

attributable to the increase in dismissals and retirements owing to the prolonged recession and restructuring plans, harassment in the workplace, and unpaid wages. Most of the requests for counselling brought to Labour Standards Inspection Offices and to the prefectural Labour Administration Offices across the country concerned dismissals and the non-payment of wages. Therefore, it can be assumed that the nature of the civil suits which followed would be similar. (A breakdown for the number of civil cases since 1995 is also provided in Statistical Aspects.)

While judicial courts play a significant role in labor suits — for example, producing important case laws (e.g., with regard to the legal principles of the abusive exercise of the right to dismiss), they face serious difficulties when a resolution of the dispute is required. Their decisions, by their very nature, establish the rights and obligations of labor and management. Accordingly, the trials tend to be prolonged, and that places a heavy burden on the people concerned. Among recent civil suits concerning work-related issues, the number of collective disputes between labor and management has tended to decrease as the unionization rate and the influence of the unions declined. However, more and more individual workers have tended to file their own cases insisting on their rights vis-a-vis those of their employers. One task now facing the judiciary is how to achieve more effective and efficient means of

resolving such disputes for the sake of the people concerned. This will include the development of mechanisms which result in a smoother handling of individual labor-management disputes in Japan's courts. It is worth noting that the reform of the judicial system in recent years is resulting in a labor-management conciliation scheme being newly established. The new scheme will provide for a mediation committee with representatives of the two parties who will try to resolve individual disputes before cases are actually brought to court.

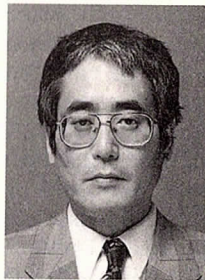
Meanwhile, the government is also submitting a new bill before the Diet that will authorize local labor bureaus to handle individual disputes. Moreover, the dispute resolution support system provided for in the Labour Standards Law has also become the core of a series of such bodies because of the high demand for such resolution. (See the October 2000 issue of the *Japan Labor Bulletin* for further information about the dispute resolution support system and the recent debate concerning trends in the area of labor dispute resolution.)

For the time being, the various systems of individual dispute resolution should be carefully watched. At the same time, further consideration is required to improve the operation of these systems. (See the June 1996 issue of *Japan Labor Bulletin* for the procedures for resolution of individual labor-management disputes.)

### Special Topic

## Industrywide Organizations of Labor Unions in the 1990s: Reform and Stagnation

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It is well known that, in principle, labor unions in Japan are organized at the firm or establishment level, in terms of both administration and finances. However, such unions do not act alone, since most belong to industrywide organizations of labor unions, which are in turn affiliates of "national centers." This article will show how such industrywide organizations of unions changed their administrative roles and functions during the 1990s. Data used in this article have been compiled from the *Survey on the Actual Situation of the Functions of Industrywide Labor Organizations* of the former Rengo (Japanese Private Sector Trade Union Confederation) (1989)<sup>(1)</sup>, and a survey conducted in 2000 by the Research Institute for Advancement of Living Standards (JTUC-RIALS)<sup>(2)</sup>.

### 1.0 Organizational Policy: 'Towards Tomorrow'

Rengo (Japanese Trade Union Confederation) adopted a policy entitled "Towards Tomorrow" at its 10th Central Committee meeting in November 1992, in which it set

forth the roles of industrywide organizations, and how to strengthen their functions.

First, they will attempt to expand their scale by incorporating non-member workers, calling for the participation of enterprise-based unions that are not affiliated with an industrywide organization, and integrating such industrywide organizations.

Second, to improve working conditions, they aim to take responsibility for organizing united actions.

Third, they are to tackle the issue of establishing and raising minimum working conditions, while setting forth their own industrial policies, and exchanging opinions with administrative organizations, employers' associations and other related bodies.

Fourth, to further policies such as expanding

organizational scale, unified struggles, and activities involving industrial policies, they are to reinforce their central headquarters, and establish and develop local branches and minor-group industry bodies, especially in terms of manpower, including full-time union officials.

The purpose of this article is to explore how far individual unions affiliated with Rengo have followed the policies they set for themselves, taking advantage of the results of the two surveys concerning industrywide organizations of labor unions.

### 2.0 Classification of Labor Unions

Before examining how industrywide organizations of labor unions have strengthened their organizational structure and roles in accordance with their policy, this article will briefly explain the classification of labor unions, a fundamental tool of analysis. As in the survey that was conducted 10 years ago, while unions are primarily classified according to the extent of their coverage, other factors, such as their labor market exclusivity and the number of members, are also taken into consideration. As far as extent of coverage is concerned, unions are classified as either medium-group industry, major-group industry or general, the latter type representing unions that are without fixed limits in this respect. Classification is based not on the unions' own reports, but on estimates of their actual coverage.

