

A P W S L J a p a n

Asia Pacific Workers' Solidarity Links

No39/December, 2001

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Privatization of Postal Services and the Response of Workers

An interview with Mr. Takahashi Shinji, Chairperson of Yu-Kin-Ro

Takahashi Shinji has been a post office worker for nearly 30 years. His workplace is in Joto-ku in the northern part of Osaka City. Joto Post Office where he works is well-known among activists (and among officials of the local postal bureau) for the high morale of the trade union. I am not talking about the majority union, Zentei, but the small union called "Yuu-ji-ro" (Osaka Post Workers' Union for Autonomy and Co-existence). Takahashi and his colleagues formed Yuu-ji-ro more than ten years ago after a courageous resistance against leaders of Zentei who betrayed the cause of working class. In 1991, Yuu-ji-ro joined with 5 other independent unions to form Zen-ro-kyo Postal Workers' Union (Zen-ro-kyo is the Japanese abbreviation for National Trade Union Council). Although Zen-ro-kyo Postal Workers' Union is small in number, their insistence on the workers' solidarity against the management and the government is one of the causes of headaches for the authority. Yu-Kin-Ro (Kinki Region Postal Workers' Union), which Takahashi chairs, is a regional organization of Zen-ro-kyo Postal Workers' Union.

Now, under Koizumi government, privatization of postal services is one of the focal point of the "reform and deregulation" drive unleashed by neo-liberalists. In fact, Koizumi has been one of the most eager proponents of the

privatization of postal services. On the other hand, fierce resistance to the privatization is coming from inside the government as well as ruling Liberal Democratic Party. One of the factions in the LDP led by ex-prime minister R. Hashimoto has strong links with privileged officials of postal bureaus and local postmasters.¹

Most of the major media are supporting the "reformists" against "diehards" as usual. People have been educated to think that privatization is the trend in the period of globalization. But we know, through our exchanges with workers and activists of other countries, that many workers and citizens in the world are fighting against privatization schemes in order to defend the right of workers as well as the networks of public services.

In the following interview, Takahashi explains the situation of post workers here, the implication of the privatization drive, and the problems the trade unions are faced with.

Q

First of all, can you explain briefly about the privatization plan of postal services?

A

There are three postal services which were administered by the Ministry of Posts and

¹ See Note 2 on the next page.

From The Editor

Excuse for the delay...

It is almost 8 months since the last issue of "APWSL Japan", the 38th issue, was sent to you. It does not mean that there are few things to report, nor that APWSL Japan became dormant. On the contrary, there have been many things to take up in this newsletter. APWSL Japan has been as active as before. The only reason for the delay was the difficulty in establishing editorial board. As the former editor announced in the last issue, I took charge of this newsletter. I will try my best to send this "quarterly" regularly and ensure that you will receive the next issue in March, 2002.

Important Announcement!

From this issue, we send "APWSL Japan" by e-mail in order to save costs. We are ready to continue to send printed version of the "APWSL Japan" to those who don't have access to e-mail. However, to minimize the cost, we will send the printed version only if you write to us for the request. If you received the printed version of this issue and want to receive e-mail version, please write to us to the address below.

For Your Information

You can find up-to-date news on workers' movement in Japan at the web page of LaborNet Japan: <http://www.labornetjp.org/fj>
Members of APWSL Japan are actively involved in this project.

**Y.Kitahata,
Editor**

APWSL Japan

C/O Rodo Joho, Shin-Hirokoji Building, 1-1-12,
Ueno, Taito-ku, Tokyo, Japan

Fax:81-3-3837-2544 **E-mail:**apwsljp@jca.apc.org

Web:<http://www.jca.apc.org/apwsljp/>

Telecommunications and are now administrated by Postal Services Agency of Ministry of Public Management, Home Affairs, Posts and Telecommunications - savings, life insurance, and mail delivery.²

² "Fully a third of the 855,000 bureaucrats working for the central government are employees of the Posts and Telecommunications
2

In 1997, it was decided under the Hashimoto Government that these services should be transferred to the Postal Corporation in April, 2003. The decision was the result of concession between deregulationists and "conservatives" within the ruling party. Although many people believe that the transfer to corporation will be a major step toward full privatization, nothing has been decided yet as regards the future of the services after the transfer to corporation.

