to cope with "emergencies in areas surrounding Japan"? An emergency in areas surrounding Japan will not happen on its own, but must be caused by someone.

The Emergency-contingency bill was approved smoothly by the House of Councilors in a full session. The voting procedure took only five minutes using an electronic push-button system. The bills covering the updated Japan-U.S. defense cooperation guidelines were enacted without clearing the question of their constitutionality. I cannot help feeling that this legislation will lead Japan to joint military operations.

The new guidelines are indispensable for America. Should a provoked neighboring country attack Japan with missiles, the bases in Kanagawa Prefecture would certainly become its target. Officially, it is said that "the Self Defense Force will give only back-up support." But in an emergency, the word "back-up support" would have no meaning. The Self Defense Force SDF would have to be in



*Residents protest against night light practice of planes from Kitty Hawk aircraft carrier at Atsugi US airbase, Feb. 1999*

the front-line. When the American aircraft carrier "Independence" (now replaced by the carrier Kitty Hawk), based in Yokosuka, was opened to the public, flyers were distributed in which the captain said: "The Independence is ready for operation at any place in order to protect the interests of America." This means the ship will go any place from the major port in Japan to protect the interests of America, ignoring the prior consultation required by the Japan-U.S. Security Treaty.

Also, trailers with containers marked "USA" stream into the Sagami supply facility one after another. Harmful substances such as cadmium and PCB, which are more dangerous than ammunition or bombs, are transported into the facility and burned in the fields within the base. In addition, at Camp Zama many problems have been brought about, such as dumping insecticide, DDT and other kinds of environmental pollution. There seems to be no end to these problems. Unlike the case with the Highway No. 58 in Okinawa on which vehicles belonging to the Marines pass, on the Highway No. 16, the vehicles that carry ammunition supplies, including dangerous substances, belong to private companies, thus civilians cannot tell what is going on. If an emergency occurs, loads of containers with military supplies would be piled up in the Sagami facility. Local governments would be forced to support the bases, and local hospitals would be made to care for the injured soldiers as a first priority. Public roads would be used as military roads and the local people would be put off. This is what the new guidelines will potentially bring about. The defense commitment to the U.S. will aggravate the burden as well as the risk of Kanagawa Prefecture where these bases are concentrated. I am very sad that most citizens lack the knowledge or imagination of what is going on in the US bases in Kanagawa.

*Noguchi Yutaka is retired worker of Isuzu Motors and a member of the national steering committee of APWSL Japan. This article was translated by Noguchi Junko.*

# Some Impressions of the Third National Migrant Worker Forum Held in Tokyo

by John McLaughlin

Over the weekend of June 5-6, more than 500 Japanese activists and foreign workers turned out for the Third National Forum in Solidarity with Migrant Workers, Tokyo '99 held at Roudou Square Tokyo, near Hatchobori Station. In fact, there have been annual national forums on migrant workers' rights in cities around Japan for the past decade, but this one was labeled "Third" because it came at the end of the second full year of the founding of the National Network in Solidarity with Migrant Workers, which sponsored the event. The Forum embodies the coordination achieved so far by non-governmental organizations (NGOs), networks of activists and specialists such as lawyers, public health workers and researchers, and labor unions organizing foreign workers. Strong coordination among Japanese activists is essential for effectively lobbying the Diet and government ministries, which the National Network has been able to do with some success over the past two years. However, a number of foreign participants in the group discussions voiced their concern that many foreigners were merely being serviced or represented by these groups and that not enough effort was being put into consciousness raising, education and self-directed action among foreigners themselves. On that point, the forum itself felt rather choreographed, but a huge number of events and discussions were packed into 12 hours of meeting time.

This packed schedule started off on Saturday at 1 pm with opening remarks by the Forum Organizers and overseas guest speakers. After a panel discussion entitled, "Toward a Multi-cultural Society of Integration with Migrant Workers and Their Families," participated in by several NGO directors, there were group sessions in Japanese on 15 different topics, ranging from labor problems to immigration and human rights issues to health, education and welfare for migrant workers' families, especially children. In the evening, there were exchange sessions for migrant workers in 10 different languages. Sunday's session began with a play about the treatment of foreigners in the Immigration Bureau's Detention Centers. Then, Rex Varona, Executive Director of Asia Migrant Center based in Hong Kong, gave a keynote lecture on the situation of migrant workers in Asia and Japan's responsibility regional labor migration. Finally, there were short summaries of the Saturday afternoon panels, some questions from the audience, and appeals by two Iranian children and by participating organizations in the Forum to the Japanese government. On Sunday afternoon, there was a quarterly national steering committee, in which new officers and representatives were appointed and the goals for the coming year were reaffirmed. The following morning a group of 10 Forum representatives met with the Cabinet Secretary to express opposition to previous and current revisions to the Alien Registration Law and to press the government to sign the United Nations International Convention on the Protection of Migrant Workers and Their Families.

