

# APWSL Japan

Asia Pacific Workers' Solidarity Links

No41/October, 2004

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## A "Come-from-Behind Victory" after 25 Years of Hard Struggle - Dismissed Post Workers Won the Court Trail



On June 30, Tokyo High Court repealed the disciplinary action against seven post workers of April 28, 1979. The decision of the High Court was an utter surprise even for the plaintiff (the dismissed workers) and their supporters. It was a "come-from-behind victory" for the dismissed post workers after their hard struggle for as long as 25 years since the unfair dismissal by Director of

the Tokyo Post Office.

The story goes back to the end of 1978, when rank and file workers of Zentei Union (Japan Post Workers' Union) were on a slowdown strike to resist "Marusei" (a productivity campaign organized by the management) and anti-union discrimination. Their struggle was very effective because it was the busiest season of a year. Distributing new year postcards in time was the biggest concern for the authority.

The retaliation by the post office authority was unprecedented with 58 workers dismissed. More than 3,000 workers were victimized in the whole country. The disciplinary actions were not focused on union leaders but

## *From The Editor*

It is almost 2 years since the last issue of "APWSL Japan", the 40th issue, was sent to you. In this issue, we want to share "JOY", "ANGER" and "UNITY" with all our readers. "JOY" for the victory of 25 years of hard struggle of post workers. "ANGER" over the reactionary offensive by Tokyo Metropolitan Board of Education. "UNITY" shown in the cross border action of solidarity with Tyson Foods workers.

Based on the discussion during the 4th World Social Forum in Mumbai, APWSL Japan is now discussing on a creative way to strengthen our links and network in order to effectively respond to the issues brought about with "globalization". Better communication and exchange of information and experiences are as important as ever. So, we will promise to "try to" publish this newsletter somewhat regularly. **Please print and circulate this newsletter.**

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on young, rank and file workers.

44 of the 58 dismissed workers brought this issue to Tokyo District Court in 1986. The trial was prolonged because of a series of disputes on the recognition of facts.

In the meantime, their union, Zentei Union, had been developing a policy of class collaboration and accepting a series of rationalization and the workshop discipline. Finally, In June 1991, Zentei decided to stop its support to the court struggle and completed its turn to the class collaborationist policy.

The dismissed workers were faced with tremendous difficulty in continuing the struggle. Among 44 workers who joined the court struggle, only 7 remained. In 1992, Tokyo District Court rejected the claim of the workers and supported the disciplinary action.

However, these 7 workers have been determined to continue their struggle. They organized a network of support among new independent unions as well as the rank and file workers in Zentei.

The decision of Tokyo High Court was a historical victory. It will encourage many workers who have been continuing their hard struggle for many years.

## Tokyo : 220 Teachers Punished for Refusing to Sing Kimigayo ("National Anthem")



Education is one of the most important target of reactionary forces because they hate the post-war democratic education. They say the democratic education has been undermining the national identity of

Japanese people.

Shintaro Ishihara, Governor of Tokyo, is the most prominent representative of these reactionary forces. Under his governorship, Tokyo Metropolitan Board of Education has been criminalizing opponents of their extra-nationalist initiatives. Last October they set up protocols for standing for Hinomaru ("national flag") and singing Kimigayo ("national anthem") at public school ceremonies.

As Hinomaru is a symbol of Japan's militarism, which led to disastrous results in the whole region, and Kimigayo is a song of affection to Emperor's reign,

democratic forces have been fighting against forceful introduction of them into education. Teachers Union resisted such attempts very strongly. Even when the law designating the Hinomaru and the Kimigayo as the national flag and the anthem was enacted in 1999, both the prime minister and the chief Cabinet secretary at that time said there would be no orders or compulsion with regard to them.

However, in October 2003, the Tokyo Metropolitan Board of Education has issued a 12-point instruction concerning the national flag and anthem for school ceremonies, requiring that the flag be placed on the center stage and the singing of the anthem be specified on the program for the ceremony. Many teachers were embarrassed by the instruction and dwelled on it because

such a compulsion would have been contrary to what they have been teaching in classrooms. As the result, a number of teachers refused to obey the instruction or didn't stand up nor sang as were instructed.