Medium-group industry unions are classified further according to their size and labor market exclusivity (which means organizing one or more enterprises whose products are dominant in the relevant market). Those that do have labor market exclusivity are divided into those with more than 100,000 members (medium-group industry type A) and those with less than 100,000 members (medium-group industry type B). Those that do not have labor market exclusivity are classified as medium-group industry type C.

Table 1 lists 42 industrywide organizations of labor unions divided into five types (hereafter, medium-A, medium-B, medium-C, major and general) according to this scheme.

The features of each type can be summarized as follows.

Medium A type organizations generally consist of a small number of large-sized unions and a large number of small-sized unions. On the other hand, major-type organizations are well balanced in terms of membership and number of affiliates, whereas a general-type organization consists of small-scale affiliates. The number of unions in medium-B and -C type organizations is relatively small, and their size forms no particular pattern. These differences are reflected in the structure of the organizations, as will be discussed next.

Many medium-A type organizations have supplementary bodies in addition to their headquarters. Some of these are local branches situated in individual prefectures or regions across the country, with full-time union officials and with a leadership devoted to a specific

purpose — for example, wage struggles. Others are minor-group industry bodies that have functions similar to those of the local bodies.

In addition to their headquarters, major-type organizations have both local branches and minor-group industry bodies, with full-time union officials. Organizations of this type are managed by headquarters, local branches and minor-group industry bodies, and individual affiliated unions.

The core of a general type organization is a well-functioning local branch situated in each prefecture. On the other hand, only a few medium-B and -C type organizations have local branches with full-time union officials in prefectures or regions across the country. Only three out of 13 medium-B, and three out of 14 medium-C type organizations have such local branches.

The headquarters of major and medium-A type organizations are outstandingly well organized. The number and proportion of full-time union officials are highest among medium-A type organizations. A characteristic of this type is that most of their full-time union officials hold employee status of particular enterprises. Many major-type organizations have quite a few union officials at their headquarters. Although the proportion of union officials engaged exclusively in work at their headquarters is low, these organizations have at their headquarters 10 or more professional full-time union officials without employee status. On the other hand, there are few full-time union officials at the headquarters of medium-B, medium-C, and general type organizations.

Moreover, major and medium-A type organizations have more staff members as a whole, including full-time union officials at their headquarters and union staff. The average number of staff members per organization for the major and medium types are: major, 64.3; medium-A, 38.0; medium-B, 14.5; and medium-C, 8.7.

Furthermore, all nine medium-A and three out of four major-type organizations have 20 or more staff members engaged exclusively in union activities, compared with only one out of 13 medium-B, and three out of 14 medium-C type organizations that have the same staff level.

### 3.0 Organizational Reforms

Over the last 10 years or so, industrywide organizations of labor unions affiliated with Rengo have made efforts to reform themselves to strengthen their functions. Let us take a closer look at such efforts — first of all, concerning unification, expanding coverage, increasing standards of membership fees, and reinforcing the ability to expand.

#### 3.1 Unification

Since November 1989, when the new Rengo was formed, new organizations launched by means of mergers, or formed by labor unions that had not previously belonged to any industrywide organization, totaled 11 out of 42 (more than 20%) of the organizations surveyed. Inclusion of the Federation of Printing Information Media