One of the targets of the "reform" is the postal savings system. With over 24,500 offices nationwide, the postal savings system has over 2 trillion dollars in deposits, which is 4 times of the Japan's largest commercial bank. Private-sector financial institutions have been argued against the unfair advantages (including tax exemption) given to the system. The massive assets accumulated by the postal savings and life insurance systems are channeled into the government's Fiscal Investment and Loan Program to be used as operating capital for government-run banks, corporations, and other public bodies. This is another target of the "reform".

The other aim of the reform is, of course, to allow private companies to compete in postal services. It would not only deprive the rights of workers and working conditions guaranteed for the national public service workers, but also destroy the uniform nationwide coverage offered by the present system.

Ministry...These employees, from senior officials to the rank and file, are putting up a united front against privatization, and they have enlisted the support of powerful politicians....Some 80% of post offices in Japan are classified as special (tokutei) post offices. When the government established the modern postal system in 1871, it appointed local men of wealth and influence to head these post offices, and the title of postmaster became virtually hereditary. Postmasters ...perceive privatization as infringing on their vested interests. And at election time they have a big influence on the local vote."("Will the Three Postal Services Be Privatized?", from the web page of FPC <Foreign Press Center>
<http://www.fpcj.jp/e/shiryo/pg/1997/97-07.html>)

Q

What would be the direct effects of the transfer to corporation on the working conditions?

A

In the present system, the employment of post workers is somewhat protected by the Law on the Quorum of National Public Service Employees. With the transfer to corporation, this protection will no longer be applied to postal workers. This means reduction of work forces will become easier.

As regards the employment status, they are saying that the status as state employees would be guaranteed even after the transfer to corporation.

However, we know that in railroad and telephone and telecommunication services, which have already privatized, tens of thousands of jobs were lost after the privatization. We are already faced with the changes in the labor relations and harsh productivity drive with the introduction of automation equipment for handling mails. In this way they are preparing for the privatization. To illustrate it, while the total workload of postal services increased by 1.7 times from 1981 to 1996, the number of workers for the services increased by only 2,000 from 140,000 to 142,000 during the same period.³

Q

Are there any changes in the pattern of employment of post workers recently?

A

The most obvious change is the number of irregular workers. Now there are 70,000 to 80,000 irregular workers working throughout the year while the number of regular workers about 250,000. Many of irregular workers are in fact employed almost regularly. However, their employments are to be renewed day by day! They are very vulnerable.⁴ Their wages are about one fourth of regular workers. With the pressure for reduction of the workforces, these irregular workers might be replaced by part-time employees.

³ The number of workers for savings reduced from 67,000 to 65,000 from 1981 to 1996 and the numbers of workers for life insurance reduced from 46,000 to 45,000 in the same period.

⁴ 60 to 70 % of these irregular workers are women, while only 5-6% of regular workers are women.

The other change is the drastic increase of workloads. The labor management became tighter. The increase of night works is causing death of workers. Since the introduction of "new night shift" in 1993, which involves 16 straight hours of night work without sleep, many postal workers died from overwork.

Introduction of 7-digit postal code system also caused heavier workload. Because of the shortcoming of the sorting machine, mail delivery workers have to rearrange their distribution route, thus cannot finish the work within the regular working hours. In fact, these expensive machines are purchased from NEC, Toshiba, Hitachi and other leading companies, and these companies order components and parts from contract companies which are managed by retired bureaucrats at twice or three times of the market prices!

Q

Do other unions oppose the privatization of postal services?

A

Both Zentei (Japan Postal Workers' Union) and Zen-yu-sei (All Japan Postal Office Labor Union)⁵ are against the privatization. The problem is that they are so much involved in the interest of the corrupt bureaucrats. They are now cooperating with officials of postal bureau to resist the privatization. Their aim is not to defend the right of the workers nor to preserve the public services but to defend their own interest as trade union bureaucrats.

While we oppose privatization, we also oppose the corrupt bureaucrats and their vested interest.

Q

Are the attacks on union activities increasing?

A

We are now faced with a new kind of attacks called "exchange of human resources". This scheme is introduced 7 or 8 years ago by the Ministry of Posts and Telecommunications in the

⁵ In the past, Zentei was a leftist union affiliated in Sohyo. Zen-yu-sei was a pro-management union from the start. The leadership of Zentei shifted to the right many years ago. Both Zentei and Zen-yu-sei affiliates Rengo.

name of "revitalizing the workplace". The scheme involves the forcible redeployment of staffs twice a year. Those who worked in workshops for more than five years are the candidates to be redeployed. Each time, about 5 % of the workers in the whole country are subject to the redeployment.

