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Organizing Marginalized and Non-Regular Workers – A US-Japan Comparison

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March 15, 2007
Discussion Paper No. 4

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Organizing Marginalized and Non-Regular Workers – A US-Japan Comparison

Charles Weathers
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The last thirty years have seen significant decline in the influence of organized labor in practically all advanced industrial democracies (AIDs), but decline has been particularly severe in the US and Japan. According to many critics, union decline is a major factor in the rather high incidence of poverty alleged to exist in both countries. What is clear is that both the American and Japanese union movements are placing high priority on the organization of marginal workers as a core strategy in efforts to revitalize their movements, and to respond to public perceptions of rising inequality and unfairness.

The nature of marginalization differs significantly in each country. The US work force includes large numbers of the so-called working poor, persons who work significant hours, sometimes even in excess of 40 hours per week, but still fail to earn more than poverty level wages. This partly reflects large number of low-wage minorities (especially African-Americans) and immigrants, over 7 million of them illegal, in the work force. In addition, some employers, notably Wal-Mart, blur the line between regular and non-regular worker by paying low wages and fringe benefits and assigning irregular work hours to many of its employees.

In Japan, on the other hand, attention focuses primarily on native, female non-regular workers, especially part-time workers or *paato*. This reflects the rapid rise in the number of non-regular workers in the fifteen years; they currently account for around 1/3 of the workforce. Because of changes in hiring practices over the past ten years, the number of male non-regular workers has risen steadily, but non-regular work remains predominantly female. Foreign workers, while admittedly now essential in some sectors, account for a quite small portion of the work force relative to other OECD nations. Finally, there is an unusually clear differentiation between regular and non-regular employees in Japan.

For over a decade, social movement unionism has been the dominant paradigm for union revitalization efforts in the US. Simply stated, this means that union mobilization should adopt the characteristics of social movements – appealing to social justice, mobilizing the rank and file on a permanent basis, and seeking fundamental political and socioeconomic

reforms. There is no clear paradigm in Japan, largely because the sense of crisis is much less pronounced among Japanese than American unionists, and because the labor movement is divided along ideological lines, although rising differentials (kakusa), and consequent fears of possible mass impoverishment, have emerged as a rallying point.

This paper examines union efforts to organize marginal workers in the US and Japan. It uses the well-developed literature on organizing in the US as a starting point to examine the current conditions of organizing, particularly of non-regular workers, in Japan. While organizing has become the core mission of the US's most important labor organizations, organizing efforts remain comparatively low-profile and often experimental in Japan, reflecting a lesser sense of crisis and sharper divisions among unionists over strategies, objectives, and status. At the same time, we see revealed many common dynamics, including efforts of organizers to appeal to worker desire for dignity or recognition as well as to improve compensation for under-paid employees.

Political Economic Framework

The US and Japan feature arguably the two weakest union movements among AIDs.[1] This reflects the weakness of the political left in both countries, as well as the strong influence of business. In addition, class (and union) consciousness are much weaker than in Europe, partly because the institutionalization of democratic institutions generally preceded the emergence of large-scale unionism. This factor is often seen in divisions and lack of rights consciousness that hinder organizing drives. Finally, the two labor movements are perhaps the most depoliticized among AIDs. The US's AFL-CIO long supported government policymaking on foreign affairs and trade issues and deliberately distanced itself from social movements, especially the civil rights and feminist movements. Labor leaders emphasizing close cooperation with managers became the dominant force inside the Japan's labor movement by the 1960s. As a result, strikes have become exceedingly rare phenomena since the early 1980s. Moreover, the country's social movements have been quite low-profile since the mid-1970s. Rather than being valued for cooperation, however, they are regarded as passive or ineffective (especially in Japan), or as special interests representing relatively privileged workers (US).

US unions have faced the strongest hostility from managers of any democratic country. Today there is a very clear economic incentive for opposing unions, because unionized workers generally earn xx more than non-union workers. In addition, in the American context, unions tend to constrain management freedom of action, though union advocates often claim

[1] French unions have a lower organization rate, but they have significant mobilizing capacities and rely less on formal memberships.

that they tend to raise productivity by forcing managers to confront problematic work practices.

Typically, the situation in Japan is far from clear-cut. Despite the virtually continuous domination of conservative political parties and national bureaucrats of economic policymaking, many observers believe or assume that Japanese employers do not oppose unions, or are even quite receptive to them. While it is true that Japanese managers sometimes welcome unions, my interviews indicate that they also often resist unionization. Moreover, there is great controversy about the role of Japan's unions. The mainstream union movement emphasizes cooperative ties with managers, and many union leaders associate worker interests closely with those of management. Critics believe that excess cooperation has meant neglect of work conditions and the interests of marginal workers. Thus the core issue might briefly restated as: Many managers accept or welcome unions, but perhaps only those that do not act independently.

A distinctive feature of the US employment system is that it is highly varied. This is reflected in the situation that the working poor represents workers in a wide array of jobs, often working long hours, or being employed by major corporations such as Wal-Mart. The Japanese employment system (like most national systems) generally features clearer patterns than the US. Major corporations still prefer to hire school-leavers and nurture them to commit themselves long-term to the organization (though changes over the past decade have been significant – fewer regular workers are hired, and they are expected to take greater personal responsibility for their career development). In addition, compensation correlates closely to firm size, education level, and gender, but not to union membership, in contrast to the large union premium existing in the US.

Thus, marginal workers (excepting immigrants) tend to be women employed as non-regular workers. Their social strata vary greatly, but there is rising concern that a growing number of low-income non-regular workers need living wages to support families. However, as managers constantly (and plausibly) emphasize, many non-regular workers are housewives who rely primarily on their primary breadwinner husbands' incomes. This situation creates a division of interest among female non-regulars that makes consciousness-raising and union mobilization more difficult.

The US and Japan have small welfare states, creating both opportunity and obstacle for unions. Effective unions in the US typically gain health insurance and other fringe benefits for workers, and fringe benefits account for much of the cost differential between union and non-union workers.[2] The possibility of gaining (or in some cases protecting) fringe benefits is

[2] The lack of well-developed social safety net has meant that unions tend to demand equivalent benefits as part of compensation. This has distorted the labor-management relations system and undermined unionism according to Lichtenstein (2002).

frequently a strong incentive for workers to form a union, but also a strong incentive for managers to resist. Fringe benefits are also an important factor in union organizing in Japan, but the cost pressures are less.

Likewise, the growth of marginal work forces and other employment system changes create opportunity and obstacle. The possibility of improving pay and respect create incentives to join unions, and sometimes marginal workers prove very willing unionists. Organizing marginal workers is a means for unions to demonstrate commitment to social justice. They also tend to perform jobs that cannot be sent overseas (or whose loss is not especially threatening). On the other hand, their low wages mean that they contribute little to union finances. (In fact, growing numbers of insecure workers mean financial crunches for unions as well as households.) More generally, many marginal workers work in scattered workplaces, making it difficult to gather workers or conduct meetings. This is a contrast to the mass production factories that were the core of unionism until recently. However, those jobs are now fewer in number and vulnerable to threats of offshoring.

The impact of the public sector differs significantly. The public sector has often served as a vanguard of progressive labor practice in Europe, but in line with their small-government-oriented approaches, both countries have steered away from empowering public sector workers. In response, however, unions have seized openings to build strong representation roles. Public sector organizing surged in the US from the 1960s, and public sector workers spearheaded key issues such as comparable in the 1970s and 1980s (Johnston 1994). Japan's left-wing unions built their strongest positions in the public sector following the war, so that women seeking relatively equal opportunity and long-term careers, for example, typically turned to teaching and the civil-service until the 1980s.