Table 1. Classification of Industry-wide Organizations of Labor Unions

| Union type  | Name   | Coverage policy type  | Market share | Membership |
|---|--|---|--------------|------------|
| Medium-group industry A   | Confederation of Japan Automobile Workers' Unions (Jidosha Soren)  | Medium  | Yes          | 773,551    |
|   | Japanese Electrical, Electronic & Information Unions (Denki Rengo)   | Medium  | Yes          | 664,833    |
|   | National Federation of Life Insurance Workers' Unions (Seiho Roren)  | Medium  | Yes          | 350,660    |
|   | Japan Federation of Telecommunications, Electronic Information and Allied Workers (Joho Roren)                           | Medium  | Yes          | 273,433    |
|   | Federation of Electric Power Related Industry Worker's Unions of Japan (Denryoku Soren)                                  | Medium  | Yes          | 251,429    |
|   | General Federation of Private Railway & Bus Worker's Union of Japan (Shitetsu Soren)                                     | Various   | Yes          | 160,368    |
|   | Japan Federation of Steel Workers' Unions (Tekko Roren)  | Various   | Yes          | 156,136    |
|   | Japan Confederation of Shipbuilding & Engineering Workers' Unions (Zosen-juki Roren)                                     | Medium  | Yes          | 118,451    |
|   | Japan Federation of Foods and Tobacco Workers' Unions (Shokuhin Rengo)   | Medium  | Yes          | 101,726    |
|   | Japanese Federation of Chemistry Workers' Unions (Kagaku League 21)  | Medium  | Yes          | 100,414    |
|   | Medium-group industry B  | Japan Federation of Chemical Workers' Unions (Kagaku Soren)   | Medium       | Yes        |
| Japanese Rubber Workers' Unions Confederation (Gomu Rengo)                                  |  | Medium  | Yes          | 51,640     |
| Japanese Federation of Pulp and Paper Workers' Unions (Kamijpa Rengo)                       |  | Medium  | Yes          | 49,408     |
| Federation of Non-Life Insurance Workers' Unions of Japan (Sonpo Roren)                     |  | Medium  | Yes          | 44,924     |
| Japan Federation of Leisure-Service Industries Workers' Unions (Leisure-Service Rengo)      |  | Medium  | Yes          | 40,000     |
| All Japan Seamen's Union (Kaiin)  |  | Medium  | Yes          | 40,000     |
| Federation of Gas Workers' Unions of Japan (Zenkoku Gas)                                    |  | Medium  | Yes          | 30,154     |
| Japanese Confederation of Aviation Labor (Koku Rengo)                                       |  | Medium  | Yes          | 28,354     |
| All Japan Federation of Ceramics Industry Workers (Ceramics Rengo)                          |  | Medium  | Yes          | 26,539     |
| Federation of Printing Information Media Workers' Unions (Insatsu Roren)                    |  | Medium  | Yes          | 24,245     |
| Japanese Federation of Industrial Materials and Energy Workers' Unions (Hitetsu Rengo, JME) |  | Medium  | Yes          | 23,000     |
| Japan Confederation of Petroleum Industry Workers' Unions (Sekiyu Roren)                    |  | Medium  | Yes          | 21,410     |
| National Federation of Cement Workers' Unions of Japan (Zenkoku Cement)                     |  | Medium  | Yes          | 5,649      |
| Medium-group industry C   |  | Japan Federation of Commercial Workers' Unions (Shogyo Roren) | Medium       | No         |
|   | Japan Railway Trade Unions Confederation (JR Rengo)  | Medium  | No           | 81,700     |
|   | Japan Confederation of Railway Workers' Unions (JR Soren)  | General   | No           | 65,933     |
|   | National Federation of Automobile Transport Workers' Unions (Zenjiko Roren)  | Medium  | No           | 46,000     |
|   | Chain Store Labor Unions Council (Chain Rokyo)   | Medium  | No           | 33,986     |
|   | All Japan Federative Council of Mutual Bank Labors' Unions (Zengin Rengo)  | Medium  | No           | 36,422     |
|   | Japan Food Industry Workers' Union Council (Shokuhin Rokyo)  | Medium  | No           | 18,859     |
|   | Federation of All-NHK Labor Unions (NHK Roren)   | Medium  | No           | 12,069     |
|   | Japan Construction Trade Union Confederation (Kensetsu Rengo)  | Major   | No           | 11,022     |
|   | National Organization of All Chemical Workers (Shinkagaku)   | General   | No           | 8,400      |
|   | Federation of Textile Clothing & Living Goods Workers' Union of Japan (Sen'i-Seikatsu-Roren)                             | Major   | No           | 3,000      |
|   | All Japan Shipbuilding and Engineering Union (Zenzosen Kikai)  | Medium  | No           | 2,088      |
|   | National Union of Coal Mine Workers (Zentanko)   | General   | No           | 830        |
|   | Council of Japan Construction Industry Employees' Unions (Nikkenkyo)   | Medium  | No           | 61,500     |
| Major-industry  | Japanese Federation of Textile, Garment, Chemical, Commercial, Food and Allied Industries Workers' Unions (Zensen Domei) | Various   | Yes          | 602,418    |
|   | Japanese Association of Metal, Machinery, and Manufacturing Workers (JAM)  | Major   | Yes          | 465,960    |
|   | Japanese Federation of Chemical, Service and General Trade Unions (CSG Rengo)  | Various   | Yes          | 201,339    |
|   | Japan Federation of Transport Workers' Unions (Kotsu Roren)  | Various   | No           | 80,673     |
| General   | National Union of General Workers (Zenkoku Ippan)  | General   | No           | 47,994     |

Workers' Unions (Insatsu Joho Media Sangyo Rodokumiai Rengokai, Insatsu-roren), which was formed immediately before the formation of the new Rengo, would raise the figure to nearly 30 percent.

Between the end of the 1980s and the early 1990s, six new organizations were established: the Federation of Printing Information Media Workers' Unions (Insatsu Joho Media Sangyo Rodokumiai Rengokai, Insatsu-roren); the Japan Food Industry Workers' Union Council (Shokuhin Sangyo Rodokumiai Kyogikai, Shokuhin-rokyo); the Japan Construction Trade Union Confederation (Kensetsu-roren); the Japan Federation of Foods and Tobacco Workers' Unions (Nihon Shokuhinkanren Sangyo Rodokumiai Rengokai, Shokuhin-roren); the Japanese Rubber Workers' Unions Confederation (Nihon Gomu Sangyo Rodokumiai Rengo, Gomu-roren); and the Japan Federation of Leisure-Service Industries Workers' Unions (Leisure-Service Sangyo Rodokumiai Rengo, Leisure-Service-roren).

