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**LABOUR UNION MOVEMENTS AND
“SHUN-TŌ” (SPRING CAMPAIGN)
IN JAPAN**

By Kaichi MAEKAWA*

I Introduction

The Industrial Relations in Japan can be characterized, as is generally recognized, with (1) life-time employment system, (2) nenkō wage system, (promotion by age and seniority order wage system), and (3) enterprize unions. Because each union organizes employees on a company basis respectively, employers can easily “divide and rule” employees and the level of wages and working conditions tend to be differentiated among companies.

In order to overcome these weak points and level up nation-wide wages and working conditions, Japanese labour unions under the leadership of their national centers¹⁾ have continued to organize in spring each year an united campaign, having coordinated the demands of different unions on an industry level and finally unified them on the national level, and having established a certain period of the campaign. That is so-called the “Shun-tō” (spring campaign) which has been continued for about 25 years after 1956. “Shun-tō” is a centralized representation of Japanese labour union movements after World War II. Accordingly, problems of Japanese labour unions have inevitably been highlighted in “Shun-tō”.

Japanese economy after World War II made its start in a radically inflationary situ-

* Professor.

ation and has made a rapid growth bolstered by technological innovation, being accompanied always by chronic inflation. Thus, Japanese economy after the war can be characterized with both of inflation and technological innovation. In these circumstances such a concept as wages should rise year after year has been disseminated and firmly fixed generally in Japanese society. Labour union movements have been developed naturally upon this point of view.

However, as Japanese economy has been interrelated strongly with world economy, Japan could not be an exception of the oil shock. By the shock the economic growth of Japan has been reduced and business cycle showed a tendency towards depression. Accordingly, the yearly wage-raise supported by rapid economic growth has been reduced and in 1975 real wages decreased actually,²⁾ which has undermined the common concept of postwar Japanese society that wages should rise each year. There appears a limitation in the wage-raise campaign of labour unions and such a point of view that wages should principally be looked upon in terms of real wages rather than in nominal ones has begun to be emphasized.

In depressed industries employers' intentions are seen to decrease personnel and reduce even nominal wages, therefore labour unions' movements are being compelled to change their position from "offensive" to "defensive".

Postwar labour union movements in Japan have since 1956 concentrated their energy into so-called "Shun-tō" and been developed on the base of "Shun-tō". However, "Shun-tō" has become manneristic in the second half of 1960's on the one hand, and on the other hand there have begun to be raised such new concepts as "humanization of labour", "employees' participation", etc. In such a situation traditional union movements based primarily upon wage-raise campaigns have been developed and expanded into movements demanding safeguards of livelihood not only workers, but also of people in general.

1) There are 4 national centers of unions in Japan, each of which has following members:

Table 1. Number of Union Members by Each of Major National Centers

(1,000 persons)

Year	Total	General Council of Japanese Trade Unions	Japan Confederation of Labour	Federation of Industrial Organizations	Federation of Neutral Labour Unions	Others
1965	10,147	4,250	1,659	61	984	3,300
70	11,605	4,282	2,070	75	1,400	3,944
71	11,798	4,245	2,172	76	1,350	4,110
72	11,889	4,267	2,226	73	1,393	4,081
73	12,098	4,341	2,278	70	1,374	4,420
74	12,462	4,457	2,313	71	1,401	4,614
75	12,590	4,573	2,266	70	1,369	4,705
76	12,509	4,579	2,209	66	1,354	4,690
77	12,437	4,557	2,210	65	1,330	4,660

Source: Ministry of Labour, *Basic Survey on Labour Unions*.

What do these developments of "Shun-tō" mean in relation to the basic characteristics inherent to Japanese labour union movements? Do these developments promise the prosperity in the future of Japanese labour union movements? Those are the subjects to be examined in this article.