I arrived for the last hour of the group session on "Migrant Workers and Labor Problems", which was attended by 87 people packed into a large room to hear 4 Japanese and 1 Filipino organizer of foreign workers unions talk about their diverse experiences organizing foreign workers. The session was attended by many Latin American and Asian workers who demanded towards the end that

Japanese organizers do more to help them educate and take actions by themselves and to pay more attention to the needs of migrant workers from developing countries instead of those from richer ones. One Japanese Peruvian asserted that organizing does not equal just getting foreign workers into unions, nor is it providing information in their native languages, which is only one step toward solving their problems working and living in Japan. She presented one example of a group of Latin American workers in Kanagawa Prefecture who recognized that not many people read the information sheets provided to them in Spanish and they do not really understand their rights in Japan or about unions, so they set out to educate themselves and others by making a video in Spanish.

According to summaries presented the following day, other heavily attended group sessions were the problems of the job training system, immigration law and detention centers, permanent residency and international marriage and divorce, and children's education. There was enough interest in women's issues, particularly domestic violence, to schedule a second temporary session in the evening.

In the evening, the 90-minute "sharing among migrant workers in their mother tongue" sessions were held in Bengali, Burmese, English, French, Japanese, Korean, Persian, Portuguese, Spanish, and Tagalog. The English session was attended by a mix of 12 people from Nepal, Nigeria, Iran, the United Kingdom and United States. The session started with a talk by Max Woollerton, secretary-general of the Tokyo Foreign Language College Teachers Union and President of the Kanto Teachers Union Federation, about his experience of getting support from a variety of Japanese unions in his union's ongoing labor dispute. Without that support, the union could not have come as far as it has in its long struggle (now in its fourth year) but it has been an arduous process due to the factionalism, insularity, old-fashioned and other problematic attitudes taken by many unions in Japan. This point was reaffirmed by a teacher from Aichi Prefecture who has been unable to get support from the teachers union at the private high school where he used to teach. He recommended seeking support from independent unions rather than unions affiliated with the bigger labor federation. We all agreed that the Japanese and foreigners have numerous communication and organizational problems both among themselves and with each other and tried to identify concrete steps for improvement such as making information clearinghouses in English that can be shared by foreigners in different unions, including more foreigners on executive committees, and having more lateral coordination within unions instead of top-down chains of communication and decision making. Since some unions have achieved success in getting support from international organizations, one interesting proposal was for native speakers of English, French, and Spanish to help foreign workers for whom these languages may be second or third languages in contacting international organizations for support. Unfortunately there was no time to translate them into Japanese by the next day and so the discussion summaries of foreigner-led groups could not be heard then but they will be published in a Forum Report due out in September.

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### From the Editor:

This is our third issue of the 1998-99 year. Judging from the past two year's experience as editor, three issues is about all we can manage to put out with our limited bilingual resources, so our paying readers in Japan will understand this. Two good things about the timing of this issue are, first, it comes out only a month or so after the rewarding exchange visit from the NZ postal workers, including the long anticipated visit by John Maynard, who has coordinated several APWSL-Japan sponsored visits to Aotearoa/New Zealand over the past few years. As you can see, we have enthusiastically devoted several pages of articles and photographs for reports of this visit. Second, this issue comes out only a few weeks before the Annual General Meeting of APWSL-Japan on July 17-18. We hope to get some feedback from our readers in Japan then and even better, to get a few more volunteers to help write and translate articles for us.

I must make an important correction of a headline in the last issue (No. 31, Mar. '99) on page 3 which read, "Japanese Army Veterans Complete Third Leg of Peace Cycle Tour in Malaysia." Although the purpose of the tour was to retrace the route of the invasion by the Japanese Army in WWII, this time bearing messages of peace, in fact none of the participants were veterans. They were all workers of varying ages. I apologize for this serious mistake, if not insult. As they say in Japanese, taihen shitsurei itashimashita. Owabi itashimasu.

Please note that the Volume number for this issue is Vol. 9 and that it should have been Vol. 9 for the past two issues, Nos. 30 and 31.

I didn't realize that the volume number automatically goes up by one after the Annual General Meeting. Well, that explains how we can be on Volume 9 but only No. 32. Our next issue, No. 33, will begin Volume 10.

In addition to the writers and translators, we would like to thank the following people for contributing to this issue:

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