Since around 1980, however, rationalization and marketization of public sector workforces and functions has advanced steadily. US public sector unions have generally maintained their position, although President Reagan's firing of the striking air traffic controllers in 1981 encouraged the intensification of private sector anti-union practices, and outsourcing to private firms has degraded numerous jobs. Japan's public sector policies have played a clearer role in rolling back labor prerogatives. Years of pressure from conservative policymakers and the deflation of socialist ideology have left Japan's once feared leftist unions shadows of their former selves. Particularly important were Administrative Reform (privatization) policies of the 1980s. NTT, for example, was forced to buy cost cutting pressures to terminate family friendly programs in the 1990s. Local governments have steadily increased their use of non-regular workers since the 1970s, as demands for service have grown stronger while budgets have become tighter. As in the US, marketization (outsourcing and competitive bidding) have degraded work practices for many employees. Further, a distinctive feature of

employment practices in Japan is that public sector non-regular workers have few rights. To simplify, public sector agencies are not officially allowed to employ non-regulars, meaning that, legally, many do not clearly exist, and most are not covered by the Labor Standards Law. This situation serves to grossly complicate union representation, to disempower the workers, and to undermine their rights consciousness, since specialized knowledge is necessary to understand their legal conditions.

Changes in Union Approaches

Unions worldwide have suffered weakening influence and image because of rapid socioeconomic change, and most are now learning to protect their social roles by becoming more active, innovative, and proactive. A critical but generally optimistic observer, Lowell Turner (2004), argues that this increasing activism indicates that unions are not the secondary, often passive actors suggested by much recent economic literature.

The US stands out on several counts. First, management hostility means that unions have developed highly refined organizing strategies that integrated sophisticated social and economic strategies with calculated aggressiveness. A related change is that the mainstream labor movement shifted during the 1990s from its traditional conservatism to an openly (though short of radical) left-wing stance. This reflected the growing sense of crisis and the growing influence of the left-wing unions that pioneered new organizing tactics. A crucial part of the union transformation in the US, argues Ruth Milkman (2006), is that the previously maligned occupational unions have seized leadership from the industrial unions that led organized labor in its glory days from the 1930s. The occupational unions, now greatly retooled and reformed, are better suited to organizing workplaces in highly competitive, largely unregulated markets. Other studies suggest that the less pressured European unions have not experienced such drastic transformation (Frege and Kelly 2004).

The dominant paradigm for new organization in the US is social movement unionism. The term is used widely and loosely, but here we primarily follow the approach laid out by Stephen Lopez (2004). social movement unionism emphasizes rank-and-file grassroots-intensive approaches to organizing; new forms of collective action – not just strikes, but activities such as public demonstrations intended to impact broader society; building of labor-community coalitions; and framing demands politically. The latter means in particular emphasizing social justice, attacking corrupt employer practices, and protesting neoliberal economic policies. Social movement unionism is also important as a means of purging American unionism of its greatest deficiencies, business unionism and corruption.

Business unionism refers to the routinization of the union practices, in which unions

performed services for workers, including collective bargaining and grievance arbitration, but worker voice was minimized in the interests of stability. Business unionism was also associated with the distancing of unions from most social movements from the 1950s until recently. Today, union advocates are likely to regard social movements as natural allies of labor unions. Whereas organization of a workplace was previously regarded as the climax of a labor campaign, after which union influence would be institutionalized and robust, Lopez envisions effective organization as sustaining grass-roots protest (Lopez 2004:105-06). Further, social movement unionism resists the propensity of organizations (unions certainly included) to drift into emphasizing organizational interests over those of members. Differently stated, a process of routinization sets in during which union officials would come to pursue their own interests – for example, they might raise their pay and perks, or seek to solidify their positions at member expense by making dubious compromises with managers, suppressing opposition in union elections, and raising their pay and perks. In contrast, Lopez writes, "Social movement unionism can deploy its forces and its efforts in a highly creative and flexible manner" (Lopez 2004:209). Implicit in Lopez's analysis is a view of a "state of nature" economic environment in which labor interests are under constant threat from aggressive business strategies, from the old and simple (low pay) to the new and sophisticated (complex corporate structures that conceal high profits). In such an environment, labor organizations must constantly innovate and struggle, or face the prospect of rebuilding from scratch, if not fading away altogether.

The heightened (though disciplined) militancy advocated by Lopez also reflects the belief that alternative strategies have failed or are inadequate. One alternative strategy is full-service unionism, which calls for raising skill levels, assisting job placement, and performing other labor market functions. A well-known example is Las Vegas, where UNITE-HERE, regarded as one of the AFL-CIO's exemplary unions, has created a good working relationship with employers by helping develop skills demanded by local businesses. Lopez argues that this model is not generally transferable to areas that do not enjoy the economic prosperity fueled by Las Vegas's lucrative gambling industry. Lopez also rejects cooperation is a core union strategy, arguing that many unions pursue to cooperation during the 1980s, but were frequently rebuffed by managers.

Lopez, like other observers, emphasizes a focus on the organization of low-wage workers for strategic as well as humanitarian reasons. Numerous observers find that low-wage workers, including many immigrants, often become strong union supporters in order to bolster their sense of dignity, along with incomes, against disrespectful bosses. Further, they tend to perform jobs, such as maintenance worker or janitor, care worker, and truck driver, that cannot be readily moved, much less offshored; in contrast, the mass production manufacturing

workers who served as the core of 20th century union movements have seen their numbers reduced and their livelihoods increasingly threatened by technological innovations and offshoring. Therefore, low-wage workers should serve as the base of a transformed union movement, which can steadily strengthen its influence and reach out to vulnerable sectors as it strengthens its foundation.

Needless to say, Japanese unions are far from embracing social movement unionism. Mainstream Japanese unions continue to emphasize cooperation, and to assign strong normative as well as practical importance to their decades-long commitment to productivity-raising, as manifested through the unions' participation in the productivity movement that commenced in 1955. For example, Sasamori Kiyoshi, the former president of Japan's leading labor federation, Rengo, recently appealed to the normative and practical virtues of a cooperative relationship:

"In the so-called "1955 system"… [1955] was a great turning point for management and labor as well….All writers have affirmed that the three productivity principles (securing and expanding employment, enhancement of labor-management cooperation and consultation, and of the fair sharing of the fruits [of economic growth]) were part of the system…. There is no mistake that this contributed greatly to the prosperity of the national economy, the development of enterprise and to the formation of labor-management relations, and of the livelihood security of workers and their families…

"The foundation underlining these three principles, the greatest natural resource "assets" of a natural resource-poor Japan, are supposed to be the diligent work force and the appreciation of people, the spirit of "sovereign employees....However, as Japan sank into a deflationary spiral following the bursting of the bubble, "employment" became sacrificed with overcoming foreign competition as the justification." (*Business Labor Trend*, November 2005, inside cover.)

The commitment is held particularly strongly by unions in Japan's manufacturing sectors. The left wing of the union movement has always rejected close cooperation, but its influence is much diminished since the 1970s. As described below, Japanese unions have moved to steadily toward making organization a priority over the past 10 years, but have yet to make it a true priority. The cooperative federation Rengo emphasizes policymaking participation, leaving organizing to affiliated unions. The left-wing federation Zenroren is closer to emphasizing organization, but still falls well short of the American commitment. Further, while both Zenroren and the scattered community unions may possess the oppositionist-activist mentalities that seem necessary to launch determined organizing campaigns, they lack resources, both financial and personnel, to do so.

The United States

The 1980s were a disastrous decade for traditional unionism in the US, as the manufacturing sector endured drastic downsizing and sharp declines in the influence of industrial unions like the Machinists and Steelworkers. However, some unions, notably the SEIU and Unite, were launching some innovative strategies aimed at organizing the fast-growing groups of marginal and low-wage workers. The most important movement was the Justice for Janitors (JfJ) campaign, in Los Angeles, run by the SEIU. JfJ remains today the template for union organizing in the US, and the SEIU, as a result of this and other successes, has emerged as a powerful social and political force in the US.

The Service Employees International Union (SEIU) has become the strongest force in the campaign to revitalize the labor movement because of its dedication to organizing, development of innovative strategies, embrace of minorities, and cultivation of labor leaders. That union was founded in 1921, and is the prototype of an old AFL occupational union that has transformed itself to organize workers in the globalized economy (Milkman 2006). In the 1970s and early 1980s, the union was regarded as somewhat corrupt and its influence was declining. At that time, in Los Angeles and some other cities, building owners steadily outsourced cleaning and maintenance to subcontractors, who quickly forced down worker wages, reducing union membership in the process. Low wages in turn led to a influx of immigrants, many of them illegal, into the industry.