II Establishment of "Shun-tō" Style

"Shun-tō" marked its start by the wage-raise campaign in the spring of 1955 which was a joint campaign of 8 unit-organizations (the Japan Coal Miners' Union, the General Federation of Private Railway Workers' Unions of Japan, the Japanese Federation of Synthetic Chemical Workers' Unions, the Japan Electric Power Workers' Union, the National Federation of Paper and Pulp Industry Workers' Unions, the National Trade Unions of Metal and Engineering Workers' Unions, the Japanese Federation of Chemical Industry Workers' Unions and the All-Japan Federation of Electric Machine Workers' Unions)

2) Table 2. Total Amount of Wage in Cash (Trend of Real Wages)

Year and Month	Real term	
	Index (1970=100)	Comparison with the same month of the preceding year (Δ decrease)
1972	121.4	10.4
73	127.3	5.6
74	134.9	5.6
75	137.3	3.1
75 Apr.	101.1	6.0
May	101.0	Δ 3.3
June	206.5	Δ 1.4
July	193.3	Δ 0.4
Aug.	120.4	4.8
Sept.	106.1	5.6
Oct.	101.1	3.9
Nov.	108.6	5.8
Dec.	311.4	Δ 0.8
76 Jan.	107.7	4.1
Feb.	103.7	4.3
Mar.	115.4	5.9
Apr.	106.6	5.3
May	105.4	4.4
June	190.2	7.3
July	192.2	Δ 0.6
Aug.	118.2	Δ 1.8
Sept.	105.3	Δ 0.8
Oct.	107.4	3.3

Source: Ministry of Labour, *Monthly Labour Statistics*.

In 1956 "Shun-tō" has become a regular campaign. The process of its development can be summarized as follows:

- 1955 joint campaign of 8 unit-organizations
- 1956 "Shun-tō" was regularized
- 1965 "Shun-tō" was summarized and criticized in its mannerism
- 1970 campaign for protecting life and living standards
- 1971 campaign for life systems, and
- 1974 "national Shun-tō" was proposed.

After 10 years from its establishment in 1956, "Shun-tō" caused internal criticism by membership unions and was given impacts of changes in socioeconomic conditions (deterioration of economic conditions, lack of satisfaction in life of workers, etc.). Accordingly, in the later half of 1960s target areas of "Shun-tō" campaign have gradually been extended from wage-raise to living conditions. In 1971 a campaign for life systems was declared as one of the "Shun-tō" policies and moreover in 1974 nation-wide problems on living conditions were emphasized as the object of labour union movements.

The development from the wage-raise campaign in the earlier stage of "Shun-tō" to the campaign for life systems and further to the national spring campaign reflects the problems confronted by present-day Japanese labour union movements.

The joint campaign of 8 unit-organizations in 1955 was a prototype of "Shun-tō". This campaign was organized through the following processes: at first, in the 5th periodical conference of General Council of Japanese Trade Unions (July 12-15, 1954) was put great emphasis on "wage-raise" campaign and was adopted following policy:

"In the present deflationary conditions it is unable for each union or each federation of unions separately to defeat the wage stagnation policy of Japan Federation of Employers' Associations and to acquire wage-raise. The only way to attain the purpose is to fight with, by organizing a gigantic scale, a nation-wide, transindustrial unified campaign..... So that, we proceed to accomplish the purpose of organizing a nationwide, whole industry-wide unified requirements and unified campaign"³⁾

After the determination of above mentioned policy in December, 1954, 5 unit-organizations (Coal Miners' Unions, Federation of Private Railway Workers' Unions, Federation of Synthetic Chemistry Unions, Electrical Industry Labour Unions and Federation of Paper and Pulp Labour Unions) had a joint meeting for the spring campaign in next year and organized officially a "Joint Council on Spring Wage-Raise Campaign" (January 22, 1955). After that, 3 more unit-organizations (National Metal Unions, Confederation of Chemistry Labour Unions and Federation of Electrical Machine Workers' Unions) participated the Joint Council and was formed so-called "8 Organizations' Joint Campaign", that was the prototype of "Shun-tō" being evaluated as a "model of the trans-industry unified campaign".⁴⁾

3) The General Council, *10 year History of Sohyō (General Council of Japanese Trade Unions)*, pp. 435-6.

4) *Ibid.*, p. 471.

This unified campaign was developed in 1956 to a long time (February 15–April 30) conflict, in which participated over 3 millions of workers, major unions of private industries acquired wage-raise over about 10 percent of the wage level in the previous year. Thus was established the style of the trans-industry unified campaign.