In the late 1990s, another six organizations were formed by mergers between smaller organizations: the Japanese Federation of Industrial Materials and Energy Workers' Unions (Zen-Nihon Hitetsu Sozai Enerugi Rodokumiai Rengokai, JME); the Federation of Electric Power Related Industry Workers' Unions of Japan (Zenkoku Denryoku Kanren Sangyo Rodokumiai Soren, Denryoku-soren); the Japanese Federation of Chemical, Service and General Trade Unions (Nihon Kagaku Sabisu Ippan Rodokumiai Rengo, CSG Rengo); the Japanese Federation of Chemistry Workers' Unions (Nippon Kagaku Sangyo Rodokumiai Renmei, Kagaku League 21); the Japanese Association of Metal, Machinery, and Manufacturing Workers (Sangyobetsu Rodokumiai JAM); and the Japanese Confederation of Aviation Labor (Koku-roren).

In 2001, the Japan Federation of Commercial Workers' Unions (Nihon Shogyo Rodokumiai Rengokai, Shogyo-roren), the Chain Store Labor Unions Council (Chen Sutoa Rodokumiai Kyogikai, Chain-rokyo) and seven department store unions will merge to form the Japanese Federation of Service and Commercial Distribution Industry Unions.

A new industrywide organization of service sector unions is also expected to be established, with the Japan Federation of Leisure-Service Industries Workers' Unions as its core, and incorporating hotel industry unions — some independent and some affiliated with other industry unions (CSG Rengo, the Japan Federation of Commercial Workers' Unions).

The Japanese Federation of Textile, Garment, Chemical, Commercial Food and Allied Industries Workers' Unions (Zensen) and CSG Rengo are considering mergers. Two other groups of unions are also contemplating mergers, one centered on steel, shipbuilding, and industrial materials and energy workers unions, and the second concerned with transportation. The first group comprises the Japan Federation of Steel Workers' Unions (Nihon Tekko Sangyo Rodokumiai Rengokai, Tekko-roren), the Japan Confederation of

Shipbuilding & Engineering Workers' Unions (Zenkoku Zosen Jukikai Rodokumiai Rengokai, JSEU) and the Japanese Federation of Industrial Materials and Energy Workers' Unions (Zen Nihon Hitetsu Sozai Enerugi Rodokumiai Rengokai, Hitetsu-roren). The second group consists of the General Federation of Private Railway & Bus Workers' Unions of Japan (Nihon Shitetsu Rodokumiai Soren, Shitetsu-soren), the All Japan Federation of Transport Workers' Unions (Zen-Nihon Unyu Sangyo Rodokumiai Rengokai, Unyu-roren), the Japan Federation of Transport Workers' Unions (Zenkoku Kotsu Unyu Rodokumiai Soren, Kotsu-roren) and the National Federation of Automobile Transport Workers' Unions (Zenkoku Jidosha Kotsu Rodokumiai Rengokai, Zenjiko-roren).

This series of moves suggests that one element of Rengo's "Towards Tomorrow" policy is being steadily put into practice: "the consolidation of individual unions not yet belonging to industrywide organizations and the bringing together and unification of industrywide organizations themselves."

However, this trend does not necessarily mean an expansion of the scale of organizations, or further improvement in their structure. Table 2 shows the following changes in the scale of organizations since 1989, when the previous survey was carried out.

There has been a conspicuous decrease in union membership overall. More than half of the industrywide organizations — 23 out of 42 — had a decrease of five percent or more in union membership. There has also been a decrease in membership of medium-A type organizations, such as the National Federation of Life Insurance Workers' Unions (Zenkoku Seimeihoken Rodokumiai Rengokai, Seiho-roren), the Japan Federation of Telecommunications, Electronic Information and Allied Workers (Joho Sangyo Rodokumiai Rengokai, Joho-roren), and the Japan Federation of Steel Workers' Unions.

Furthermore, some organizations had a drastic decrease in their membership — for example, membership of the All Japan Seamen's Union (Zen-Nippon Kaiin Kumiai, Kaiin) dropped by 64.3 percent from 112,000 to 40,000. However, there was little change — less than five percent — in the membership of seven organizations, including some large-scale medium-A type organizations.

On the other hand, 10 organizations had an increase of five percent or more in their membership since the previous survey. Of these, it is noteworthy that large-scale organizations with 500,000 or more members, such as Zensen and the Confederation of Japan Automobile Workers' Unions (Zen-Nihon Jidosha Sangyo Rodokumiai Soren, Jidosha-soren) had a certain increase in membership. The membership of the Federation of Electric Power Related Industry Workers' Unions of Japan, which already had more than 200,000 members, increased by more than five percent.

There was either a decrease or little change in the membership of 12 organizations that were involved in mergers. There was an increase of five percent or more in

the membership of the Federation of Electric Power Related Industry Workers' Unions of Japan, the Japanese Confederation of Aviation Labor, the Federation of Printing Information Media Workers' Unions, and the Japan Food Industry Workers' Union Council, whereas there was little change in the membership of JAM, CSG Rengo, and the Japanese Federation of Industrial Materials and Energy Workers' Unions.