By the late 1970s, however, the rapid influx of minorities into the industries led to demands for reform within the SEIU, and progressive leaders gained control of the organizing department. In 1980, John Sweeney, currently president of the AFL-CIO, became president of the SEIU. In two years, Sweeney greatly expanded the SEIU's organizing staff, doubling membership dues to pay for the expansion.

The Los Angeles JfJ campaign was able to draw on a core of activists and earlier experiences. California was the main site of one of the most successful social movements of the 1960s and 1970s, the United Farm Workers, which improved pay and working conditions for immigrant agricultural laborers. By the late 1970s, the United Farm Workers was in severe decline, but many of the persons active in the movement went on to participate in the JfJ and other progressive campaigns.[3] The SEIU began conducting JfJ campaigns in the mid-1980s in Denver and Pittsburgh, and applied these experiences to the Los Angeles campaign, which commenced in 1988.

The campaign confronted the typical problems of organizing in the globalized economy

[3] For example, one of JfJ's major architects was Eliseo Medina, a rising star in the Farm Workers Union prior to a falling out with its difficult leader, Cesar Chavez.

(Milkman 2006). Workers were scattered in numerous worksites, while employer responsibility was diffused through layers of subcontracting and multiple businesses, including owners of buildings, renters, and 18 different buildings service contractors. Thus, any one contractor could potentially block a settlement. Moreover, even if the union could organize a particular cleaning firm, that firm might switch its business to a nonunion subsidiary; alternatively, the client could switch to a cheaper nonunion contractor. Further, at that time, it was generally believed that immigrants, particularly illegal ones, were extremely difficult to organize.

The union used centralized, top-down planning to devise strategies to overcome the multiple problems. First, it sidestepped the National Labor Relations Board (NLRB) process. This system, which calls for union certification elections, is widely regarded as rigged against unions, as the complex but laxly enforced rules generally allow employers to interfere in the election process. Penalties for violations of rules or laws, such as illegal dismissal, are too derisory to deter aggressive managers. Another concern was that the bureaucratic complexities of NLRB elections tended to alienate rank-and-file workers from unions (Milkman 2006:156).

The campaign utilized five inter-related strategies, based on Milkman's case study.

1. Research and information gathering. The Los Angeles campaign employed a full-time researcher whose efforts were supplemented by researchers at SEIU's national headquarters in Washington. One objective was to identify the targeted businesses' legal and economic weaknesses that the union could exploit.
2. Developing an array of sophisticated and aggressive illegal tactics. The organizers used legal tactics to protected workers from dismissal. The main tactic was filing a series of unfair labor practice complaints with the NLRB because US labor law allows employers to replace workers striking to demand higher wages but not workers who are striking over unfair labor practices.
3. Mobilizing, preparing, and empowering the workers. Organizers used worker education (utilizing in large part information provided by the researchers) and public demonstrations to give workers a sense of empowerment.
4. Conducting public demonstrations. Public demonstrations help to draw attention and stimulate public support, as well as height in the mobilization of the workers. The media was often used to disseminate unflattering information about major firms in the janitorial industry. Union organizers took care that public protests were peaceful and orderly.
5. Building coalitions. The SEIU sought allies among other unions, local politicians, and community organizations, such as churches. Members of the Teamsters, a major AFL-CIO union representing truck drivers, refused to make deliveries or collect trash from buildings

being struck by the SEIU.

The JfJ campaign also employed unconventional strike and picketing practices. Strikes aimed less at preventing services from being provided, and more at influencing public opinion. Picketing was conducted according to a nationwide strategy. Unions in one city would respect pickets from another city, so that they backed up one another's actions. That made it possible to apply pressure on firms nationwide, and to threaten to escalate pressure.

The JfJ campaign made steady gains from 1988, and of the SEIU stepped up its activities in 1990. In spring 1990, the SEIU launched a strike against ISS, a major buildings service contractor. On June 15, the union conducted a peaceful march on a Century City office complex. Police attacked the demonstrators, who included union sympathizers as well as janitors, and several dozen demonstrators were beaten. The attack, which was shown on TV, created public outrage and brought SEIU allies directly into the dispute. The mayor, Tom Bradley, immediately telephoned property owners to voice his concern. In a possibly crucial move, the leader of a powerful SEIU local in New York City, after watching the television reports, called the president of ISS into his office and threatened to launch a major major labor dispute is the firm did not settle with the union in Los Angeles. The SEIU signed a contract with ISS in Los Angeles the same day, and the later extended the contract to other firms.

Perhaps the SEIU's most impressive follow-up was a long-term campaign that concluded with the unionization of 74,000 home care workers in Los Angeles Country in 1999 (Delp and Quan 2002). This was the biggest organizing victory for the US labor movement since 1937, when 112,000 Ford workers joined the United Auto Workers. Once again success was achieved among a low-wage, largely immigrant and minority work force, but this composed overwhelmingly of women. They were scattered over 4000 square miles and spoke more than 100 languages. The campaign took around 12 years and cost more than $1 million. Organizers reportedly visited 33,000 workers at their homes. In addition the SEIU persuaded of the California legislature to enact a law in 1992 leading home care workers unionize. This campaign, along with several associated campaigns, organize the more than 100,000 home care workers in California during the 1990s.

Like the JfJ campaign, the home care worker campaign emphasized grass-roots organizing, coalition-building, and sophisticated tactics to cope with complex legal situations. One of the most difficult problems was that no authority possessed authority to take responsibility for the workers' well-being or conduct collective bargaining with them. In addition, California state courts had ruled that the home care workers were independent contractors without the right to unionize – individual clients were ruled the clients, even though public agencies paid the bills. Ultimately, organizers, mobilized home care workers, and various allies, including religious

organizations and politicians, generated enough political pressure to secure increased federal funding, and later to bring the California legislature to establish state agencies to exercise authority over the home care worker program.

Organizers had great difficulty in locating and contacting the scattered workers at the start of the campaign, but once contacted many were eager to participate. The SEIU enlisted more than 12,000 home care workers to the campaign in less than six months in 1987-88. They kept the workers mobilized during the long campaign in part by conducted associated campaigns, such as mass demonstrations in support of raising the state's minimum wage or fighting cuts in funding. Sometimes, successes were achieved, helping to keep the workers energized.

One of the lessons of these and other campaigns have been that immigrants often make staunch union members and activists. It was originally assumed that language difficulties and, in the case of illegals, threats of deportation would turn them from union activities. Instead, a large literature testifies that a desire for greater respect and decent compensation often strongly motivates immigrants and minorities to participation in union activities. Employer threats are less potent than previously suspected, partly because threats of dismissal often create little pressure when wages are poor. As for deportation, many workers assume that they will simply return to the US, or view it as a nuisance compared to the violence that some have encountered in their native countries. Finally, many Mexicans and other ethnic or immigrant groups have strong senses of community created by living and working together. These bonds of social solidarity often underpin strong worker and union identity.

The SEIU's success in increasing its membership from the 1980s to the mid-1990s helped make it a strong force for reform in the AFL-CIO. Similarly, John Sweeney became the logical choice for president when the reform group forced out the old guard in 1995. However, the failure to halt the erosion of membership created tensions that led to the federation's rupture in 2005. The AFL-CIO split occurred primarily because of fierce disagreements about revitalization strategies, not because of ideology. In short, the mainstream AFL-CIO leadership wanted to maintain a broad-based approach utilizing three main areas – organizing, politics, and international solidarity – while the dissidents wanted to focus nearly all resources on organizing alone.

The SEIU's influence is visible in Japan as well as the US. A number of Japanese observers have observed SEIU activities. A Seikyo Roren senior official acknowledged being impressed by the funding and the education program provided for organizing (interview), and some organizers now use organizing materials designed by the AFL-CIO, including a document shown to the author by a Seikyo Roren organizer.[4]

[4] I have not confirmed the original, but it is probably *A Training Manual for Union Organizers*. The weblink on the manual opens the AFL-CIO's "The Labor Educator" site.

