

Abstracts

Modern Significance and Challenges of Strikes: Based on the History and Current Situation in Japan

Jongwon Woo (Hosei University)

This paper explores the reasons strikes have become rare in Japan based on its historical context and the current situation. It then examines the modern significance and challenges of strikes in light of these findings. First, a historical analysis can be summarized as follows: strikes, which were actively conducted during the second phase of the high economic growth period to demand a greater share for workers, subsided in the third phase due to changes in the leadership of the labor movement, then nearly disappeared in the fourth phase due to the cessation of economic growth. This historical trend was influenced by objective factors such as the degree of economic growth and changes in the industrial structure, as well as subjective factors like the spring labor offensive (*shuntō*) and the policies of labor organizations. Second, the current situation can be summarized as follows: the reason strikes are rarely used today is largely due to strong trust between labor and management. This trust has been formed through the institutionalization of dialogues, represented by labor-management consultations, and through the interaction among members based on unions with a mix of blue-collar and white-collar workers and internal promotions. However, this trust also carries the risk of diluting the necessary tension between labor and management. Third, the modern significance and challenges of strikes can be summarized as follows: to balance trust and tension between labor and management, it is necessary to build not only affect-based trust but also cognition-based trust. This requires a renewed recognition of the differing interests between labor and management, for which strikes can serve as a catalyst. However, in large corporations, general union members, who tend to prioritize work and are integrated into work management, may not desire strikes. To break through this situation, it is conceivable to cease the provision of “above-standard” labor, which is common in Japan, and to temporarily suspend labor-management consultations.

Strikes and Industrial Relations in Post-War Japan: Examining the Coal Mining Industry

Tomoki Shimanishi (Rikkyo University)

This study investigates the significance and limitations of strikes in post-war Japan by examining strikes in the coal mining industry, including Miike Sougi, after the Second World War. The governance structure of the Japan Coal Miners' Union (JCMU) is analyzed, along with the role of strikes “embedded” in labor-management negotiations. The following findings are presented. First, the JCMU struggled to maintain unified strikes, as its labor movement was predominantly based on enterprise unions. This underscores the necessity for industrial unions—led by democratically elected leaders and full-time union specialists—to adopt a centralized governance structure to ensure the effectiveness of unified strikes in Japan. Second, some enterprise unions or their federations under the JCMU have adopted a centralized structure, enabling them to secure concessions from managements. This underscores the effectiveness of strikes as a method for resolving labor disputes in the coal mining industry. Third, labor disputes involving “embedded” strikes—aimed at preventing mine closures—allowed unions to secure additional compensation, while also enabling local governments to implement mine closure policies in advance. The “embedded strike” cannot be viewed as a mere formality; rather, it plays a substantive role in shaping labor disputes. Strikes, irrespective of their form, are an effective method for resolving labor disputes and accompanying issues.

The Economics of Strikes and Union Activities: An Empirical Analysis Using Survey Data on Japanese Union Members

Takashi Saito (Meiji Gakuin University)

In recent years, strikes have become rare in Japan, largely attributed to the decline of union bargaining power and the widespread adoption of labor-management cooperation. This study examines the factors behind the decline in strikes by focusing on union members' participation in union activities as a preliminary approach. A review of previous research

shows that theoretical models, such as Hicks's (1963) resistance and concession curves and Ashenfelter and Johnson's (1969) bargaining theory, have analyzed the mechanisms of strikes, emphasizing asymmetric information. While there have been many empirical studies based on these models, research specifically on Japan remains limited. Moreover, while most studies focus on the mechanisms by which unions organize strikes, it is equally important to analyze whether individual union members choose to participate in such activities. However, such analyses remain scarce. Using large-scale individual-level survey data, this study tests three hypotheses explaining union participation: (1) the cost of union activities, (2) the benefits of participation, and (3) interest in labor and social movements. The results indicate that individuals with higher costs are less likely to participate, while those who expect greater benefits or have a strong interest in labor movements are more engaged. These findings suggest that rising educational attainment, improved labor-management communication, and declining interest in labor activism may have contributed to the decrease in strikes in Japan.

The Rapid Increase in Strikes in the United States: Is This A Path for the Revival of the Labor Movement in America?

Toshimitsu Shinkawa (Hosei University)

This paper aims to examine whether the recent increase in strikes could lead to a revival of the labor movement in the United States. After presenting data and examples of recent strikes, the author highlights the challenges faced by American organized labor. First, there is a persistent anti-union stance from management, often framed as a commitment to individual free choice. Second, anti-unionism is embedded in institutional settings. Third, business unionism, which historically dominated the labor movement, has primarily focused on organizing white male workers and has limited its political activities to functioning as a pressure group for the Democratic Party. Business unionism has struggled to organize effectively in response to the influx of immigrant workers, the diversification of society, and the intensified management offensive accompanying globalization. In contrast, social movement unionism has emerged to address these limitations within the labor movement. Many of the labor unions that have recently conducted strikes align with this trend. However, to connect activism to structural reform and prevent it from becoming a temporary phenomenon, a class perspective is essential. This perspective must unite workers and limit the unchecked exploitation of capital. Constructing a class identity across various lines is extremely challenging, as it has historically been absent in the American labor movement. Nevertheless, it appears to be the only viable path for its revival.

Collective Labour Rights for the Solo Self-Employed as Freedom of Collective Begging? Developments and Discourses in the European Union

Shiro Ikawa (Chuo University)

To protect the solo self-employed regardless of their employment status, not only is the analogous approach to individual labour law regulations possible, but also the collective approach of protection through trade unions, as long as collective bargaining and agreements are excluded from the scope of competition law. Indeed, the EU, which this paper has chosen as an advanced area of judicial and policy developments, has already guaranteed such exemption to certain solo self-employed people. Furthermore, such developments could be justified by the constitutional norms of the Charter of Fundamental Rights of the European Union. Yet the mere guarantee of collective bargaining is no less than the freedom of collective begging. Solo self-employed people should be effectively guaranteed the right to take collective action as pressure, which the EU has still not achieved due to the trauma of the so-called Laval quartet.