There was a decrease of five percent or more in the membership of the Japan Federation of Foods and Tobacco Workers' Unions, Kagaku League 21, the Japanese Rubber Workers' Unions Confederation, the Japan Federation of Leisure-Service Industries Workers' Unions, and the Japan Construction Trade Union Confederation.

Of these recently merged organizations, those that had an increase in membership, all have around 20,000 members, except the Federation of Electric Power Related Industry Workers' Unions of Japan which has over 250,000 members.

On the other hand, organizations with a membership of around 400,000, such as JAM and CSG Rengo, and those with a membership of around 200,000 are stagnant in terms of membership growth, while organizations with a membership of around 100,000, such as Kagaku League 21, have had substantial decreases.

These trends give the impression that the unification of organizations in some cases facilitated their expansion, especially among small organizations. However, in many cases industrywide organizations that were failing to increase their union membership, unification was a means to prevent a decline in, to maintain, or to increase, their power in negotiations and struggles. The motives behind some mergers may therefore have been somewhat different from that of the positive reinforcement of power, as

promoted by the "Towards Tomorrow" policy.

### 3.2 Expanding Coverage

The "Coverage policy type" column in Table 1 shows how the industrywide organizations see themselves. Of 42 organizations, 30 stated that they covered medium-group industries, three stated that they covered major-group industries, five stated that they covered various types of industry (that is, several major group industries), and four stated that they covered regardless of industry. Some interesting facts emerge when this result is compared with that of the previous survey.

First, there are now five organizations aiming to cover various types of industry, whereas in the previous survey only Zensen did this. This time, CSG Rengo, the General Federation of Private Railway & Bus Worker's Union of Japan, the Japan Federation of Steel Workers' Unions, and the Japan Federation of Transport Workers' Unions have adopted the new policy.

Second, the number of organizations aiming to cover major-group industry decreased from four to three. In this group, the previous survey included the following four organizations, the first two of which have since merged and been reborn as JAM: the Japanese Federation of Metal Industry Unions (Zenkin-rengo), the National Union of Metal Workers (Zenkoku-kinzoku Rodokumiai, Zenkoku-kinzoku); the Japanese Federation of Chemical and General Trade Unions (Zenkoku Kagaku Ippan Rodokumiai Domei, Zenka-domei); and the Japan Federation of Transport Workers' Unions.

The Japanese Federation of Chemical and General Trade Unions has merged with the National Federation of General Workers' Unions (Ippan-domei) to become CSG Rengo, which now aims to cover various types of industry. The Japan Federation of Transport Workers' Unions also

changed their policy to cover various types of industry.

Two organizations have changed to cover major-group industry: the Japan Construction Trade Union Confederation and the Federation of Textile Clothing & Living Goods Workers' Unions of Japan (Nihon Sen'i Seikatsu Sangyo Rodokumiai Rengokai, Sen'i-seikatsuroren).

Third, two more organizations have started to cover regardless of industry so that there are now four such organizations. In the previous survey, the National Union of General Workers (Zenkoku Ippan Rodokumiai, Zenkoku-ippan) and the National Federation of General Workers' Unions had this policy. The latter has now merged with the Japanese Federation of Chemical and General Trade Unions to become CSG Rengo. This means that three organizations have a newly adopted policy: Japan Confederation of Railway Workers' Unions (Zen-Nihon Tetsudo Rodokumiai Sorengokai, JR-soren), the National Organization of All Chemical Workers (Zen Kagaku Sangyo Rodokumiai Rengo, Shinkagaku), and the National Union of Coal Mine Workers (Zenkoku Sekitankogyo Rodokumiai, Zentanko).

To sum up, some 70 percent of industrywide organizations of labor unions in Japan are organized as medium-group industry unions, but in the last 10 years, there have been some signs of change. Four organizations have adopted a policy of covering various types of industry: two to cover major-group industry, and three to cover regardless of industry. Whatever their actual situation, what is important here is the determination of these industry-wide organizations to expand their base.

### 3.3 Increasing Membership Fees

There were changes in the membership fees of 34 organizations whose data are given both in the recent survey and the previous one. (The National Federation of Life Insurance Workers' Unions was included in the previous survey, but its fees were unknown and thus excluded from this analysis.)

First, 27 out of 34 organizations (80%) increased their fees to pay for their headquarters.

Second, the number of organizations that raised their fees cannot be classified in terms of any particular type: eight out of nine medium-A, eight out of 11 medium-B, six

out of nine medium-C, all four major, and one general type organization have raised their fees.

The fact that many organizations raised their fees implies that their affiliates wished to stabilize their financial basis, and that this had the approval of the entire organization.

### 3.4 Reinforcing the Ability to Expand

Let us now examine 35 organizations for which comparable data is available, to see whether in the last 10 years there has been any change in their schemes for expanding their organizations.

