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THE IRON WORKERS' UNION IN THE EARLIEST STAGES OF JAPANESE LABOUR MOVEMENT—THE RISE AND FALL OF A CRAFT UNION

KANAE IIDA

“What purpose have we in coming to America? Is it to make money? Or is it to see and enjoy America? No, we come neither to make money as all Chinese and Hungarians, nor to see and enjoy pleasure. Far be this from us, for our country is in its most important and its busiest day of revolution both in political and religious affairs, and had need of every patriot. We come to this country for the purpose of gaining true knowledge of higher civilization, both to educate and to cultivate our minds for the future use of, in the service of our native land”—from “Why We Are Coming to America” by Sen Katayama.

“I myself advanced the organization of workers as the best means to promote the interest of workers, dwelling at considerable length upon the method of formation of trade unions, explaining the plan of American trade unions and the American Federation of Labor. It can be said that the meeting has done much toward the labor movement in this country, but it serves as a foundation of future work”—from “Our Organizer in Japan” by Fusataro Takano (American Federationist, IV. No. 4)

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I. THE BACKGROUND OF THE ESTABLISHMENT OF THE IWU

It is a historical phenomenon peculiar to the capitalistic system that ‘wage-hiring labour’ emerges as the result of the evolvement of handicraft manufacturing production following an accumulation of capital¹. Also throughout the industrial

¹ See the following comment of Karl Marx; Historisch epochemachend in der Geschichte der ursprünglichen Akkumulation sind alle Um-wälzungen, die der sich bildenden kapitalisten Klasse als Hebel dienen; vor allem aber die momente, worin grosse Menschenmassen plötzlich und gewaltsam von ihren Subsistenzmitteln losgerissen und als vogelfreie Proletarier auf den Arbeitsmarkt geschleudert werden. Die Expropriation des ländlichen Produzenten, des Bauern, von Grund und Boden bildet die Grundlage des ganzen Prozesses. Ihre Geschichte nimmt in verschiedenen Ländern verschiedene Färbung an und durchläuft die verschiedenen Phasen in verschiedener Reihenfolge und in verschiedenen Geschichts-epochen. Nur in England, das wir daher als Beispiel nehmen, besitzt sie klassische Form. (Marx/Engels. *Werke*, Bd. 23, *Das Kapital*, Bd. I, Berlin, 1962, S. 744.)