In fact, this is a method to weaken the union by dividing workers geographically. In many cases, there are clear indications that they target at the workplaces where trade unions are active. Often workshops where Zentei union is active are targeted.

Q

Now, I want to ask about the activities of Zen-ro-kyo Postal Workers' Union. What are the main progresses in your ten years of activities?

A

We started with 6 unions with the total of 150 members. Now we have 600 members. Although this is only a modest progress, we proved ourselves as a responsible union. We have been consistently fighting against the forcible redeployment in the name of "exchange of human resources". We have been resisting rationalization at the workshop level. We have been very active in peace movement and have been successful in organizing "Peace Cycle" campaign⁶

Recently we concentrate our efforts to support irregular workers. There are many cases in which irregular workers are dismissed because they are not obedient enough. In fact, as I explained earlier, these workers are employed on day to day basis and the directors of the post offices have the authority to refuse to renew the employment of any irregular workers. They pretend that it is not dismissal but termination of employment.

In some cases our union brings lawsuit against the administration on the unfair dismissals. Although we haven't been able to nullify the dismissals, there are some progresses. We made the administration to offer social insurance and unemployment insurance. for irregular workers.

⁶ Peace Cycle in organized every summer. Hundreds of workers and citizens cycle all over the country with peace message and rally in Hiroshima.

Q

Zen-ro-kyo Postal Workers' Union is very active in international solidarity actions. This year you invited members of SUD⁷ to your convention. What did you learned from exchanges with them?

A

Some of the members were impressed by a report on the development of SUD published in "Rodo Joho (Labor Information" and began to discuss about inviting delegation from SUD-PTT. I was impressed at their experiences in their campaign against privatization, the fully democratic functioning and structure of the union, and their active involvement in whole range of social issues. I felt that this is the exact direction that we are taking.

The exchanges were very successful in gathering new layers of activists and building new links. We reaffirmed our belief in our struggle. Although the success of SUD-PTT is far more dynamic with the increase of membership from 1,000 to 12,000, we have many things in common.

In 1999, we invited postal workers from New Zealand and learned from their experiences in the struggle in the privatized post offices. Through these exchanges, consciousness and feelings of international solidarity have been developing among us.

Q

What is the prospect of your struggle against the privatization and what is the task of your union?

A

First of all, we are emphasizing the need to overcome the narrow perspective based only on the interest of regular workers. Unstable employment is spreading drastically to all sectors of the society. Without protecting the right of these workers, trade unions cannot respond to the changes effectively.

Secondly, we are against privatization but we don't mean to defend the corrupt bureaucrats.

⁷ SUDs are coalitions of independent trade unions in France. The Post Workers' Union invited delegates from SUD-PTT (post and telecommunication) and SUD-Rail for their annual convention this year and organized exchange meetings in many places including Osaka.

We are explaining that postal services are socially valuable and should be kept under the public control in order to fulfill its social mission. Private ownership and competition for the sake of profits will harm the welfare of the people. Only public ownership can maintain the uniform services at low prices regardless of whether you are living in big cities or in remote area. We have drafted our alternative plan based on the social importance of the postal services and its public dimension.

Thirdly, we want to revitalize the trade union

Solidarity with Philippine Toyota Workers - Globalization from Below

Protest Toyota Campaign Launched

Tono Haruhi

[This article is the latter part of a report prepared for the "Workshop on Asian TNCs" organized by AMRC in Bangkok November, 2001.]

Last year, Toyota Motor Company marked a sales amount of 13.42 trillion yen (US\$ 108 billion), which is the biggest among Japanese companies, and a profit of 972 billion yen (US\$ 7.8 billion), which is a record in the history for Japanese Companies. These achievements were the products of collaborative labor relations which have been ignoring the human rights of the workers.