If an organization assigns an organizer for the purpose of expanding the organization, increases the number of staff members concerned, or makes a new financial allocation, then the organization's ability to expand is considered to be strengthened. If such personnel or financial changes are not made, then the ability to expand is considered to remain unchanged; and if no personnel or financial measures are taken, then the ability to expand is considered to be weakened.

Applying these criteria to the 35 organizations, the ability to expand has been strengthened in 10, unchanged in six, and weakened in five. The remaining 14 organizations did not take any personnel or financial measures towards expansion during the past 10 years. Therefore, a relatively large number of organizations have strengthened their ability to expand.

The organizations that have strengthened their ability to expand include three out of 10 medium-A, three out of 11 medium-B, two out of nine medium-C, and two out of four major types. Those whose ability to expand remained unchanged include three medium-A, two major, and one general type. Those that weakened their ability to expand include one medium-A, and two each medium-B and -C types.

### 3.5 Efforts toward Reform

In the light of the above analysis, one can conclude that industrywide organizations of labor unions have tackled reform positively. It is not difficult to find signs of the efforts that many organizations have made towards reforming themselves, including unification, expanding industry coverage, increasing membership fees, and

Table 2. Changes in the Scale of Organizations between the Two Survey Periods

|                             | Change in membership  |  |   | Number of organizations |
|-----------------------------|---|--|---|-------------------------|
|                             |   |  |   |                         |
| <b>Increased 5% or more</b> | *Shokuhin-rokyo (38.7)<br>Sonpo-roren (31.7)<br>Ceramic-rengo (29.6)<br>*Insatsu-roren (16.6)   | Zensen (15.7)<br>Zenkoku-gas (14.4)<br>*Koku-rengo (13.6)  | Shogyo-roren (13.1)<br>*Denryoku-roren (10.2)<br>Jidosha-roren (6.6)  | 10                      |
| <b>Stagnant within 5%</b>   | Nikkenkyo (2.6)<br>*JAM (2.4)<br>Zosen-juki-roren (-0.1)  | Shitetsu-roren (-1.8)<br>*Hitetsu-rengo (-2.8)   | *CSG-Rengo (-3.1)<br>Denki Rengo (-3.4)   | 7                       |
| <b>Decreased 5% or more</b> | Kamipa-rengo (-7.3)<br>Joho-roren (-8.7)<br>Sinkagaku (-9.2)<br>Seiho-roren (-9.3)<br>Chain-rokyo (-9.5)<br>*Shokuhin-rengo (-11.9)<br>NHK-roren (-13.0)<br>*Gomu-rengo (-13.3) | Tekko-roren (-16.9)<br>Zengin-rengo (-17.4)<br>Zenjiko-roren (-18.0)<br>Kagaku-roren (-19.3)<br>*Leisure-Service-Rengo (-20.1)<br>Sen'i-seikatsu-roren (-51.2)<br>*Kensetsu-rengo (-21.9)<br>Kotsu-roren (-22.8) | *Kagaku League 21 (-28.1)<br>Sekiyu-roren (-29.9)<br>Zenzosen-kikai (-39.8)<br>Zenkoku-ippan (-40.1)<br>Zenkoku-Cement (-48.3)<br>Kaiin (-64.3)<br>Zentanko (-73.1) | 23                      |
| <b>Others</b>               | JR-rengo  | JR-roren   |   | 2                       |
| <b>Total</b>                |   |  |   | 42                      |

Note: Asterisks indicate organizations that have merged.

Table 3. Changes in the Functions of Organizations between the Two Survey Periods

| Union type        | Total | Leadership of unified struggle |          |          | Specification of minimum levels of working conditions |          |          | Guideline on restructuring of enterprises |          |          | Systematization of labor-management consultation on industrial policies |          |          |
|-------------------|-------|--------------------------------|----------|----------|---|----------|----------|---|----------|----------|---|----------|----------|
|                   |       | Weaker                         | Stagnant | Stronger | Weaker  | Stagnant | Stronger | Weaker                                    | Stagnant | Stronger | Weaker  | Stagnant | Stronger |
| Total             | 35    | 5                              | 9        | 6        | 5   | 9        | 2        | 4   | 9        | 3        | 5   | 18       | 4        |
| Medium-industry A | 10    | 1                              | 2        | 1        | 0   | 1        | 1        | 0   | 1        | 1        | 1   | 4        | 2        |
| Medium-industry B | 11    | 1                              | 2        | 3        | 2   | 4        | 1        | 4   | 3        | 1        | 1   | 7        | 0        |
| Medium-industry C | 9     | 2                              | 5        | 0        | 2   | 4        | 0        | 0   | 5        | 1        | 1   | 7        | 1        |
| Major-industry    | 4     | 1                              | 0        | 2        | 1   | 0        | 0        | 0   | 0        | 0        | 2   | 0        | 1        |
| General           | 1     | 0                              | 0        | 0        | 0   | 0        | 0        | 0   | 0        | 0        | 0   | 0        | 0        |

Note: "Remains strong" is not included in this comparison.

reinforcing their ability to expand. The question is whether or not these efforts actually produce results.