Japan: Private Sector Organizing by Mainstream Unions

In Japan, organizing part-timers has been an on-again off-again issue for unions since the early 1980s (Suzuki 2006). The unions of the cooperative union federation, Domei, and its rival, left-wing Sohyo, wanted to put organizers in the field at that time, but were diverted toward different priorities. In particular, as a merger between the two federations became imminent, the two rivals tended instead to focus on tightening their federations in order to protect their influence from one another. The bursting of the economic bubble around 1991 worsened the environment for workers and unions alike, leading to a rapid increase in the hiring of part-timers – and in efforts to raise their skill levels – as businesses came under pressure to reduce labor costs.

As concerns about inequality began to rise, paato became a major issue for Rengo by around 2000 – though the concerns of federation officials should not be taken to mean that all affiliated unions are equally concerned about non-regular workers. In 2001, Rengo organized Action Plan 21, a plan for bolstering organizing. Action Plan 21 increased the number of organizers, and reportedly helped bring 293,749 new members into the federation during the year to September 2003. However, net losses were greater.[5] Rengo has since announced a second and third Action Plan 21. The third Action Plan 21, decided at the October 2005 convention, called for organizing 600,000 workers (480,000 regular and 120,000 paato) in two years. By June 2006, just 75,000 had been organized, but 40,725 were paato. At this moment, organizing of paato is one of the union movement's few relatively bright spots. The current organization rate is currently just 4.3%, but has been rising steadily for about three years (*Asahi*, 29 December 2006, p. 2). In the meantime, the officially estimated union organization rate fell to 18.2% for 2006, down from 18.7% in 2005, marking the 31st consecutive year of decline. In 2006, Rengo established Paato Joint Struggle Council (*Paato Kyoto Kaigi*), to bolster struggles for paato rights and benefits, but only 15 union initially participated.

As with the AFL-CIO in the US, active organizing by Rengo is actually conducted by just a handful of unions. In the two-year period from October 1, 2003 to September 30, 2005, only seven unions were able to organize more than 10,000 persons.[6] These were Jichiro, UI Zensen Domei, Denki Rengo (electronics), Nikkyoso (public school teachers), Joho Roren (telecommunications), JSD (groceries and services), and JPU (postal) (all seven are industrial

[5] See Hyodo (2006) on recent Rengo organizing initiatives. The breakdown is generally too lacking in detail to know if new members were brought in by Rengo organizers, or organizers for Rengo unions.

[6] Scale is generally important to union organizing. With one exception, no Rengo affiliate with under 40,000 members organized significant numbers of members during this period.

unions). They accounted for 153,140 of the total 225,079 (68%) of new Rengo recruits for those two years, with UI Zensen Domei alone accounting for 70,068, or 31%. Unfortunately, just one-fourth – 56,970 – were previously unorganized. UI Zensen Domei recruited 31,856 (56%) of that total. 5 of the above unions organized significant numbers of part-timers – UI Zensen Domei, JSD, JPU, Zen-yusei (postal workers), and Joho Roren.

The Japan Institute for Labour Policy and Training (JILPT) conducted a survey on paato organization in January and February 2005 (Rodo Seisaku Kenkyu-Kenshu Kiko 2006). It covered five industrial unions, including Zensen Domei, Food Rengo, Service Rengo, were covered, and 143 union locals responded. The workplaces covered were in sectors that employ high ratios of paato, including distribution, food services (shokuhin), and restaurants. The survey was answered by union officials (not workers), with multiple answers allowed for many questions. In 70.7% of unions, paato and regular workers belong to the same union. Only 4.1% of the unions include only paato. The main reasons for joining unions include improving labor conditions (60.9%) and strengthening the unions negotiating power (58.6%). 57.6% of respondents believed that part-timers' volume of work had increased in their workplaces, and only 6.3% that it had decreased. 57.4% responded that managers had accepted the unionization of PT, and just 9.1% that they opposed it. JILPT researchers believe these results indicate that many managers value the contributions and opinions of paato, and therefore welcome their organization by unions. 79.3% agreed that "we became able to reflect the opinions of PT in union activities" and 70.1% that "labor conditions improved."

Rengo is trying to bolster its own organizing. It is placing representatives in regional offices, thought these efforts are still at an early stage, and are not expected to be fully effective until around 2011, according to the official I interviewed.[7] Rengo operates phone call-in services, which are a standard means for workers to make contact with unions in Japan. The Rengo Osaka Center for General Information and Support (Rengo Osaka nan de mo sodan sentaa), for example, takes calls in Kansai and generally refers persons to the most appropriate union, often the local branch of UI Zensen Domei.

UI Zensen Domei accounts for most new organizing in Rengo (it was known as Zensen Domei until a 2002 merger). It is expected to soon overtake Jichiro to become Japan's largest union. Jichiro has attracted much positive attention recently for large-scale organizing, primarily of paato working in supermarkets and department stores (that is, workplaces where large-scale work forces can be tapped).

UI Zensen Domei was originally a textile workers union (known as Zensen Domei until a

[7] Official of Rengo Osaka, Rengo's Osaka branch. August 2006, Osaka. Rengo Osaka is Rengo's most important branch.

recent merger) representing large numbers of women. As the industry steadily restructured, shedding workers and sending work offshore, the union adjusted by representing workers in other service sectors, especially distribution and retailing. In 1973, it began to deploy organizers. It is far more centralized than most Japanese industrial unions, which generally conduct primarily coordinating functions, and seeks to force its enterprise union affiliates to follow guidelines rather than align too closely with management. Whether it is successful in maintaining independence and protecting worker standards is subject to considerable debate. However, its commitment to organizing has enabled the union to prosper. It boasts 951,000 members, including around 380,000 part-timers, and stable finances that underpin continuous organizing.

Like SEIU, which became the US's largest union around 2000, UI Zensen Domei generates considerable controversy, though for different reasons. SEIU draws criticism for some observers for top-down organizing and for failing to follow up some organizing campaigns with effective contract bargaining and continued mobilization. Many union supporters were unhappy with SEIU's role in splitting the AFL-CIO in 2005. While SEIU is decidedly left-wing, UI Zensen Domei is cooperation-oriented, though more assertive than most major cooperative Japanese unions, which does not necessarily mean much per se. Opinions differ widely. Honda Kazunari, who has studied Zensen Domei organizing of non-regular workers, regards it as Japan's best union, and a highly effective organizer. Critics accuse it of conducting top-down campaigns that emphasize contacts with and concerns of managers over those of workers. Community union acquaintances believe that some UI Zensen Domei organizers make dubious deals with managers, and one Jichiro official scoffed that many UI Zensen Domei members do not even know that they are in the union. Sociologist Glenda Roberts reports that the UI Zensen Domei (as it was then known) local that represented her factory workers in the 1980s did next nothing to improve worker conditions, providing nothing more than a symbolic presence.

UI Zensen Domei has also been accused of undercutting other unions. Some managers clearly tolerate or welcome UI Zensen Domei organization partly because it serves as a barrier to activity by left-wing unions – that is also one of the union's selling points to managers. However, some observers also accuse UI Zensen Domei of organizing workplaces in direct opposition to other unions – in effect, helping managers to bust independent-minded or confrontational unions.[8]

There is also conflicting information regarding relations with managers during organizing activities. Honda asserts that managers generally welcome Zensen Domei organizing drives,

[8] Interview, community union official, Toyama Prefecture, June 2006.

at least in the union's primary sectors, supermarkets and distribution.[9] This reflects the greatly increased importance of part-time workers in these sectors. Managers need to raise the productivity, skill levels, and stability of their part-time workers, and therefore welcome the union contribution in providing a channel for worker voice. There is no doubt that managers in Japan sometimes welcome organization – even left-wing union leaders have mentioned occasional cases to me.