Previously the intra-industry campaign had been considered to be subject to the divide and rule by employers (as said in the movement policy of General Council of Japanese Trade Unions in 1953), now, the situation was changed and it was insisted that "the main promoter of the campaign is the industrial unions and the field of the campaign is job-sites. It is urgent to organize the industry-wide unified campaign".⁵⁾ "Shun-tō" had the meaning just of this trans-industry unified wage-raise campaign.

In addition, at the start of "Shun-tō" Japanese labour unions were concerned to the political tendency of some union movements. For example, in the 7th extraordinary conference of Federation of Synthetic Chemistry Labour Unions, one of so-called 5 unit-organizations, such argument was presented as: "it must be avoided to give always priority to political demands rather than to economic ones, presenting the former at first and to dissolve the campaign of unions directly into a political campaign of the community in general."⁶⁾

Thus, "Shun-tō" was organized principally on the basis of (1) the criticism of political tendency of Japanese labour union movements, and (2) the establishment of the industry-wide unified wage-raise campaign.

III Manneristic Tendency of "Shun-tō"

Establishing the "Shun-tō" style, Japanese labour unions looked for the drive of movements chiefly in the gap between living costs and wage income. The demand in the campaign was in the beginning "wage to eat" (in 1952), then "wage to have better life and more affluent life" (in 1957), and "wage to have pretty well life, that is, wage of European level" (in 1958). Thus, the demand had been changed in accordance with the growth of Japanese economy.

Indeed "Shun-tō", having a role of concentration of Japanese labour union movements, could achieve a certain accomplishment as far as the wage-raise campaign is concerned. The results of the wage-raise campaign during 10 years after the start of "Shun-tō" are shown in the following table 3.

After 10 years of "Shun-tō" Sohyō (General Council of Japanese Trade Unions) summarized and evaluated the achievements of it, in such a way, as this type of unified campaign gave a prospect of overcoming the weak point of Japanese trade unions (the weak point of company basis organized trade unions) as well as it brought about a success in wage-raise. The evaluation was as follows:

"Previously workers have been prepossessed with company-consciousness and apt to

5) *Policy Statement of General Council of Japanese Trade Unions in 1955.*

6) *Op. cit.*, p. 425.

Table 3. Wage-Raise during 1955-1965

	Total amount of cash wage (Yen)	Increase rate of nominal wages (%)	Increase rate of real wages (%)	Amount of raise (Yen)	Raise rate (%)
1955	18,343	5.3	6.3	840	5.1
56	19,987	7.5	7.2	1,314	6.1
57	21,324	4.6	1.5	1,579	8.4
58	22,161	3.0	3.5	1,370	5.7
59	22,608	6.0	4.9	1,454	7.0
60	24,375	7.0	3.2	1,792	8.7
61	26,626	11.2	5.9	2,970	13.8
62	29,458	10.4	3.5	2,515	10.7
63	32,727	10.7	1.8	2,237	9.1
64	35,774	9.9	5.7	3,305	12.4
65	39,360	9.6	2.7	3,014	10.3

look at the wage campaign only from the view point of their own company, but now they strongly tend to see wage on the industry-wide basis. As needs of young workers increase, the demand for the minimum wage system by industry has been broadly adopted as a target unifying the industry-wide wage campaign. The campaign for the nation-wide uniform minimum wage has also been developed epoch-makingly by the establishment of a nation-wide striking posture in 1957, realization of the unified national movements on March 27, 1964, etc.”⁷⁾

In such a way, “Shun-tō” was evaluated advantageously as it had developed an unified campaign for the minimum wage by industry on the one hand, however, on the other hand there had been presented adverse internal criticisms to “Shun-tō” by unions which participated it. These criticisms can be summarized in the following 4 points:

- (1) criticism to schedule-tactics;
- (2) criticism to dependence on unions of big companies;
- (3) criticism to lack of wage policies (the establishment of uniform wage rate by industry and positioning of the minimum wage by industry), and
- (4) criticism to political bargaining

As discussed above, “Shun-tō” was organized to overcome those weak points of Japanese labour unions as having their own company colours on the one hand, and political tendency on the other hand. “Shun-tō” was to direct unions’ movements correctly and to make them stronger. Accordingly, its major, definite purposes were to organize the industry-wide unified wage-raise campaign and to overcome the political tendency of movements. Nevertheless, after 10 years of its development there were those internal criticisms raised as mentioned above. That is because: the unified campaign of “Shun-tō” was actually only a “collusive agreement” on a “style of making an array” of unions organized on a company basis; other than wage demands there always were pro-

7) “Shun-tō” Joint Committee, *White Paper on Wage*, 1965.

posed political demands in parallel in order to dissolve political discontents of union members; and at the end of the campaign leaders tried to make compromises on the political level, thus political tendency could not be overcome completely.