#### 4.0 Achievements

The achievement of industrywide organizations will be discussed, using comparisons of survey results relating to:

- strengthening of the central leadership in industry-based unified struggle,
- moves of industrywide unions to have minimum working conditions specified,
- moves to deal with the effects of restructuring,
- moves to systematize discussion of industrial policies between labor and management,
- results achieved by efforts to expand, and
- the number of members elected to governmental bodies.

Table 3 shows changes in the functions of industrywide unions affecting 35 organizations whose data are available from the previous survey. The various factors are classified according to whether they have been strengthened, unchanged, or weakened during the period between the surveys. (Note that organizations which are as positive now as they were 10 years ago are not included.)

First, concerning leadership, only six out of 35 organizations have strengthened their leadership, while five have weakened it, and nine have remained weak. Thus, weak leadership (14) is much more evident than strong leadership (6), particularly in medium-C type organizations.

Second, concerning efforts to specify minimum levels of working conditions at enterprises, two out of 35 organizations have made a greater effort than they did 10 years before, whereas nine have made a lesser effort, and five have given up. Thus, weak efforts of this kind (14)

greatly outnumber strong ones (2), particularly in many medium-B and -C type organizations.

Third, concerning guidelines on the restructuring of enterprises, three out of 35 organizations have recently issued guidelines, whereas nine have issued none, and four have given up issuing guidelines. Once again, weak efforts of this kind (13) greatly outnumber strong ones (3), again particularly in medium-B and -C type organizations.

Fourth, concerning systematization of consultation of industrial policies between labor and management, four organizations have recently set up such systems with the relevant employers' associations, whereas 18 have taken no action, and five have given up such consultation. Yet again, weak efforts of this kind (23) greatly outnumber strong ones (4), again particularly in medium-B and -C type organizations.

Fifth, regarding expansion, during fiscal 1999, 59,668 people joined labor unions affiliated with 42 industrywide organizations, representing an average of 1,420.7 new members per organization. This is less than the figure recorded in the previous survey in fiscal 1988, when new members totaled 91,244 for 47 industrywide organizations, representing an average of 1,941.4 per organization. Of the 35 organizations that were included in both surveys and can thus be compared, three increased their membership by 10,000 or more in the previous survey — Zensen, the Japanese Electronic, Electrical & Information Unions (Zen-Nihon Denshi Johokanren Sangyo Rodokumiai Rengokai, Denki Rengo) and the Japanese Federation of Metal Industry Unions — but this time only Zensen achieved a similar figure.

Table 4 shows that seven out of 35 organizations had an

increase in the number of new members during the period between the two surveys, whereas 18 had a decrease or no change. Moreover, 10 organizations had no new members in either survey period.

Finally, Table 5 shows the number of members elected to a governmental body for the 33 organizations with data for both survey periods.

The table indicates that the total number of assembly members supported by industrywide organizations decreased substantially at every level — from 1,763 to 1,368. The rate of decrease greatly exceeds the rate of decrease in the overall number of elected representatives (4.1%). An analysis shows that there was a sharp decrease among prefectural and municipal assembly members, and that the number of upper house members decreased by 40.0%, from 25 to 15. Only the number of lower house members increased, from 11 to 16.

More than half of the organizations — 19 out of 33 — experienced a decrease in the number of assembly members: five out of eight medium-A, eight out of 11 medium-B, three out of nine medium-C, two out of four major, and one general type. Eight organizations had no assembly members in either survey period: one each medium-A and medium-B, and six medium-C types. On the other hand, a mere four organizations had an increase in the number of assembly members, and the margin of increase was small. Two organizations had no change in the number of assembly members.

To sum up, it can hardly be concluded that industrywide organizations have achieved satisfactory results for these activities. Although some organizations made efforts to strengthen their roles, they are the minority, while the majority — mostly medium-B and -C types — either remained weak or gave up their efforts and became weaker.

#### 5.0 Challenges

What has become clear is that industrywide organizations of labor unions have made efforts towards reform but have failed to achieve tangible results. How should this be interpreted?

One interpretation is that they could not achieve their aims because of the unfavorable economic environment, although without such efforts their positions might have been worse.

Another interpretation is that it requires a certain period of time for such efforts to bear fruit. These interpretations imply that as the environment changes or more time passes, their efforts will certainly produce satisfactory results. If so, then it is important for them to continue their efforts.

A third interpretation is that while reform of the organizations may proceed on the basis of internal consensus (which is difficult for democratic organizations like labor unions to achieve), to strengthen the role of industrywide organizations also requires positive pressure on people or bodies outside the organizations themselves — including employers, various ministries, political parties, and workers who do not belong to any union. It is

because of insufficient attention to this additional requirement that the organizations have not been able to realize their aims. Seen from this viewpoint, results cannot be expected from the type of effort that has been made so far, even after the economic environment has changed or a certain time has passed. In fact, since the other parties involved — employers and others — will also change, continued efforts are likely to achieve less in the future. In short, what is required is a reform not of the organizations' structures but of their methods.