Toyota has dominant power over the whole business circle as well as trade unions in the country. Its chairperson, Mr. Okuda Hiroshi, is Chairperson of Nikkeiren (Japan Federation of Employers' Associations). As the most influential figure among Japan's business circle he was asked to join the cabinet of Prime Minister Koizumi Jun-ichiro. Chairperson of Confederation of Japan Automobile Workers' Unions (JAW), Mr. Kato Yuji, is also from Toyota Company Workers' Union (JAW is the biggest of private sector union federations with 750,000 members).

A letter from TMPCWA

Toyota Motor Philippine Corporation Workers Association (TMPCWA) got in touch with us in Japan in January 2000 through YCW (Young Christian Workers) network. TMPCWA

movement through our daily struggle at workplaces. Without resisting any form of deprivations of workers' right, we will lose our rights one by one. That is what has been occurring in recent years.

Last but not the least important is the active involvement in social issues. It has been an important aspect of our union from the very beginning.

(Interviewed and written by Kitahata Yoshihide)



Protest Action at the Headquarter of Toyota Company in Toyota City (November 26, 2001)

represents the workers at Toyota Motor Philippine Corporation, which is a subsidiary of Toyota Motor Company. Toyota Motor Philippine Corporation of President Mr. Fukuda Ken employs 1500 workers there. TMPCWA, which is an independent trade union without affiliation to any union federations, began its organizing campaign in 1997 and has been supported by YCW since late 1998. Despite a series of sabotages by the company, TMPCWA was authorized by the Philippine Government to conduct the election for certification. It was in the midst of the preparation for the election that TMPCWA first got in touch with us.

The letter from YCW-Philippines, which was addressed to Mr. Kojima Takeshi, Vice-Chairperson of Union Yokosuka, urged Japanese auto workers including Toyota workers to send solidarity messages to TMPCWA in order to encourage its members. Union Yokosuka is a

local community union in Yokosuka city and affiliates to Kanto Regional Council of the All Japan Shipbuilding and Engineering Union (Zen-Zosen), which has 2000 members. The letter from YCW-P was addressed to Mr. Kojima because Kojima, a Christian himself, has been the representative of a local solidarity group, Yokosuka Citizen's Association in Solidarity with Philippine People, which was set up in 1983. He has organized a series of study tours to Philippines and YCW-P hosted these study tours there.

After reading the letter, Kojima discussed the case with Oidon, a coordinator of Japan Auto Workers' Network (JAWN) and Kojima's longtime friend, and, with his help, arranged a letter of solidarity from Toyota workers here. Since that time members of JAWN and APWSL (Asia Pacific Workers Solidarity Links) Japan have been informed of the development of the situation.

Although TMPCWA won the certification election in March 2000, the company didn't accept the result saying that the election was void. They repeatedly appealed to courts in order to nullify the certification of the union. Kojima and other people from Yokosuka group visited Philippines in July 2000 and celebrated TMPCWA's victory in the election. Ms. Tono Haruhi, Convenor of APWSL, visited TMPCWA next month during her visit to Manila for an APWSL meeting.

"Protest Toyota" Campaign launched

APWSL Japan and Japan Auto Workers' Network jointly planned to hold a seminar on "Globalization in Auto Industry and Workers in Asia" in April 2001. We invited ED Cubelo, Chairperson of TMPCWA, as well as an activist and a researcher from Malaysia. In order to fully utilize this opportunity, Zen-Zosen Union, which had been interested in the dispute at Philippine Toyota, decided to demand the Tokyo Office of Toyota Company to meet with the union on this issue and to organize a protest rally. Zen-Zosen is a progressive union committed to organizing unions of small number of dissidents in big companies like Isuzu Motor Company as well as organizing workers of subsidiary companies, part-timers, migrant workers. It is also actively involved in social movements on

various issues including occupational health and safety, war reparation, and U.S. military bases.

In late March this year, when we are preparing for the seminar, we received an urgent appeal from TMPCWA informing us of the abrupt dismissals of 227 members of the union and the union's determination to launch a strike from the 28th of March. Zen-Zosen, JAWN and APWSL Japan jointly sent a protest letter to Toyota Company. We also sent e-mails to Confederation of Japan Automobile Workers' Union, Toyota Workers' Union and IMF to support the workers at Philippine Toyota. IMF responded immediately by sending message of the secretariat general to Zen-Zosen and promising that they would investigate on the issue. On the other hand, there has been no response from CJAWU and Toyota Workers' Union.

During the strike, TMPCWA kept sending us the update information on the development of the situation day by day via the YCW network. They requested us to send protest letters to Philippine Toyota.