However, two interviews with UI Zensen Domei officials – the head of the Osaka regional office and two senior officials with organizing responsibilities at the national headquarters in Tokyo – indicate that management resistance was the norm.[10] Why this author's interview results conflict so directly with the interpretation of a well-established researcher like Honda remains unresolved.

UI Zensen Domei conducts two levels of organization. Its regional offices communicate with individual workers, primarily in small firms, and try to resolve their problems and to organize their workplaces.[11] In the case of the Osaka office, the most common initial contact is referrals from Rengo Osaka Center for General Information and Support. The second most common initial type is contacts from workers have employment problems, and are encouraged by friends who are members of UI Zensen Domei to contact the union for assistance. In these cases, the union may function much like a community union dealing with small and mid-size businesses, though it will be able to bring more resources to bear. Managers occasionally ask the union to organize their workplace, though the contact will be indirect, and it happens rarely. A breakdown of regional organizing results, provided by the Osaka office, indicates that many regional offices organize very few or no new members.

Of more relevance here is the union's campaigns to organize non-regular workers in large enterprises. UI Zensen Domei has 144 organizers. Seven general organizers attached to the central headquarters or other higher levels, and 137 work primarily at the regional level. (Officials note with pride that theirs is the only union to operate in all of the country's 47 prefectures and administrative regions (*todofuken*)). The main organizing priorities are not non-regular workers (or women) per se, but unorganized workers in companies that are already unionized – in practice, however, these are primarily part-timers in companies where the regular workers have long been unionized. (As noted by many observers, a major change in practice by UI Zensen Domei and some other unions has been recruitment of a much wider

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[9] See *Business Labor Trend*, July 2006, pp. 18-22. Also, discussion with Prof. Honda, 1 March 2007, Tokyo.

[10] Interview, Chief of Osaka Prefectural branch; 23 August 2006, Osaka. Interview, two senior officials with responsibility for organizing; 2 November 2006, Tokyo.

[11] The Osaka branch is probably typical of Zensen Domei branch offices in many respects, but being in a major metropolitan area, it has a staff of 11 rather than the usual 3 or 4, and represents a large number of workers. The official estimated that around 30% of its members are non-regulars.

range of paato. Previously, only higher-ranking paato with longer hours were recruited, but unions now seek to recruit the majority, though paato with very short hours are apparently still excluded from union activity in some sectors.) 60% of new recruits in the five years through 2006 were part-timers.

While Honda emphasizes that most managers welcome union organization (at least by cooperative unions like UI Zensen Domei), interviewees told me that they routinely meet resistance, including unfair labor practices. There is about one court case a year. (The union has three lawyers on consulting contracts, engaged largely in problems related to organization, rationalization, and bankruptcy.) Unlike Zenroren and community unions (the left wing), UI Zensen Domei does not generally pass out flyers. Organizing often goes on in secret, though UI Zensen Domei officials are often introduced to employees by managers. The two senior officials generally stressed the importance of building relations with the workers through a series of meetings. This is a fairly conventional Japanese approach, and different from the top-down organizing approach (i.e., through agreements with managers) generally attributed to the union. On the other hand, they explained that in large workplaces the union is likely to approach the managers first, though there are cases of bottom-up organizing in large workplaces. While UI Zensen Domei utilizes thee basic approaches, they emphasized that every situation is different, and that organizers must use their own discretion in adopting a strategy.

Zensen Domei has increased membership steadily for several years, and Honda believes that the great challenge for the next decade will be learning to induce greater participation from members. Obtaining benefits may also be a problem. At present, the economy is growing steadily, and worker shortages have become commonplace, ensuring that most firms will agree to at least minimal improvements in pay and conditions. When growth slows, it is not clear that wage raises will continue or be sufficient to satisfy part-timers paying union dues. These are invariably kept low for non-regular workers by all unions, but still represent significant investments to low-wage workers. Access to union-provided benefits like recreational activities and discount trips (such as ski tours) are also inducements important to some people.

Public Sector Organizing by Mainstream Unions

In recent years, the government has been steadily reducing the number of civil servants, privatizing facilities such as daycare centers, and outsourcing services to private firms. As a result, the number of nonregular public-sector workers has grown steadily, even though public-sector agencies are prohibited, in principle, from employing nonregular workers. Due

to this and other legal complexities, it is difficult to know how many nonregular public-sector workers there are. All local governments that I have investigated utilize particular means of evading or breaking laws restricting the use of non-regular workers. Pay, fringe benefits, and other conditions also vary by local government, generally reflecting its financial condition and degree of union influence.

The hiring of non-regular workers became significant by the 1970s when local governments hired rinji (a type of non-regular worker) as the rapid expansion of and demand for services outstripped budgets. For example, the number of daycare centers increased rapidly during the 1970s and many of the new daycare workers were rinji. Since the early 1990s, the fiscal condition of local governments has deteriorated badly, and the central government has grown ever fonder of market-oriented economic policymaking. With the population aging and poverty levels rising, however, the demand for services is hardly slowing. The government's Trinity Reform, which will reduce central government subsidies to local governments, and the market-test system, mandating bidding between public and private sector agencies, will increase pressures to reduce labor costs. One measure is to reduce pay and fringe benefits for non-regular workers, sometimes by changing their status.

Jichiro, the local civil servants union and Japan's largest union, has periodically announced new organizing programs or priorities beginning in 1982. Another, in 1992, aimed largely at organizing workers in the growing public-related sector (i.e., private contractors for outsourced public services). A following union program, launched in 1999, emphasized the need to organize home helpers (who serve primarily elderly persons living at home), who have notoriously poor pay and work conditions. Despite the plans, Jichiro membership fell to 997,000 in 2001. Jichiro attributed the decrease in part to outsourcing to both private and so-called auxiliary (quasi-public) organizations (*gaikaku dantai*), claiming that the 280,000 blue-collar positions existing in 1986 had been reduced by over 100,000; but the union also acknowledged that organizing efforts were lagging. For example, only about 20,000, or 6.6%, of public sector non-regulars, and only a few thousand home helpers, were organized by Jichiro. Jichiro acknowledged that it lacked officials who could dedicate themselves to organizing and that its organizations lacked experience in private-sector organizing (Saito 2006:216).

On January 1, 2006, Jichiro and Zenkoku Ippan merged. Jichiro hoped to strengthen its organizing capabilities by merging with a union well regarded for its assertiveness and recruitment of individual workers (in contrast to nearly all Rengo unions, but much like community unions). In addition, about 30 to 40% of Zenkoku Ippan's membership was in sectors performing public related functions or outsourced functions from local governments.[12]

[12] Following the merger, Jichiro kept its name as it was, while Zenkoku Ippan became Jichiro Zenkoku

At its 2003 convention, Jichiro decided again to strengthen its organizing capabilities. Jichiro decided to increase union dues by 20 yen per month per member to create a fund for organizing "service"-providing sectors (notably including home helpers).

Jichiro also established about 12 organizers on two-year contracts in 2004. They have had their contracts renewed once so far. However, in discussions with three of the contractors, it was indicated that there is considerable disagreement within the federation about the appropriate roles of the contract organizers or whether they should even be utilized.[13] Some activist members are angered that the union employs them on a contract basis, particularly with insecure work being a major issue for unions. The four organizers have varied backgrounds, but share activist tendencies. Two had prior experience as local union officials.

One contract organizer was hired largely because he knew Jichiro officials who knew he shared their concerns, though his job experience was not directly related. He acknowledged that he lacks the experience to do effective organizing, but generally tours workplaces with experienced officials with activist mentalities; two of them participated in the interview. They emphasized a major gap in consciousness between themselves and Jichiro headquarters. The headquarters instructs to participate in movements – just organize workers – but the three officials believe that they are always related. Implicit in the discussion was a sense of activism as a lifestyle. They also commented that Jichiro is relatively fragmented (in contrast to UI Zensen Domei, which is well centralized by Japanese union standards). This means that while the center tries to push Prefectural branches into pursuing organizing and other activities it has little leverage to actually force them to do so. This has the advantage, however, of leaving regional officials to take independent initiatives.