If the third interpretation is appropriate, then what kind of challenges should be assigned to the various types of industrywide organization?

The majority of organizations that "remained weak" or "became weaker" are medium-B or -C type. Some of these have made efforts to revise their organizational policies, to carry out mergers with other organizations, to increase membership fees, and so forth. Despite all this, marked differences exist among different types of industrywide organizations. If such differences are related largely to membership figures and labor market exclusivity, then the reforms of organizational structure that they have conducted are insufficient. It seems that further efforts towards the unification of organizations and other reforms will be required.

Among the medium-A and major-type organizations are some that do not function well, and, in some cases, have experienced stagnation or retrogression — for example, with respect to their ability to expand, specification of minimum levels for working conditions, and number of members that are elected to government. Medium-A type organizations should also bear in mind that they are organizations of large-sized unions. They therefore face another major challenge: determining whether and how they can reflect the interests of workers in small and medium-sized unions which will increase further in response to transformation of the industrial structure.

#### Notes:

- <sup>(1)</sup> For a summary of this survey, see Nakamura (1991).
- <sup>(2)</sup> This survey was conducted to examine the achievements of union activities in the 1990s and to explore their future tasks. It was aimed at enterprise-based unions and industrywide organizations of labor unions affiliated with Rengo, and at Rengo itself. The main focuses were the degree of involvement in management by enterprise-based unions, and changes in the organization and function of industrywide organizations. In the case of Rengo, the focus was on unions' participation in policy making.

#### References:

- Nakamura, Keisuke. "Types and Functions of Industrywide Labor Organizations in Japan." *Japan Labor Bulletin* 30. 1 (1991): 5-8.
- Research Institute for Advancement of Living Standards, *Rodokumiai no Mirai wo Saguru — Henkaku to Teitai no 90 Nendai wo Koete* (The Search for the Future of Labor Unions — Overcoming the Reform and Stagnation of the 1990s).

Table 4. Changes in Union Membership between the Two Survey Periods

| Union type        | Number of organizations | Change in membership |           | Unchanged |
|-------------------|-------------------------|----------------------|-----------|-----------|
|                   |                         | Increased            | Decreased |           |
| Total             | 35                      | 7                    | 18        | 10        |
| Medium-industry A | 10                      | 2                    | 7         | 1         |
| Medium-industry B | 11                      | 2                    | 4*        | 5         |
| Medium-industry C | 9                       | 0                    | 5         | 4         |
| Major-industry    | 4                       | 3                    | 1         | 0         |
| General           | 1                       | 0                    | 1         | 0         |

Note: Includes an organization whose membership remained unchanged at 20.

Table 5. Changes in the Number of Assembly Members within Organizations between the Two Surveys

| Union type        | Total assembly members |        |        | Lower house |      |         | Upper house |      |        | Prefectural governments |       |        | Municipal governments |        |        |
|-------------------|------------------------|--------|--------|-------------|------|---------|-------------|------|--------|-------------------------|-------|--------|-----------------------|--------|--------|
|                   | 1989                   | 2000   | Change | 1989        | 2000 | Change  | 1989        | 2000 | Change | 1989                    | 2000  | Change | 1989                  | 2000   | Change |
| Total             | 1,763                  | 1,368  | -22.4% | 25          | 15   | -40.0%  | 11          | 16   | 45.5%  | 163                     | 121   | -25.8% | 1,564                 | 1,216  | -22.3% |
| Medium-industry A | 1,113                  | 913    | -18.0% | 18          | 9    | -50.0%  | 8           | 10   | 25.0%  | 99                      | 75    | -24.2% | 988                   | 819    | -17.1% |
| Medium-industry B | 148                    | 54     | -63.5% | 2           | 0    | -100.0% | 1           | 1    | 0%     | 15                      | 2     | -86.7% | 130                   | 51     | -60.8% |
| Medium-industry C | 23                     | 13     | -43.5% | 0           | 0    | 0%      | 0           | 0    | 0%     | 2                       | 0     | 100.0% | 21                    | 13     | -38.1% |
| Major-industry    | 432                    | 363    | -16.0% | 4           | 5    | 25.0%   | 2           | 5    | 150.0% | 41                      | 41    | 0%     | 385                   | 312    | -19.0% |
| General           | 47                     | 25     | -46.8% | 1           | 1    | 0%      | 0           | 0    | 0%     | 6                       | 3     | -50.0% | 40                    | 21     | -47.5% |
| Quorum            | 68,246                 | 65,464 | -4.1%  | 512         | 500  | -2.3%   | 252         | 252  | 0%     | 2,910                   | 2,940 | 1.0%   | 64,572                | 61,772 | -4.3%  |