How did "Shun-tō" further deal with those weak points of Japanese labour unions which had been unable to overcome during 10 years from its start and which seem to have become a "constitution" of Japanese unions? — that is the subject of our next chapter.

IV Proposal of Life Demands in "Shun-tō"

In the second half of 1960s Japanese economy has had literally a hyper-growth period. "Shun-tō" has been continued to develop on the basis of above described evaluation and criticisms. Because of the increase of productivity and tight market conditions of manpower, wage-raise demands in "Shun-tō" have been realized over 100% year after year. The mechanism of wage-raise among various groups of employees was such as: at first wage-raise in major private industries was determined, which extended then to wage-raise in public enterprises, next to wage-raise of central and local governments' employees, and finally to that of unorganized workers. However, with respect to the uniform wage by industry, only initial salary agreements have been discussed concretely during the period and the demand for the minimum wage system has generally been overridden by the wage-raise campaign of organized workers. The demand has been proposed as merely an idealistic principle of labour unions.

Meanwhile, employers, who have gained experience of coping with "Shun-tō", have adapted "Shun-tō" itself to the function as a wage-control mechanism and have offset the increase of manpower cost by price-increase, tax-raise, increase of charges for social security benefits. They have implemented such landmaking-housing policies and development policies as causing pollution and cost-increase on the side of working people. In general, they have succeeded to balance the increase of manpower cost by acquiring more profits.

As the income level of working people increases and are levelled up by the results of the wage-raise campaign of "Shun-tō", middle-class-mind of them have grown. However, the dissatisfaction in life of them has not been dissolved and a feeling of so-called "modern poverty" has been newly generated. Table 4 shows an example of life feelings and self-evaluation of their lives by Japanese working people.

Instead of old feeling of absolute poverty which was expressed in the urgent requirement of "wage to eat", now a feeling of relative poverty has prevailed in life feelings of working people. As they are now subordinated to the diversified exploitation mechanism of modern capitalism and their living conditions are controlled by it, they should inevitably cope with it by raising sufficiently diversified requirements.

Therefore, in the later half of 1960s in addition to the wage-raise campaign there have appeared in Japanese labour union movements such problems of life encountered by working people as issues on commodity prices (1966), those on pollution (1967) and prob-

Table 4. Self-Evaluation of Social Strata and Living Standards by Government Employees (a Survey in 1969)

Social strata	1. Upper	0.1 %
	2. Upper middle	0.9
	3. Middle	16.8
	4. Lower middle	55.3
	5. Lower	23.7
		2+3
	4+5	79
Living standards	1. Fairly decent life	0.4
	2. A little decent life	4.8
	3. Tolerable	41.8
	4. Making shift with difficulties	33.5
	5. Very difficult	18.7
		1+2+3
	4+5	52

Source: Survey by Joint Committee of Government Employees

lems of prices, health insurance and taxes (1969). Thus, the objective area of labour union movements has gradually been extended.

On the basis of above mentioned background, "Shun-tō" in 1970 was concentrated into the "campaign for protecting life and living conditions of working people" consisting of 15 demand items such as health, housing, transport, safeguards in aged life, etc. and this "life campaign" course was fixed in the "Shun-tō" campaign policy in next 1971. This course had been raised on the basis of following 5 standpoints:

- (1) it is necessary to expand the objective area of movements, since the wage-raise campaign has a limit to deal with so diversified life demands of workers;
- (2) political tendency of General Council of Japanese Trade Unions should be overcome;
- (3) people's demands as citizens should be combined with union movements;
- (4) it is necessary to get rid of the movements depending on unions organized on a company basis; and
- (5) it is necessary to learn experiences of international trade union movements, especially those in Italy and France.

From these points of view the life campaign was established during "Shun-tō" in 1971. In short, the life campaign course during the second half of 1960s until 1971 was an expansion of the objective area of labour union movements to cope with diversified demands of workers for the protection of living conditions in general under the circumstances of many-sided exploitation of capitalism. In this sense, there has naturally been no change in the initiative of union movements.