Toya, another contract organizer, had organized 44 workers, all female public sector non-regular workers, into a Jichiro sub-union as of June 2006. One of the main problems she faces is that many Jichiro members look down on non-regular employees, partly because they have something of the old elitist attitude (they must pass competitive exams to become civil servants), and partly because they believe that many non-regular employees do not manage their money or personal affairs well. Two of the union members, daycare center workers, explained how they came to be a member of Toya's union. First woman: "The direct chance came when Toya-san went around the daycare center, and started talking about how things were at work. She came twice, and after that we got a place to meet and got together once or twice a month."

Second woman: "At first, I didn't want to go directly to talk. But one time, the director [of

Ippan Zenkoku Hyogikai.

[13] I interviewed four of the contract organizers in 2006. One declined to discuss his Jichiro-related activities and instead discussed his experiences in community unions. The other three are Ms. Toya (1 June 2006), Mr. Horioka (October 2006), and Mr. Saito (October 2006). All organizers' and union officials' names in this report are pseudonyms, apart from prominent officials like Rengo president Takagi.

the daycare center] told me to go. The director wanted to avoid losing face, as I recall, and wanted to show cooperation [with the union], so told us to go, go so that everyone would say that ABC Daycare Center was cooperative. The director is a member of Jichiro, but is not especially enthusiastic so that is not the reason. But it wouldn't look good if someone from our workplace didn't go, so we were told to go.

"So then while I was participating at the gathering and it came my time to talk, I came to realize how much dissatisfaction I had. Until now I had not thought about saying it – because we were hired under those conditions so I thought that there was nothing but to consent and accept it. But Toya-san told us that that wasn't so and so we knew that we could change things, and that sometimes there were colleagues with the same ideas, and we realized that there were people who would work hard to help us build a union."

Horioka, another contract organizer, covers a large area in central and northern Japan, focusing on particular sectors including health care workers. He noted that his large territory means that considerable time is devoted unproductively to travel. He described the process of organizing as starting with a meeting with one person from a workplace (two if he is lucky) and steadily building personal relations and increasing the number from there. Organizing a workplace generally takes about two years. An important motivation for workers is getting opportunities to discuss complaints about working conditions and irritating or abusive superiors.

Zenroren

Japan's number two labor federation is Zenroren, which numbers over a million members, well below Rengo's six million-plus. Zenroren includes significant numbers of communist activists, although many of the federation's members are said to be unhappy about their influence. Zenroren is nevertheless undoubtedly the organization of choice for some non-communist activists impatient with Rengo's emphasis on cooperation. Zenroren, in its Mid-term Plan in operation in 2006, called for devoting 20% of its budget to organizing, although one senior official describe that target as wholly unrealistic (interview, senior official for Seikyo Roren).

Zenroren's local civil servants' union is Jichi Roren, which formed from left-wing breakaways from Jichiro in 1989. It included 202,000 members in 2006, a decline of 9,000 from 2005. In 2001, Jichi Roren proclaimed a strengthened commitment to organizing non-regular workers. In 2002, it elaborated the targets, specifying insecure employees in privatized daycare centers, school lunch programs, and home helper programs as especially in need of union assistance. The union also argued that the growing role of private sector firms

in public services was widening the divide between regular and non-regular workers and making organization more difficult (Saito 2006:216-18). One Zenroren source indicated that Jichi Roren makes important use of OB's to conduct organizing (interview, Yone).[14] Other organizations, including Kokko Roren (95,000 members in 2006, down 6,000) and Kokko Rengo (119,000, down 3,000) are in similar positions of facing declining membership and facing privatization challenges from local governments and central government agencies. (Saito 2006:218-20)

In 2003 and 2004, Zenroren designated 12 national organizers on three-year contracts.[15] In contrast to Jichiro, which recruited contract organizers at large, Zenroren's national organizers were recruited from within the federation. Hence, while the central headquarters pays their expenses, their positions apparently entail a shifting of costs rather than significant additional costs. It was not decided (as of January 2007) whether their positions would be renewed; since they are Zenroren officials, however, they do not face job insecurity, in contrast to Jichiro organizers. Twelve organizers cannot exert a huge impact, but their role is partly *wadai-tsukuri* (a means of drawing attention) – to emphasize that Zenroren is serious about organizing. The twelve organizers, the Zenroren senior official in charge of organizing, and other concerned and persons gather in Tokyo once every two months for 2-day-1-night sessions, where they present reports and exchange information. There have been 14 meetings as of late January 2007. There are also meetings held in different cities every six months. They conduct activities such as visiting non-aligned unions to learn about their problems, and do PR activities such as distributing flyers around train stations. The activities seem typical of left-wing labor organizations and other protest organizations in Japan.

The cooperative association, Seikyo, along with its union, Seikyo Roren, is a somewhat exceptional case.[16] Seikyo was established around 1947, but really developed following the consumer panics that occurred in the wake of the 1973 oil embargo,[17] a brief but humiliating episode in Japanese business history. Numerous companies engaged in rampant hoarding and price-gouging to gain exploitative profits. Temporary shortages of many products occurred,

[14] An "OB" (old boy) is a long-time veteran, generally retired from official duties but sometimes still active on behalf of the organization. OB union leaders frequently conduct organizing-related and other activities for unions, probably because it serves to reduce costs while allowing the persons to remain active. For another labor-related example, Ministry of Labor OBs once frequently served as representatives to shingikai on behalf of the Ministry, though examination of recent records indicate that this practice seems to have been curtailed from around 2000.

[15] They were apparently hired one by one rather than in a group like Jichiro's contract organizers. Yone was confirmed in his position in August 2004. This information comes from interviews with Kasu and Yone, and details are neither complete nor completely consistent.

[16] Unless otherwise noted, the information about Seikyo and Seikyo Roren is based primarily on an interview with Mori Makoto, a senior Seikyo Roren official (November 1, 2006, Tokyo).

[17] The subsequent decline in business image and prestige was part of the background to the brief surge of left-wing and union militancy that led to the well-known 32.9% wage increase in the 1974 shunto wage negotiating round.

and the panic buying of toilet paper is especially well remembered. Seikyo's range of businesses include supermarkets, discount department stores, and university coops. As a kind of a social movement, Seikyo has enjoyed strong commitment from members, many of whom are also its employees, but the relationship has become more complex as Seikyo has steadily evolved into something close to a conventional large retail operation (though it still receives tax breaks). Seikyo managers do not oppose organizing or union activities, presumably because this would conflict with the organization's social-consumer movement legacy. My interview with a Seikyo Roren official was the only one in which I was not informed that management opposes unions or utilizes unfair labor practices.

The workers tend to be committed to both Seikyo and the union, Seikyo Roren. The cooperative has long been able to utilize the energy and spirit of the workers to get lots of work out of them. An unfortunate side effect, according to Seikyo Roren, is that wages and work conditions are rather poor. The union increasingly believes that it needs to be able, like management, to draw on the energy and spirit of the workers to protect employment conditions as an increasingly harsh business environment creates ever-stronger cost-cutting pressures.

Seikyo Roren includes about 60,000 members, of whom about 2/3 are part-timers. As a result of the non-confrontational situation and the activist slant of Zenroren unions, Seikyo Roren features strong worker participation, particularly by the part-timers (Rodo Seisaku Kenkyu-Kenshu Kiko 2006). Unfortunately, survey results also indicate that activism has not generated strong influence. About 60% of Seikyo employees are members of Seikyo Roren. Part-timers, nearly all of them women, account for nearly 70% of Seikyo Roren members. The regular employee members are predominantly male.