The Board of Education monitored graduation ceremonies and enrollment ceremonies of March and April, collected reports from each school and punished more than 200 teachers for the disobedience.

The teachers brought this case to the court and organizing resistance to the reactionary course promoted by Governor Ishihara.

On August 30th, 650 people gathered at the gate of Tokyo City Hall (municipal government building) to denounce the Board of Education.

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## Safe Jobs, Safe Food - Workers and Consumers' Response to the "BSE Issue"



In July, Two workers of Teamsters Local 556 at Pasco factory in Washington of Tyson Foods Company came to Japan to extend their "Safe Jobs, Safe Food" campaign. Workers at Tyson Foods.

While Japanese and U.S. government officials were discussing on lifting the ban on the import of American beef to Japan, consumer groups and Tyson workers represented by Teamster Local 556 joined together to call on Tyson Foods and the U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) to take the necessary steps to restore consumer confidence in Japan.

Tyson Foods is the world's largest meat company and Local 556 has been demanding the company to improve the working conditions. Meatpacking workers in U.S., many of them low-income immigrants, have suffered layoffs, reduced working hours and wages, and increased job insecurity because Tyson and the USDA won't address the legitimate safety concerns of consumers in Japan and around the world. They refuse BSE testing.

Two workers of Teamsters Local 556 came to Japan on July 19th and stayed five days. They met consumers' groups and trade unions in Japan and spoke to the people at a railway terminal. They explained how Tyson was ignoring the health and safety of workers as well as consumers.

On July 22th, many union members in Tokyo and Kanagawa joined them and distributed leaflets to support their cause. More than 50 workers participated the meeting in the evening of that day in support of them.

## The 15th Annual General Meeting of APWSL Japan, June 17-18

We had the 15th Annual General Meeting in Osaka on July 17-18th. Fifteen members participated.

The AGM was composed of three sessions: 1) reports on international solidarity works 2) open event, and 3) organizational matters.

At the first session, three reports were given

### i) Seoul Actions on FTA in June



There has been a joint campaign against Korea-Japan Free Trade Agreement (FTA) organized both in Korea

and in Japan. On June 12-15th, KoPA of Korea and other organizations including KCTU organized a series of actions in Seoul and more than 100 activists from various groups in Japan joined these actions. Members of APWSL Japan were among them. We saw video taken and edited by one of our members and discussed on the development of the linkage of the "Global Justice Movements" in East Asia.

### ii) The development of the situation of workers in China

We discussed on the reports of the recent development of the situation of workers in China. There have been quite a number of labor disputes and most of these cases are related to industrial accidents, dismissal of workers due to bankruptcy, and corruption. Workers are under desperate conditions. APWSL groups in East Asia sub region should take up the issue of the rights of workers in China.

### iii) Cross-border actions of US trade unions and our solidarity actions.

In March, workers of HERE Local 100 who were on strike at Oysterbar restaurant in New York on their contracts came to Japan to sabotage the opening of Oysterbar's restaurant in Tokyo. Workers in Tokyo and Kanagawa areas joined their action on March 5th. The action was very successful and may have contributed to put pressure on the employer.

In July, workers of Teamsters Local 556 at Pasco factory in Washington of Tyson Foods Company came to Japan to extend their "Safe Jobs, Safe Food" campaign. Workers in Tokyo and Kanagawa areas joined their action on July 22nd.

We have been accumulating experiences of this kind of cross-border actions.

The second session was planned as a "Pre-event" of the Labor Festa 2004. We saw a film on organizing women and minority and five short videos shown at the last years' Labor Festa.

In the third session we discussed on our basic activities including publication of newsletters. Executive members were re-elected. The budget was discussed.

## APWSL-Japan's Workshop at the 4th WSF in Mumbai, January 2004

[APWSL organized a workshop on "Organizing Women Workers" at the 4th World Social Forum held in Mumbai in January this year. The following is the opening speech by Ms. Harada Keiko.]

Sisters and Brothers,

Now we will begin the workshop.

My name is Harada Keiko of APWSL Japan.

On behalf of APWSL Japan, I want to thank women members of APWSL and all the participants who are actively committed to the issues of women workers.

