

Toward Fairer and Sounder Labour-Management Relations

Labour Relations Commissions (LRCs) were established in March 1, 1946 with the objectives of settling labour disputes and deciding unfair labour practices cases. LRCs are independent administrative agencies with tripartite members; representing employees, employers and public interests. Although the objectives of LRCs have remained unchanged for the past 60 years, their main tasks have been changing to meet the social needs of the times.

As inflation immediately after WWII triggered relatively violent, and severe labour disputes in the coal mine and power sectors that posed significant impacts on the daily lives of citizens, LRCs worked to settle these labour disputes through mediation and conciliation. When Japan subsequently enjoyed high economic growth, the labour movement turned into a so-called annual spring labourer offensive that sought a basic wage hike. LRCs played important roles in accommodating wage determination at that time. In this manner, LRCs stabilized the Japanese economy and improved the living standards of workers until the late 1970s.

On the other hand, the number of cases involving unfair labour practice has risen to a peak, both during and after the 70's. LRCs have been facing an increased number of complicated disputes relating to employers' authority, including the transfer or criterion of deciding the employer, meaning the examination process has become excessively long. When the government privatized Japan National Railway in 1987, many former JNR workers filed complaints because JNR's successor JR did not employ trade union members who opposed the JNR privatization. These labour disputes have triggered a further rise in the number of complaints before LRCs.

LRCs in Japan have been making various efforts to address these problems. In 2005, the Trade Union Law was amended to quickly and properly examine cases of alleged unfair labour practice and amendments have been gradually showing results.

As this year is the 60th anniversary of the LRCs, we decided to publish this booklet "Japan's Labour Relations Commission System", hoping to call foreign people's attentions to the roles that we have been playing to date. I would be grateful if this booklet could help readers better understand labour-management relations in Japan.

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