Seikyo Roren conducts little active organizing, but organizing new members became a priority issue about two to three years ago, partly because Seikyo is stepping up its use of contracting-out. This means that Seikyo Roren will need to organize outside of Seikyo itself to maintain influence (Mori affirmed that so far subcontracting firms have not opposed union activities). There has been intense internal debate about organizing strategies, and it is certain that resources devoted to organizing will increase, though by how much is not clear at all. Union officials have discussed devoting 20% of their budget to organizing, though in reality only about 3% is so allocated at present. At present, there are only two "true" organizers in the union (including one interviewed, as described below). Many of Seikyo's part-timers are in their forties and fifties, and are approaching retirement age. Mori has pushed a plan to reemploy them as union organizers working within Seikyo but it has not worked out. Seikyo Roren has operated an organizing training program for around ten years, but it has been quite limited, and the union was planning to begin a more intense program beginning in January

2007. Another problem for Seikyo Roren is that Rengo competitor Chain Rokyo organized some Seikyo stores in Kansai, perhaps with the blessing of managers who preferred to keep out a left-wing union. There is some information exchange between Seikyo Roren and UI Zensen Domei, but interaction does not appear to be significant.

One of Seikyo Roren's organizers, Yone, who is also one of the twelve national organizers, recently organized the part-timers at a university cooperative. About 30% of Seikyo employees work in university cooperatives. Furthermore, at many universities, about 90% of Seikyo employees are part-timers. Yone became a Seikyo employee at his university soon after graduating, and became a union official in large part because he witnessed the mistreatment, including "power harassment," of part-time workers, who were excluded from the union. He later became the chief official of the union when it was later expanded to include the part-timers.

There were no difficulties with management. Not only did Yone conduct organizing activities openly, but the management generally favored organizing the part-timers because it was "completely wrong" (*zettai akan*) if their voices were not heard. In this case, Honda's optimistic scenario is played out in Seikyo. Yone described part-timers at university coops as "me no mae ni" – before our eyes, i.e., just waiting to be organized. While organizing is not especially difficult (no difficult legal complications, no obstructive managers), it is time-consuming. The core problems included the divide between the regular (unionized) members and the part-timers, and the logistics of building both personal relations and organizations. Yone made his first contact with regular workers and learned about conditions of the part-timers from them. Above all, he built personal relations (*ningen kankei*) with them, and overcame their resistance to organizing part-time workers.[18] Fortunately, resistance was primarily passive – there are around 2,000 Seikyo Roren members employed in university coops (primarily as regular employees). Yone estimated that during his campaign about 1/3 supported organizing part-timers, 1/3 were indifferent, and 1/3 opposed, though opposition primarily took the passive form of refusing to provide assistance such as passing out leaflets.

Despite management acceptance, the university Seikyo union required about two years to organize. It was launched in November 2006. The main problem was finding time to hold meetings because many members were housewives with substantial childcare and housework responsibilities. The union did gain some relief from the willingness of older women to take on most union duties, particularly serving as officers. From around April 2006, Yone began pushing harder, "persuading" the women to organize a union, and once he believed that they ready, he pressed to bring matters to a conclusion while their motivation level remained high.

[18] The role of personal relations is regarded as a core issue in many discussions and studies about Japanese employment practices.

Meetings were held once a month initially. From around August 2006, Yone attended meetings about once a week, and then 2 to 3 times a week in October as preparations reached the final stages. (Yone's territory is large, and the workplace was, unfortunately, located over an hour from both his home and the union offices.) Yone wanted to ensure that the union would have at least 55 members – there were 54 regular employees in the existing union, so the part-timer organization would not seem subordinate. He was pleasantly surprised when 197 persons joined out of 360 total part-timers. Although Yone will continue to attend some meetings, he plans to leave continued organizing of the remaining part-timers and other initiatives to the union members so that he can start focusing on an organizing campaign at another university Seikyo. He emphasized that in the past, there was typically insufficient follow-up after organizing drives, and that lack of communication led to conflicts. Now, he believes, there is greater effort toward mutual assistance.

Once the union was formed, Yone quickly followed up (in a different sense) by making a quick gain to solidify support. The union quickly demanded a 1.2 month bonus, and received an answer just 18 days after its founding. The employees received a 5,000-yen bonus. It was not a large amount, but it bolstered morale and confidence in the union by demonstrating that workers could make concrete gains through the union.

Not only does Japan's public sector often exert a negative rather than positive impact on non-regular worker rights, but central government agencies are sometimes alleged to be particularly abusive employers. One of Zenroren's national organizers presently recruits non-regular workers (all women) working for ministries in Kasumigaseki, for a union affiliated to Kokko Roren, which represents national civil servants. Kasu became a labor activist partly because his father has been embroiled in labor-legal difficulties for years. He originally envisaged becoming a lawyer but came to be a union official instead. In that his original motivation was his father's labor legal issues, Kasu's background is a variation on the pattern that labor activists, notably lawsuit plaintiffs and community union officials, tend to become involved in labor affairs after becoming embroiled in labor-legal troubles (generally their own rather than relatives'). Although he has a different career in mind for the future, he is fully dedicated to this one at present. Kasu stated, "I think about [union] activities 24 hours a day" when asked about his daily activities.

Kasu's union represents both regular and non-regular workers, but primarily the latter. About 80% of the non-regulars, Kasu estimates, are women in their 20s. The bureaucrats, Kasu claims, like to have young women around to improve the environment.[19] They are also

[19] This kind of charge occurs fairly frequently with regard to agency temporaries, though the incidence is presumably much less than in the past because of rising rights consciousness, the subsequent risk of disruption or lawsuits, and economic pressures (see Weathers 2001). However, one female participant in a

forced to do grubby work like cleaning closets and collecting pizza orders, though it is illegal to employ temps for duties outside their contracts (nevertheless, disputes about appropriate work assignments are common in Japan's temping world).

Not only are non-regular workers in national agencies unprotected by the Labor Standards Law, there are no rules or procedures for rectifying even serious problems such as unpaid overtime or sexual harassment. Tight budgets are part of the problem. Wages of non-regular workers are not – officially – personnel costs (*jinken-hi*) but equipment costs (*bukken-hi*). The government does not keep statistics (presumably since the law theoretically prohibits the employment of non-regular workers in the public sector), but Zenroren surveys indicate that daily compensation is about 7,500 yen. Social insurance coverage varies widely and by agency – all of MHLW's non-regulars are covered, and none of the finance ministry's. Agencies can terminate on one day's notice, and virtually all employees are subject to *yatoidome* (non-renewal of contract; de facto termination as far as many employees and activists are concerned) after three years. Naturally, a haughty attitude toward non-regulars is pronounced in the national agencies as well as local agencies (as noted by Toya). Non-regulars eat lunch in the halls, not in the cafeteria with the bureaucrats.

Kasu sometimes walks the halls to distribute materials, though he cannot talk to employees there, as they would be dismissed if seen talking to union official (especially from Zenroren). The women are generally isolated in that they do not discuss workplace problems with coworkers. Email and mobile phones are important tools, he noted. When Kasu gets an email from a worker contacting him regarding her problems, he urges her to meet him for a face-to-face talk. He then encourages the person to join the union, pressing the argument, standard for union activists in both regular and community unions, that individuals need a union's support to accomplish anything against an employer. "Pressing collective bargaining is my job."[20] Naturally, all communications are conducted in secret, though often in ministry buildings. Kasu might meet a Finance Ministry employee in an MHLW cafeteria, for example, since neither would be recognized.

In one case, a woman consulting with the union was fired, but the union helped her to find a new job. In this case the union was pleased to be able to keep the member even though she changed workplaces.

"moral harassment" study group (a support group for plaintiffs pressing various bullying-related charges against a former employer) related in April 2006 that she sometimes placed some temporary agency workers for an employer based in part on managers' desire for young and pretty women rather than work skills. Her statements and Kasu's suggest that the practice of selecting temp workers to be "flowers of the workplace" may be more prevalent than I had previously assumed.

[20] In Japanese, the term collective bargaining (dantai kosho) is applied widely, covering grievance as well as wage and fringe benefit negotiation.