Here, I will briefly explain why we planned this workshop. But, before that, I have to apologize for one thing: the difficulty of communicating with each other because of the language problem. As a network of grassroots workers, emphasizing the importance of the participation of the grassroots workers, especially women workers, we should encourage workers to speak in their own language. However, we don't have enough resources for translating all different languages. As the result, we had to choose to use English as the key language for the reports and discussion in this workshop. We want all the participants

to share the inconvenience and help each other so that as many participants as possible can express themselves in this workshop.

I, myself, is not good at speaking English. So, in order to save time, let me read the text, which was translated by one of my friends.

I thought of organizing this workshop after I participated the Asia Social Forum in January last year. Most of the participants of the Asia Social Forum were from South Asia. I participated a series of workshops on trade union movements. I found that most of the speakers were men. It was very disappointing to me, although it might be a wrong impression because I attended only a few workshops.

On the other hand, I had an opportunity to listen to a story of textile workers from Bangladesh who came to Japan last year. I was very much impressed by the story. In Japan, the situation of women workers in East Asia or South-East Asia are known to some extent. But, as regards the women workers in South Asia, we don't know much. Therefore, the exchange with a woman worker from Bangladesh was very important experience for me.

As a member of APWSL network, which is committed to the international solidarity among grassroots workers of the region, I sincerely hope to share issues and problems of women workers of each country and build continuous links of cooperation through exchanges with women members of APWSL.

At the last Council Meeting of APWSL held in early 2002, there was a decision to promote women leadership in order to effectively organize workers in marginalized sectors. What kind of initiative for this has been taken in each country after the Council Meeting? Of course the situation is quite different from county to country, but I guess there are many thing in common. I hope we can

discuss all the aspects of the rights of women, including human rights and labor rights of women, and envision a continuous cooperation and solidarity based on a face-to-face relationship.

In this workshop, we will share the situation and experiences from three different sub-regions: East Asia, South Asia and South-East Asia. Then we will have a kind of free discussion.

Let me start my report. First, I will introduce myself and talk about my union. Then I will describe the general situation of women workers in Japan.

I am local government worker, teaching in a primary school in Osaka. Although teaching has been regarded as a stable job, the working environment has been worsening. A rating or evaluation system has been introduced to evaluate the ability or achievements of each individual teachers. Wages will be linked to the rating or the evaluation. Traditionally, our wages have been based on the years of employment. Equal wages between women and men were guaranteed.

Teaching pupils is a collective effort of all the co-workers in a school, in my case, in a primary school. We cannot separate one worker's ability or achievements from the others'. In addition, there is no reasonable method to evaluate workers without unfairness. Inner conflict of teachers and inner growth and development of pupils cannot be evaluated from outside. Thus, the traditional wage system is more suited to the type of the work.

On the other hand, a wage system based on rating or evaluation will be unfavorable to women. While many women workers have to take care of their children and families in addition to their works in their workshops, many male workers can concentrate on their works in their workshops. Although an increasing number of male workers are getting involved in household works and

childcare, women are still forced to take most of the unpaid works. Therefore, although the rating or evaluation system is applied to both women and men, it is foreseen that women will get lower score, in general, and thus lower wages than men.

In Japan, discrimination in employment between women and men is prohibited by laws. You cannot discriminate women in a direct way. However, there are many forms of indirect discrimination, which results in lower wages and less opportunity for promotion for women. For example, in private sectors, many companies offer two types of employment. One is called a "main career track job". This type of employment is for those who want to develop their career and proceed to upper positions. This requires full dedication to the company. For example, you cannot oppose any transfer. The other type of job is called a "general level job". This is for those who are not ready to be fully dedicated to the company. Theoretically, both men and women can choose either type of employment. In fact, women who took "main career track jobs" enjoy equal treatment. In this way, companies are saying that there is not discrimination any more. However, the reality is that not so many women can take "main career track jobs" because many women workers have to take care of their children and families including seniors.

The education sector was the last sector in which equality between women and men was guaranteed. But as I explained, we are losing it.