Around the same time, we received an alert from APWSL Indonesia on the dispute at PT Kadera. PT Kadera is a subsidiary of Araco Company in Toyota City, which is a subsidiary of Toyota Company. At the factory of PT Kadera, armed goons employed by the company attacked the striking workers, resulting in death of two workers. APWSL group in Kansai region took up this issue and organized protest actions against Araco Company.

Faced with the seriousness of the problems and the importance of immediate response and solidarity, we launched the "Protest Toyota Campaign" to organize protest actions to stop the violation of workers' rights by Toyota Company. This campaign has already received responses from the APWSL network as well as Labor Net groups in many countries. Many protest letters and solidarity messages have been sent to Toyota Company and TMPCWA respectively.

Protest Actions against Toyota

The strike at Philippine Toyota lasted two weeks. Meanwhile the dispute began to take political

dimensions. The management of Toyota Company and Philippine Toyota, together with other Japanese companies in Philippines, met government officials there and threatened them with the possible withdrawal of capital investments from Philippines unless the dispute would be promptly settled.

Amid the increasing tension, ED Cubelo, Chairperson of TMPCWA, arrived in Japan on the 19th of April. During the seminars on the workers situation in auto industry on the 21st and 22nd, auto workers from Malaysia, Philippines and Japan proposed to extend this network of auto workers to the whole region.

On the 23rd of April, 150 people from 25 organizations responded to the call by Zen-Zosen to rally in front of the Toyota Company's Tokyo Office. Among the participants of the action, there were many Philippino/Philippina workers working in Japan. The management of Toyota Company agreed to meet us, although their attitude was quite irresponsible. They just let us speak to them without giving any response.

This action was very stimulating for both workers. For Japanese workers, the action had a very symbolic meaning because Toyota Company and the trade union in it have long been symbols of Japanese Companies and company unions in Japan respectively. Workers who participated the rally were also encouraged by the genuine spirit of struggling workers embodied by ED. On the other hand, we heard that workers at Philippine Toyota were encouraged by the pictures and video films, brought back by ED, illustrating the support given to them by workers in Japan.

After this first round of action, we discussed on the need to continue and extend the solidarity actions based on the success and understood the importance of comprehending the problems. Because of the difference in language as well as Labor Law systems, it is very difficult to fully understand the problems.

We planned an exchange visit to Philippines from the 30th of July to the 2nd of August. Thirteen people including members of Zen-Zosen Union participated. The delegation from Japan joined with members of TMPCWA to go to Japanese

Embassy and Philippine Toyota Company for protest actions. After coming back, the participants of the exchange visit produced a report (36 pages of pictures, documents and essays) and distributed 2,000 copies of the report. In this way, we have been trying to make people know the situation and the problems. As the conclusion of the discussions on the long-running support, "The Association for Supporting TMPCWA" was formed in October by trade unions and labor NGOs which have been cooperating with each other in the solidarity works. "Protest Toyota Campaign" was adopted as the title of the campaign launched by the association.

The Association for Supporting TMPCWA plans to invite ED and another member of TMPCWA from the 22nd to the 29th of November and organize protest actions at Toyota Company's Tokyo Office and its headquarter in Toyota City in Aichi Prefecture during this period. Support groups were formed in Toyota City and Osaka. In Osaka, APWSL group is planning a solidarity meeting with support of local trade unions. In Toyota City, members of JAWN are very active in extending the support group. The support groups of different area will gather in Toyota City to hold a meeting and launch an protest action at the headquarter of the company on the 25th and 26th of November.

However, regardless of the increasing international solidarity, the condition of the struggle is getting more difficult. The Philippine government, surrendering to the threatening by Toyota and other Japanese companies, made a series of decisions in favor of the management, nullifying the previous recognition of the trade union. Stimulated by this attitude of the government, the management has dismissed 233 workers and sued 26 union members in criminal court in conspiracy with the puppet union.

Tasks for the future

The campaign responded rather promptly, so far, to the calls for support. There are a few elements which enabled such prompt responses:

- 1) The existence of the network of trade unions and NGOs in Japan linked to those in

Philippines, which facilitated the reliance among us.

2) Many of the participants of the campaign have experiences of unfair dismissal and prolonged disputes of their own and share the anger against the violation of workers' human rights by Toyota Company.