8) Shogo Oki, *Review on 30 million People's Shun-tō*, pp. 24, 40, 75, 84.

V From the Life Campaign to the National "Shun-tō"

As in Japanese society a whole aged population is growing, members of labour unions alone can not be an exception of this tendency. Indeed, during the high-growth period of Japanese economy working conditions have been improved absolutely. Especially, this improvement has been remarkable for young workers and in working people as a whole middle-class mind has been made stronger⁹⁾. Nevertheless, among them middle and old age groups have not received so much benefits of high economic growth. Moreover, the recessions of Japanese economy after the oil shock have increased unemployment and uneasiness at aged life of these groups, so that they have inevitably become concerned strongly with their job opportunities and social security systems. In these circumstances, in 1973, the national centers of labour unions in the movements requiring improvements of the pension system realized negotiations with the government, thus could exercise a controlling power of labour unions over policy-making on the national level. The results of these movements were positively evaluated in this sense¹⁰⁾, and this evaluation played a role of a lever to the development to so-called "national Shun-tō" in 1974.

"Shun-tō" in 1974 was characterized as "Shun-tō of national, total campaign to protect life against inflation" and the campaign policy was described as follows:

"Standing in front of all unorganized workers and nation-wide various working classes, we take the social responsibility upon ourselves for promoting improvements of wage, income and living conditions. Only by realizing this responsibility and fighting boldly labour unions can have social progressiveness. And we must say, this is an indispensable premise for our "Shun-tō" to become that of all workers and the whole nation".¹¹⁾

Thus, in order to organize "Shun-tō" of the whole nation, a social role of labour unions was emphasized in "Shun-tō" and various reforms included in social welfare and security policies in a broad sense were raised as campaign objectives of labour unions themselves¹²⁾. Therefore, not only workers but also the whole nation has become the

9) Akihiro Ishikawa, *Social Changes and Workers' Sense*, 1975, pp. 77-78.

10) The 1973 Policy Statement of General Council of Japanese Trade Unions stated, "we realized the joint proposal on pension improvement by 4 opposition parties against the deceptive '50 thousands yen pension' proposal by the government, and the concrete political issue to choose whether the government proposal or the proposal by 4 opposition parties was made clear before the nation". And "1974 White Paper on Wage" by Shun-tō Joint Committee also evaluated that "an unified strike for pension demand succeeded for the first time in '73 Shun-tō' last year".

11) Shun-tō Joint Committee, *1974 White Paper on Wage*, Rōdō Keizai-sha, p. 143.

12) Ibid., "1974 White Paper on Wage" describes: "Incompleteness of various systems (systems of minimum wage, social security and welfare, etc..... by the referrer) under the circumstances of inflation has in the sense of insufficiency of income safeguard become a cause of reduction in living standards. In order to fight against inflation, the campaign for reforms including social welfare and security policies in a broad sense as well as that for wage-raise should be carried out as a social responsibility of organized workers" (p. 14).

subject of "Shun-tō" movements, that is to say, "Shun-tō" has been developed to "nation-wide, total" movements.

The "Shun-tō" declaration of 1974 described: "In this '74 Shun-tō, the working together with all its efforts should..."¹³⁾ "...together with all working people..."¹⁴⁾ And the declaration was addressed to "all workers and all Japanese people!"¹⁴⁾

"Shun-tō" of workers and of trade unions has been transformed into that of the whole nation. It has been expanded in the subject as well as objects of the movements from "Shun-tō" of workers to that of all nation. This expansion has been a qualitative change rather than a development or expansion which stands merely on a prolonged line of the past life campaign. This "national Shun-tō" was characterized as "the basis of a national front to prevent reactionary tendency in political and economic policies as a whole",¹⁵⁾ after that, the "National Shun-tō" course has been continued and made stronger, which was evaluated in the 3rd year of its start in following way:

"The largest result of the movements consists in the gradual formation of such common recognition as; the "National Shun-tō" course which is diversified movements having many specified objectives should never be given up as the wage-raise campaign should not be so and the course is an inevitable one which is made necessary for us by the present-day socio-economic reality in Japan".¹⁶⁾

And the determination to make the course much stronger was declared.¹⁷⁾

Thus, "Shun-tō" representing postwar union movements in Japan has since its start to now been developed from the wage-raise campaign to the life campaign and finally to "national Shun-tō". However, during this period has "Shun-tō" showed a progress towards the resolution of those basic problems of Japanese labour unions as: (1) how to overcome the style of movements depending upon unions organized on a company basis; and (2) how to get rid of unions' political tendency?