Comparison and Discussion

Organizing and follow-up are time-consuming Organizing in both countries is time-consuming work. The initial Los Angeles JfJ campaign took over two years, even excluding planning and with the unexpectedly sudden conclusion brought about by the police attack on demonstrators. The campaign to organize homecare workers, which brought 74,000 workers into the union, took eleven years. Union official and spokesperson Dorothy Benz has noted a single campaign typically takes several months, not to mention that obtaining contracts and conducting other follow-up activities can take two years or more. Follow-up and continuous mobilization are, of course, important components of social movement unionism, which entails raising worker consciousness to promote active long-term engagement. This is important because employers frequently continue to resist the union following a certification election. Rengo president Takagi Tsuyoshi notes that raising the organization rate one percent requires the organization of over a half million (530-540,000) persons (*Toyo Keizai*, November 12, 2005:95).

In Japan, opposition is less intense, but organizers often must act secretly to avert problems such as harassment of members. Generally, a union prefers to organize, or gain the commitment, of half of a workplace's members before notifying management that a union has formed. In cases where individuals or small groups are organized, management may remain totally unaware. If workers in nascent unions are found out, they are likely to be harassed in many workplaces. A community union official noted in one interview that in one case, workers who were discussing their new union in an izakaya (restaurant-bar) were overhead by a manager who happened to be in the same establishment. The workers were harassed, and the case went to litigation over charges of unfair labor practice.

In both the US and Japan, organizers now seem to emphasize face-to-face meetings, though the mechanics differ. American organizers must frequently venture to prospective members' homes. Japanese organizers are more likely to assemble meetings in sites like coffee shops, which commonly serve that purpose in Japan. Yone, as noted, had to build personal relations with the regular workers, but operated openly. Many organizers or officials make the rounds of workplaces, looking for opportunities to talk with workers. This is the approach used by Toya, for example, as well as Mr. Edo, a Jichiro official who treats small groups of non-regular workers to lunch in order to keep open lines of communication and conduct continuous soft organizing. Even Kasu, who must operate secretly, walks the halls of ministries. Even without management interference, organizing is time-consuming. Both Horioka and Yone noted that they needed about two years to organize a single workplace in specific cases, which were not exceptional. They can usually meet people only at night, a

serious inconvenience.

Organizers Calculating the numbers of organizers is notoriously difficult. It is a high turnover occupation in the US, and the definition is often unclear. Some persons interviewed for this project (all in Japan) are not official organizers but conduct organizing or similar activities, generally on their own initiative – this situation appears to be common in Jichiro. A "similar" activity would be helping non-regular workers to improve their employment conditions, though protecting jobs has generally become a higher priority recently.

As noted above, UI Zensen Domei had 145 organizers as of November 2006 – though the interview did not provide details of their backgrounds, it is likely that all were recruited through usual union channels. That is, they probably gravitated to the union from their original positions as regular employees in firms unionized by UI Zensen Domei.

The organizers that I interviewed tended to have clear activist mentalities, and generally had activist backgrounds of some sort before becoming either organizers or union officials. As noted above, a personal labor-related struggle often brought a person into contact with unions, and led to some kind of career in activism, though this pattern is more pronounced for community union activists than organizers for mainstream or Rengo unions. This also appears to match patterns in the US, where organizers are commonly college-educated idealists or persons, often minorities or immigrants, who came into contact with unions as a result of involvement in labor disputes.

Inducements Improved compensation, and improved security, and dignity are important inducements in both countries. Compensation probably looms larger in the US, where unionization often brings significant pay raises and healthcare coverage to low-wage workers. Unions often allow new or prospective to not pay dues until a first contract is concluded.

In Japan, there are rarely prospects of substantial short-term wage increases, so unions generally rely on a wider variety of inducements to members. One reason that large raises are unlikely is that general wage ranges are fairly narrow and are well known – part-time positions generally pay 800 to 900 yen an hour, and everyone intuitively knows that because of the large number of part-timers. Further, it is well understood that employers hire paato in order to hold down costs – for this reason, it is hard to conceive of employers agreeing to wage raises much above present levels. Unions naturally hope to organize some sectors, such as groceries, comprehensively enough to try to begin taking wages out of competition, but that possibility seems fairly remote at present, even with the economy growing steadily.

In contrast to US unions, Japanese unions always charge dues, but keep them low for non-regular workers. The appropriate figure for dues is a vexing issue for many unions

(interviews, Yoko, UI Zensen Domei officials). One advantage for Japanese unions is that they can use inducements such as discounted driver insurance programs or health insurance programs to attract members. These are useful benefits (sometimes available in any case were workers aware of them) that can be provided free of employer opposition.

Empowering workers This is key in both countries. It is a higher-profile issue in the US because of the large number of immigrant and minority workers, who are easily abused, and because income differentials are often very pronounced. However, several organizers noted that anger or dissatisfaction with superiors motivates many persons to join unions. The sense of empowerment gained might be more subtle but is important. US organizers often train workers to be assertive against abusive employers, whereas my interviews suggested greater importance being placed on having opportunities to talk about bothersome issues and gain support from a union. Concluding a collective bargaining gain can take a long time in the US, but Japanese union organizers have recently been able to make quick gains rather often. As Yone noted, the university cooperative he organized easily acceded to a bonus demand, shoring up support for the union.

Divisions among workers These are frequently serious in the US, though not a factor in the cases reviewed here. Many Americans hold strong anti-union attitudes, partly reflecting legacies of business unionism or abusive union practices (Lopez 2004). In Japan, as my interviews suggest, lack of solidarity is a bigger problem, with the disrespect or lack of concern for regular toward non-regular workers being a major problem. This division of consciousness weighs heavily on the organizer program in Jichiro, according to Toya in particular, while Yone noted that it was the main obstacle (apart from logistics) in organizing the university Seikyo.

Forming coalitions Coalition forming is now viewed as essential to union revival. US are regarded as advanced in coalition-building techniques, partly because they have developed cutting-edge strategies to counter strong management resistance, and partly because of the nature of American civil society (Frege, Heery, and Turner 2004). The JfJ and home care worker campaigns could not have succeeded without careful coalition-building.

However, coalition-building clearly has limited impact in Japan. Activists and leftists certainly participate in social movements and attend events (the author has observed many) but they rarely exert much impact. This reflects in part the incorporation of mainstream Japanese unions into corporate and government policymaking institutions (though arguably without conferring much real influence) and the nature of Japanese civil society, in which

large-scale social movements are rare.

Demonstrations and disruption. Like coalition-building, these are core to US unions, and similarly carefully planned to avoid violating the law or provoking violence – but also designed to put strategic pressure on businesses or occasional related parties. These demonstrations clearly draw on a tradition of disciplined civil disobedience in the US, including the sit-down strikes of the 1930s and the Civil Rights demonstrations of the 1960s (themselves partly inspired by the 1930s sit-down strikes).

Japanese unions seem to be handicapped here – my sense is that Japanese society has relatively little tolerance for real disruption. There are regular protest marches and the like, but they barely make the news.

Finances Finances are rarely mentioned in the US literature, but the unions seem to be conducting a virtual investment strategy – major organizing unions like SEIU frequently invest considerable time and resources to conduct campaigns that take years to complete. In addition, a significant number of campaigns end in failures.

Money is certainly a problem in Japan. 5 years ago, according to Honda, UI Zensen Domei targeted larger workplaces in order that organizing campaigns bring in revenues (to what extent they pay off, or whether smaller workplaces simply minimize strain, is not known to me). Other organizers have acknowledged that organizing frequently does not bring in revenues. Jichiro's Toya acknowledges that her activities probably cost the union money. Zenroren generally emphasizes the cause more than the revenue, according to Seikyo Roren's Yone, and therefore typically more or less ignores loss-making organizing and representational activities. Organizing activities are often subsidized by the federation – for example, Zenroren's central organization subsidizes Kasu's activities. Zenroren unions also raise money through means such as kampa, as is typical of alternative and left-wing organizations in Japan.[21] Deciding union dues for part-timers is a difficult issue for all unions.

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[21] Sometimes the effort and even expense involved in such fund-raising activities likely obviates their usefulness, though any revenues are welcome to organizations that exist on shoe-strings. Perhaps equally important, however, my impression is that compose part of the protest culture in Japan. A caution is that bake sales and fund raisers are also common for organizations like nursery schools – these are clearly unproductive in my understanding, but the mothers are generally under pressure to participate.

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