3) Effective use of e-mail and cooperation of translators, which helped us to share information and form consensus among us.

On the other hand, there are still many difficulties to overcome:

1) Economic problems. Many of the dismissed workers of TMPCWA have families to support. They are faced with serious problems for their living. TMPCWA doesn't have much fund. The ability of the Japanese supporters to raise fund is very limited.

2) Difference in languages, labor law systems and culture sometimes causes difficulties in communication among us.

3) Media in Japan as well as in Philippines are reluctant to report on labor disputes involving Toyota.

4) Toyota Workers Union in Japan is a pro-company unions. Toyota Workers Union and IMF-JC ignore the causes and struggles of TMPCWA.

The tasks for the campaign at the moment include,

1) To strengthen the framework of the campaign in order to support the long-running struggle of TMPCWA, including financial support.

2) To utilize e-mail and other means to make this case known to trade unions and NGOs in Japan and in the world.

3) To build up a network of Auto Workers in Asia based on the links among struggles at Isuzu Motors Ltd. (an affiliate of GM) against closure of the factories, Daewoo Motors and so on.

4) To help TMPCWA in filing complaints with ILO. The support from Japan will be important because it needs much resource.

5) To get contact with international and national industry federations like IMF, UAW and CAW. The counterpart of these federations in Japan is IMF-JC on which we cannot rely the role of the intermediary. Therefore we have to rely on other route to establish links with these federations.

To Conclude

Toyota rejects to recognize the right to organize in the whole world. It uses any measure to suppress the trade unions which do not represent the interest of the company. In Philippines, it threatened the government by implying the possibility of moving to other countries in case they fail to settle the dispute. In this way they succeeded to make the government take tough position against the union.

Why is it? Because Toyota knows that their record profit was realized by rejection of workers' rights. They fear that once they recognize the rights of workers, they might lose much of its profits. This attitude of Toyota Company is shared by other big MNCs like GM, Renault etc.

By joining hands with workers of the subsidiary companies all over the world in a unified struggle against the dominance of these MNCs and Auto Manufacturers, we could see the possibility of disintegrating components of this dominant structure. This could be an integral part of developing "a new principle" to replace the principle neo-liberalism and promoting "globalization from below".

Statement on the terrorist attacks in the United States

Asian Pacific Workers' Solidarity Links Japan

24 September 2001



Asian Pacific Workers' Solidarity Links Japan expresses its sorrow for the more than six thousand people killed by the terrorist attacks in the United States on 11 September. As human beings we are against all acts of terrorism that take human lives by violence. We don't know who committed this heinous act or why, but they cannot be justified on any account. As citizens of a nation that has renounced war as means to settle international disputes, we also oppose war to retaliate against this terrorism. This incident is not a war but an indiscriminate massacre and seems to be an international crime. What is needed is not war but international laws and international cooperation under the United Nations. All our experiences of international conflict and war show that the use of force only intensifies hatred and brings further retaliation.

As workers fighting against racial and ethnic discrimination that destroy the unity of workers, we are deeply concerned of the mounting discrimination and oppression of the Arab and Islamic people. Whoever the perpetrators are, the sole responsibility lies on them and not on the ethnic and religious group they come from. Discrimination feeds hatred and kills people, just as violence and war do.

As workers struggling against the global race to the bottom, we believe that the globalization imposed by multinational corporations and governments in the US, Japan and Europe is widening the gap between the poor and the rich and is driving desperate people to terrorism. It cannot be rooted out without changing this structure of inequality.

As workers dedicated to international solidarity, we send our message of compassion and solidarity to the US workers who were hurt and have lost their friends. We hope for an early recovery to normal and peaceful lives. While many Americans seem to be inclined to revenge and the use of force, we hope trade unions in the US would be tolerant and become strongholds of peace.

We Japanese workers are opposed to cooperation in war and the negation of the pacifist Japanese Constitution proposed by the Koizumi Government. We will fight against the war of retaliation planned by the Bush administration together with the workers of the world.

Highlighting the New Dimension of Cross-Border Labor Disputes

The 12th Annual General Meeting (Jul 14-15, Tokyo)

Kitahata Yoshihide

APWSL Japan held its 12th Annual General Meeting in Tokyo from the 14th to 15th in July. About 20 members participated.

