

## Past, Present and Future of Labour Relations Committees

Labour Relations Commissions (LRCs) were established in 1946, immediately after WWII, because Japanese policymakers at the time believed that independent, democratic and tripartite labour administrative organs would contribute to the democratization of labour relations in Japan. LRCs have the following main characteristics: LRCs not only deliver decisions on labour disputes but also adjust the same; and are able to provide more flexible solutions than judicial courts because they are ADR organs. In addition, each LRC's tripartite structure, to which both employees and employers send their representatives as "participant members", further enhances its unique characteristics and provides LRCs with roles other than dispute resolution alone.

LRCs have played active roles in many cases, including frequent and severe labour disputes from the chaotic post-WWII times to the era of economic recovery, as well as wage hike adjustments during annual spring labour offensives during the era of high economic growth. LRCs strove to solve these collective labour disputes through consensus between employers and employees by requesting their understanding and accepting sound labour-management relations. In addition to solving labour disputes, LRCs have also provided opportunities for employers and employees in Japan to learn "good labour-management relations." At the same time, representatives of employees and employers who have actually handled dispute resolution as participant members have brought back know-how on properly setting up "good labour-management relations" to the enterprises from which they originally came.

LRCs have seen a gradually diminishing number of labour disputes since the mid-1970s, largely because labour-management relations have matured and stabilized in Japan. The fact that they have learned know-how on "good labour-management relations" through LRC has also significantly contributed to the maturing and stabilization of labour-management relations in Japan. Without LRCs, Japan would have seen totally different labour-management relations during the post-WWII era.

On the other hand, since LRCs now handle fewer labour disputes, some people are calling for them to be scaled down. However, new types of collective labour disputes are emerging, which might pose significant impacts on labour-management relations in Japan.

For example, the present labour laws do not provide effective solutions to new problems, such as the restructuring of corporate organizations, the emergence of pure holding companies, and relationships between an investment fund and an invested firm's labour union. Besides, Japanese experts recently started discussing a workers' representative scheme. If Japan introduces this scheme, we will need an organization that will handle conflicts arising from the same, or monitor whether workers are electing their representatives fairly.

I think that we should expand the authority of LRCs in order to handle these new problems. Owing to their long history and enormous experiences in addressing labour-management relations, they can successfully deal with the same.

Due to their serious efforts, LRCs have successfully overcome most labour-management problems, which policymakers expected them to address when the LRC scheme started in Japan. However, as long as we have workers and employers, new types of labour-management problems will inevitably occur one after another. I hope that LRCs will continue to work on labour-management problems and should play their roles in creating good labour-management relations in Japan. As Asian policymakers are blighted by frequent labour disputes in their modernization process, they are focusing on Japan's LRC scheme and its successful experiences. I am convinced that we must all re-acknowledge the fact that stable labour-management relations lead to a stable society and LRCs must never lose their own unique mission.

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