I have to add the problems of non-regular teachers. I am a regular worker with relatively secure employment. In my workplace, there are non-regular teachers who have the same assignments as us but employed on a contract basis of one year. Why there are regular teachers and non-regular teachers in a school? It is because the allocation of the number of teachers for each school is determined by the number of pupils and this number

changes every year. If the number of pupils decrease, you have to reduce the number of teachers. As dismissing regular teachers is difficult for many reasons, the authority always keep the number of regular teachers at the minimum level and use the non-regular teachers to fill the vacancy. There is no guarantee of the renewal of the contract for non-regular teachers. Although they work full time and take the same assignment as regular teachers, they are always worrying about their future employment. Their wages are lower. Many of non-regular teachers are women. Because of the instability of the employment, many of male non-regular teachers chose to change jobs.

Most of the teachers' unions organize only regular workers. My union, Osaka Education and Amalgamated Workers' Union, is a small union but is the only union in Osaka which non-regular teachers can join. Every year, my union demands the guarantee of jobs for non-regular teachers. However, out of the fear of losing jobs, most of the non-regular teachers are reluctant to joining the trade union. They believe that their involvement in a trade union would bring hardship to themselves. They tend to be tame and work hard without complaining.

Now I will move to the general situation of women workers of Japan. The situation is very bad. Working conditions of both men and women are decreasing. Women workers are suffering. The structure of employment is drastically changing. The number of regular workers are decreasing. The percentage of contract workers, dispatched workers and part-time workers are increasing. The wages and working conditions of these types of workers are very bad and their jobs are very unstable. Women consist the majority in these types of labor forces. Most of them are unorganized. They are reluctant to join or organize a union because they fear they will lose their jobs if they try to do so. Although the right to organize is guaranteed by the laws and employers cannot dismiss workers because of their involvement in trade union

activities, it is very hard to be a union members. Instead of dismissing the workers, employers can reject the renewal of the contracts. Or they can reduce the number of part-timers on the pretext of the depression.

Most of the trade unions in companies are composed of regular workers exclusively. They are dedicated to protect themselves. A good news is the development of regional unions which allow any individual worker in the region to join regardless of where she or he works. They have been the most dynamic sectors of trade union movement in our country in these years. The problem is that there are not so many women workers in the leadership of these unions. One of the challenges of these regional unions is to strengthen the leadership of women workers.

To conclude my report, I want to emphasize the importance of developing the leadership role of women workers. In Japan, women don't have equal status even in trade unions. Overwhelming majority of executive bodies of the unions are men. Except for women's union or women's section of the union, there are few women who are in some key positions of the union and participate the decision makings on tactics or policies of the unions.

As the trade unions have been generally functioning on the basis of the dominance of men, most of women lack the experiences in negotiation and other practical activities of the unions. Because of that women have been disregarded in terms of the potential strength of the unions. However, once they have some trainings and chances, they can prove to be remarkable component of the movement because of their willingness to liberate themselves from unfair treatments they face anywhere. They are not looking for someone who speaks for them. They are looking for the opportunity to speak themselves and fight for themselves based on their own experiences and knowledges.

I was the chairperson of our union for four years until two years ago. But I could not lead the union according to my vision. Male leaders who have long years of experiences had the dominant power in making decisions. It was partly because of my capacity, but I regret that I could not develop a program to educate women members of the union.

I am now thinking of organizing a regular space for women workers to gather and learn regardless of their union belongings.

I will finish my report here. Because of the limitation of time, I just took up some aspects of women workers in Japan. If you have comments or questions, we can discuss later after the reports by Aima and Sripai.

Thank you.

## News Clips

### (1) Steam leak at nuclear plant kills 4 - August 9

MIHAMA, Fukui Prefecture-A steam leak at a nuclear power plant here Monday killed four workers and injured seven, police officials said. It was the worst nuclear accident in Japan in terms of deaths.

There was no danger of a radioactive leak, officials said. The Nuclear and Industrial Safety Agency and Kansai Electric Power Co. officials said the men, all contract workers, were preparing the facility for a regular reactor checkup to begin this weekend.

Officials said the men were sprayed by 142-degree steam that spewed out of a ruptured pipe at high pressure in the turbine building for the 826,000-kilowatt pressurized-water type No. 3 reactor of the Mihama Nuclear Power Plant operated by Kansai Electric. It was the first fatal accident at a nuclear power plant while the reactor was still operating. Some of the injured men suffered severe burns.

Kansai Electric officials said 221 workers were inside the facility at the time.