We discussed our experiences in a series of

campaigns and actions to support workers struggles in other countries. We discussed the activity report for 2000/2001 and action plans for 2001/2002. There was also a reflection on the role and nature of the organization of APWSL Japan. We began discussion on our preparation

for the APWSL Council Meeting to be held soon. Finally, we elected new executive members.

Korea Omron, Philippine Toyota, PT Kadera

The first session of the AGM was devoted to the discussion on solidarity actions. Members of APWSL Japan joined with activists from trade unions and other groups in solidarity actions with trade unions at Korea Omron, Philippine Toyota and PT Kadera (a Toyota's subsidiary in Indonesia). APWSL Japan also sent solidarity message to striking workers at Daewoo Motor. Globalization of capitalism and drastic increase of overseas production by Japan's transnational companies has brought about the globalization of labor disputes. In these years, we have seen a series of new types of disputes involving Japan's companies in the whole region. APWSL Japan has been taking up these cases and actively organized solidarity campaigns.

Mr. Yamahara of the General Union spoke about his experiences in the solidarity actions in these ten years since the historical struggle of Sumida, Asia Suwannee and TND Trade Unions of Korea (in 1990, these three unions sent their delegation to Japan to negotiate with parent companies here). Yamahara explained about the changes in the pattern of overseas investment and the debate on the strategy to resist the multinational companies. He emphasized the need to strengthen our knowledge and capability to respond to the calls for support from other countries. Although we should always respect the desire and will of the workers directly involved, we should not restrict ourselves to outside supporters. We should become active components of the disputes. We need to know how to utilize labor laws, migration laws, labor committee systems and so on. We need a lot of translators, the access to media, financial resources and so on. As regards the role of international federations and institutes like ILO, their support can be helpful but we have to be careful so that they should not interfere the unions directly involved. We cannot expect Rengo (Japan's biggest national center of trade union federations) would actively participate the actions especially it involves the parent companies. As the conclusion, he said APWSL Japan has a unique role and ability in these solidarity actions.

Mr. Kojima of the Kanto Regional Council

of the All Japan Shipbuilding and Engineering Union (Zen-Zosen) explained the situation at Philippine Toyota and talked about the plan of an exchange visit to Philippines from the 30th of July to the 2nd of August joined by union members of his region. Mr. Oidon of Japan Auto Workers Network talked about APWSL's seminar on "Globalized Auto Industry and Workers in Asia" held in Tokyo in April and the plan of establishing auto workers' network in the region which was proposed at the seminar.

Mr. Kitahata reported on the PT Kadera case in which two striking workers were killed by the goons hired by the management of the company. PT Kadera is a subsidiary of Araco Company in Japan. APWSL Japan distributed information on this case through e-mails and met the management of Araco to demand them to respect workers' right. We are waiting for requests from the workers or workers group involved for further actions.

Ms. Kato of Japan-Korea Network gave reports on the dispute at Daewoo Motor in Korea. She also explained about the repressive attitude of Kim Dejun government in a series of labor disputes. Japan-Korea Network has close contacts with trade unions in Korea and expect APWSL Japan to cooperate with them to strengthen common struggles between workers of Korea and Japan.

Activities Report

In the second session, we heard several reports about the activities of APWSL Japan.

Mr. Watanabe, Co-cordinator of APWSL Japan, gave the Activity Report for 2000/2001. The activities taken up in the report include,

- 1) Two members of APWSL participated the Peoples' Forum in Korea during the ASEM meeting held there in October, 2000.
- 2) National Coordinating Meeting in January this year.
- 3) The second series of APWSL Japan's seminar. Three seminars were held including the seminar on auto industry mentioned above. Total number of participants was more than 100. It was successful.
- 4) Members of APWSL actively involved in a new project called "LaborNet Japan" which is a joint efforts by many activists who are interested in utilizing Internet to stimulate workers' solidarity.

Ms. Tono, Convenor of APWSL and Co-representative of APWSL Japan, gave reports on her activities as Convenor of the APWSL network. She emphasized the need to strengthen the coordination within the Secretariat as well as among national groups.

Mr. Inagaki gave financial report. Because of the decreasing of income, we have to "tighten" the expenditure and utilize the resource effectively.