VI Has "Shun-tō" Overcome the Weak Points of Japanese Unions?

As described above, "Shun-tō" has realized a style of organizing together many of Japanese labour unions and accomplished certain results in raising wage. However, how far could it approach to the solution of those basic problems in Japanese labour unions?

1) How to overcome the movements depending upon unions organized on a company basis?

The wage-raise campaign in "Shun-tō" has repeated to unify the amount of wage-raise demands amounts by unions of various companies and to acquire wage-raise by a style of making an array of unions, which has made "Shun-tō" itself manneristic.

13) *op. cit.*, p. 3.

14) *op. cit.*, p. 2.

15) *op. cit.*, p. 3.

16) *op. cit.*, p. 164.

17) National Shun-tō Joint Committee, *White Paper on Shun-tō*, 1977, pp. 164-5.

There has never been established any industry-wide, unified standard of demanding principles. Accordingly, the integration of unions by industry has not been accomplished, and as the objective conditions of economy turns worse, the movements retreat again to those unions organized on a company basis, so that the differentiation of working conditions among industries and companies has become inevitable. Thus, it could be said that in spite of the intention of "Shun-tō" to overcome the weak constitution of Japanese unions as those organized on a company basis, the result has been quite insufficient and the same problem still continues to exist.

Moreover, employers have transformed "Shun-tō" itself into a function of wage control. As discussed above, the wage determination in "Shun-tō" extends from major private industries to public enterprises, next to government employees, and finally to unorganized workers. In this case, the term "major private industries" means the major enterprises of the iron and steel industry, and the mechanism of wage-raise level in "Shun-tō" depends upon the wage agreement in the major enterprises of the iron and steel industry. The wage determination in the iron and steel industry extend to other private industries, public enterprises and government employees. In such a way, both unions and employers have confronted each other centering around the iron and steel industry and employers have coped with the wage-raise campaign is "Shun-tō" by controlling the wage level of the iron and steel industry. That is to say, as far as unions depend upon the iron and steel industry through this wage determination mechanism, their movements should inevitably retreat, as the industry gets worse.

2) How to get rid of the political tendency?

In order to break the limit of mannerism of the wage-raise campaign and to prevent the deterioration of working conditions in general by diversified exploitation systems of modern capitalism, "Shun-tō" has been developed from the wage-raise campaign to the life campaign and finally to "national Shun-tō" which has included national objectives into the field of labour union movements and which has been placed as a "basis of national front". It can be said that labour unions have included national objectives into the field of their own movements in order to get supports and cooperation of the whole nation. However, most of such national objectives are originally those of various national organizations and political parties, therefore, labour unions are to stand in the position to join on cooperate with them. In fact, nevertheless, labour unions in "Shun-tō" have included these objectives into their own movements. Thus, they can not avoid such a criticism as unions have overpassed the limit of integration of "economic" and "political" objectives and gone too far into political tendency. In this sense, it could be said that political colours in the movements of Japanese labour unions have not been dissolved even in "Shun-tō".

VII Conclusion

Japanese labour unions are in general those organized on a company basis, thus are incorporated into a system integrating both employers and employees together and become

a sub-system of seeking economic gains. Internally some critical parts of them resistant such a position appear as reformative groups, which are apt to have political tendency. That is to say, Japanese labour unions are confronting the alternatives whether to be subordinated to the management or to join with reformative political parties. Therefore, it is difficult for unions to be independent and to develop movements on their own initiative. That is the weak point of Japanese labour union movements.

It was the subject of "Shun-tō" in its early stage to overcome and get rid of this weak point. However, the result has been insufficient and now in the period of reduced economic growth, unions are again disclosing their defects and weak points. Since the idea in the early stage of "Shun-tō" was that to be evaluated positively, the reorganization of "Shun-tō" in the sense to activate this idea effectively is not only an urgent subject but also a basic problem of Japanese labour union movements.