Fukui prefectural police are investigating the accident as a possible case of professional negligence resulting in death. (IHT/Asahi: August 10,2004) (08/10)

### Pipe that caused nuke accident wasn't inspected in 28 years

MIHAMA, Fukui -- A ruptured pipe responsible for a nuclear power plant accident here that killed four people

and left seven with burns had not been inspected for 28 years despite being an important part, it has been learned. Even though the plant's operator, Kansai Electric Power Co. (KEPCO), was notified in November last year that the part needed to be inspected, it failed to implement safety measures ahead of tests scheduled for Aug. 14.

Inspections carried out after the accident showed that the thickness of the pipe had worn down from 10 millimeters to just 1.4 millimeters at the thinnest section. The minimum thickness to maintain proper safety was reportedly 4.7 millimeters.

The fatal accident, centered in the secondary system of Mihama Nuclear Power Plant's No. 3 reactor, occurred when the pipe ruptured, sending high-pressure steam gushing out into the facility.

In maintenance guidelines held by the power firm, the part that ruptured was listed as a "main inspection" part. However, ultrasonic inspections to determine the thickness of the pipe had not been carried out once since operations began in December 1976 because the part was not registered under the maintenance system.

A subcontracting inspection firm pointed out this problem in November last year, and the part was reportedly due to be inspected on Aug. 14, but no safety measures were implemented ahead of the scheduled inspection. ... (Mainichi Shimbun, Japan, Aug. 10, 2004)

### (2)Postal privatization may see end to guarantee on deposits

The government might strip Japan Post workers of their public-servant status and might end the guarantee on ordinary deposits in 2007, when postal service privatization is phased in, according to government sources.

As part of its reforms, the government plans to stop guaranteeing ordinary deposits held in the postal savings system, including those deposited prior to privatization, the sources told Kyodo News.

These ideas will be submitted to a meeting of the government's Council on Economic and Fiscal Policy in early August. The meeting will involve intensive deliberations on the privatization of postal services.

Japan Post was launched in April 2003 as a government-backed entity tasked with taking over the government-run mail delivery, postal savings and "kampo" postal insurance operations. Prime Minister Junichiro Koizumi has made privatizing Japan Post one of his key policy goals.

Regarding the status of Japan Post staff, including those working at post offices, one plan is to have them become private-sector workers once Japan Post starts being privatized, the sources said.

The plan is aimed at increasing efficiency in privatized operations by doing away with often-wasteful bureaucratic working practices and introducing flexible wage-setting systems, the sources said.

Japan Post's operations are expected to be reorganized

into several entities, all of which would be 100 percent government-backed special corporations when the privatization process begins.

The government will present recommendations on how the operations will be managed at the August council meeting. The basic operations in question are mail delivery, postal savings and insurance services, plus post-office network management.

One idea is to establish a holding company to oversee post-office network management and mail delivery, under which firms responsible for postal savings and life insurance services will be placed. ... (The Japan Times: July 24, 2004)

### (3)Textbook OK'd that Asia calls whitewash

A controversial history textbook that has already triggered the ire of China and South Korea will be used from April at a new type of high school run by the Tokyo metropolitan government, officials said.

The decision, announced Thursday by the Tokyo metropolitan board of education, concerns Hakuo High School in Taito Ward, which opens its doors in April offering a six-year course.

Critics say the textbook whitewashes Japan's militaristic past.

The text was compiled by the nationalist Japanese Society for History Textbook Reform, which claims other books discourage students from having pride in their culture.

The book is published by Fuso-sha Publishing Inc. and will be used by students in the junior high portion of the school. It will be the first metropolitan government-run six-year secondary school.

The textbook reform society was established in 1997 by scholars who sought to remove references to "comfort women," a euphemism for women who were forced to provide sex for Imperial Japanese Army soldiers during World War II, from books used by junior high school students.

The group contends that other history textbooks present Japan's military behavior in a bad light. These so-called facts are nothing more than propaganda by former enemy countries, members say.

The book was screened and approved for use by the Ministry of Education, Culture, Sports, Science and Technology in 2001.

China and South Korea have strongly protested the book on grounds it conceals the true nature of incidents before and during World War II that continue to provoke the anger of Asian nations that came under the Japanese jackboot. ... (IHT/Asahi: August 27, 2004) (08/27)