Ms. Akimoto spoke about the invitation of SUD-PTT, a France federation of independent unions in communication sector. Zenrokyo and Zenrokyo Postal Union organized exchange meetings in many cities in the country to learn the experiences and lessons of SUD-PTT. APWSL actively supported this project.

Mr. Kitahata talked about the East Asia Exchange Program. Although we could not plan the fourth East Asia Exchange Program in this 1998/2002 period, this program will be more important in the future.

Reflection on the Role of APWSL-J

In the third session, Mr. Umatani gave a reflection on the nature and role of the APWSL Japan. Is APWSL Japan an NGO without bases in workplaces? Who APWSL Japan represents? After more than ten years of existence, its time to discuss basic questions about our activities and functioning.

At the end of the AGM, new executive members were elected as follows,

Co-representatives

Ms. Harada Keiko

Mr. Inada Jun-ichi

Mr. Yamahara Katsuji

(a woman, not nominated at this time)

Coordinators

Mr. Niwa Masaharu

Mr. Watanabe Hiroshi

Editor of Newsletter

(Japanese Edition) **Yamasaki Seiichi**

(English Edition) **Kitahata Yoshihide**

Treasurer

Inagaki Yutaka

News Clips

(1) Rules for firing workers spark controversy (Excerpt From "Mainichi Shimbun" 2001.11.05)

Laws should be drawn up defining the conditions under which workers can be fired from their jobs, according to Health, Labor and Welfare Minister Chikara Sakaguchi. Sakaguchi is apparently aiming for clarity under the law to prevent unfair dismissals.

But labor unions are furious at the suggestion, saying that laws outlining acceptable dismissals will only make it easier for companies to lay off workers.

"Some wonder whether it's enough to merely respect a court ruling," Sakaguchi told reporters, referring to a benchmark 1979 Tokyo High Court decision on conditions for acceptable dismissals that has since largely served as the legal precedent for laying off workers.

...Currently, the law only obligates employers to give a worker 30 days notice of the termination of their employment. The 1979 ruling gave four guidelines for acceptable dismissal. There had to be:

- * A need to cut staff numbers;
- * No alternative but dismissal;
- * Appropriate choices as targets of dismissal; and
- * Correct following of agreements set up by the employer and employee.

(2) Jobless rate hits record high of 5.3% (Excerpt From "Mainichi Shimbun" 2001.10.30)

Japan's seasonally-adjusted unemployment rate rose to a record high of 5.3 percent in September, up 0.3 points from the previous month, government statistics showed Tuesday.

The number of those out of a job across the country hit a record 3.57 million, up 370,000 from the corresponding month last year...

Government officials are pessimistic about the prospects of the employment situation in recession-hit Japan. "The situation has become worse. The current situation will likely continue for the time being as production and consumption indexes are quite bad,"...

(3) NTT Union Accepts Spinoff Plan (Excerpt From "The Japan Times" Nov. 2, 2001)

...Management made the proposal to the union in April as NTT West Corp. plunged into a deficit after falling behind in the information technology race. NTT is being pressed to introduce market principles as well as the globalization policies of the

government of Prime Minister Junichiro Koizumi...

The pillar of the plan calls for around 60,000 employees, about 30 percent of the group workforce, to "retire" from their present jobs and transfer to a new "outsourcing" company NTT plans to set up.

Workers aged 51 or older will have their pay cut by a maximum of about 30 percent when they move to their new workplace....

A 44-year-old worker in an NTT East Corp. branch in Aomori Prefecture said: "I've told my wife that my salary would probably be slashed by 30 percent in a few years. I don't know what to say when she asks me how I will be able to cope with it."

His annual income of 6.5 million at present would drop by more than 1 million. He figures that his

lifetime earnings would thus be down by about 20 million by the time he retires.

Taking early retirement is out of the question for the man. He and his wife have two children, one in the second year of junior high school and one in fifth grade. His mother lives alone in a neighboring prefecture.

If he agrees to switch jobs, he would almost be guaranteed to continue working in Aomori Prefecture. If he refuses, on the other hand, he believes his chances of staying in the prefecture would be slim because of a lack of work, and that he would have to transfer to the Tokyo area.

He said he is prepared to face the pains of reforms as they become reality.

APWSL Japan

C/O Rodo Joho, Shin-Hirokoji Building, 1-1-12, Ueno, Taito-ku, Tokyo, Japan

BY AIR