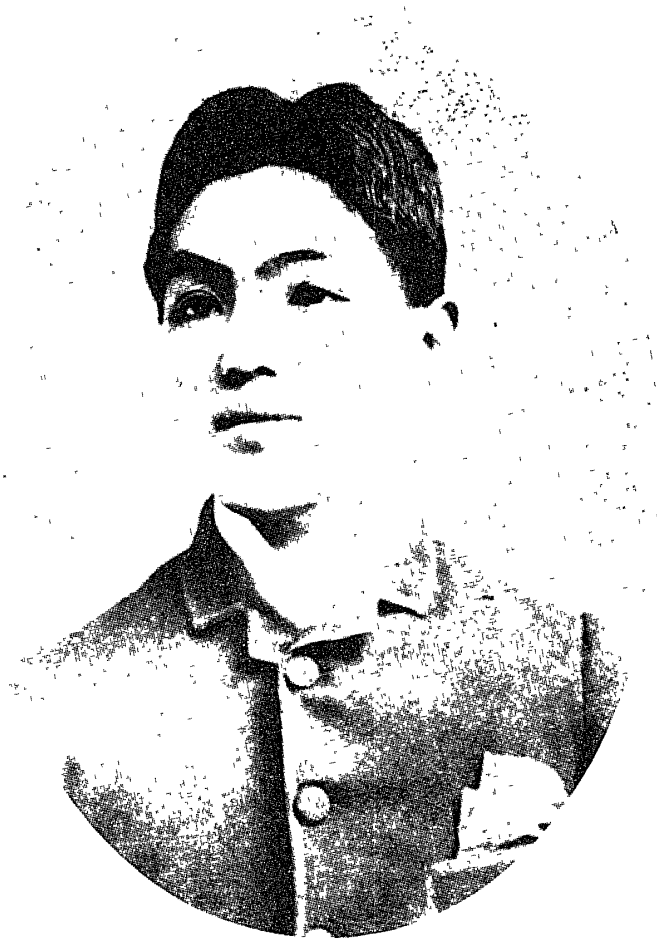


Sen Katayama as a student in U.S A. 1892

revolution, which is called the age of 'Machinery and Great Industry' after the period of manufacturing production, the wage-earners regarded themselves as a class. In the economic history of England, this can be found in the formative period of the industrial capital from the end of 17th Century to 19th Century. During this period the working class made its appearance into the labour market, conscious of wage-hiring, and their autonomous and small-scale benefit and funeral clubs which had been gradually growing up dominating the local labour market in an ephemeral form had an tendency to extend and strengthen their organization, used to make federation occupationally on the regional scale and change into craft unions governing the certain local area.² In the first half of 19th century, such craft unions were spontaneously beginning to form into national trade unions, pursuing occupational advantages that were fundamental to the whole of their movement. The British revolutionary or socialist movement was characterized by a loss of support of trade unionists if it contradicts their professional interests.

The characteristics of the Japanese labour movement were distinct from those

² Henry Pelling, *A History of British Trade Unionism*, London, 1963, p. 10ff.



Fusataro Takano at San Francisco, May, 1888

of Britain. In Britain, if ancestry and social position of the leaders of the labour movement were considered it would be found that the majority of the leaders had working class backgrounds. From generation to generation, Britain has been richly endowed with excellent leaders from the labouring class. This has not been a characteristic of the Japanese Labour Movement.

Fusataro Takano and Sen Katayama are the exceptional. This is chiefly due to a short history of capitalism and insufficient craftconsciousness among workmen. In Britain, the earliest trade unions began as craft unions formed by skilled-artisans of the towns who had been engaged in handicraft manufacture. While the old established woolen and worsted industries of Britain have had a long history of craft unions, the cotton industry and coal-mining could train their skilled-labour only in very limited and insufficient form.³ In such a way, the craft union develops in parallel with the operatives' union,⁴ and the latter became the critic

³ S. and B. Webb, *Industrial Democracy*, London, 1920, pp. 472-475.

⁴ Phelps Brown, *The growth of Industrial Relation, a study from the standpoint of 1905-1907*, London, 1965, p. 120ff.

of the former throughout the nineteenth century. Thus the general union appeared as an unique militant association different from the craft union which was based on control of the labour market and the restriction of the labour supply.⁵

It was a common characteristics of Japanese, German and Russian capitalism that governments which had been pursuing after semi-feudalistic policies had to suppress the disintegration of the village communities or even pay a great attention to the maintenance of these backgrounds. As the process of village disintegration was very gradual and not complete in Japan, when compared with the western European countries, it did not occur in the primary stages of economic development, that the exodus of peasants from their own villages and migration of labourers from agricultural villages to towns took the form of the movement of entire families.⁶ The large movement of the labour force from villages to the industrial towns in the earliest stages of Japanese capitalism was mainly due to the exodus of sons and daughters who were not householders. They were often called "emigrant labourers"⁷. This is not to say that this type of emigrant labour had a dominant influence on the making of our labour market. Not only did

⁵ E. J. Hobsbawm, *Labouring Men, Studies in the History of Labouring Men, Studies in the History of Labour*, London, 1964.

⁶ In 'The Constitution of Japanese Capitalistic Society' ('NIHON SHIHONSHUGI-SHAKAI NO KIKO'), the classical work on the history of Japanese capitalism, Dr. Yoshitaro Hirano points out the decreasing numbers of the agricultural population from 1874 to 1920 in Japan. He compares 1874, the year of the publication of revision of the land-tax with 1920, the year of the establishment of Japan Trades Union Alliance (NIHON RODO SODOMEI), the first national centre in Japan, referring to 'the Tables of Statistics' by the bureau of statistics (1874), the 'Annual statistics' and the 'Report of National Census'. While the total population of Japan in 1874 was 33,300,600, of which 25,965,439 were the agricultural population, the former increased to 55,963,053 and the latter to 27,138,251 by 1920. Although both increased in numbers, if the percentage of the agricultural population to the whole population was taken we find that the agricultural population decreased from 77.9 in 1874 to 46 in 1920. However, we should not assume that this indicates the migration of entire families from villages to industrial towns. The relative decrease of the village population in this period is due to the dramatic migration of second and third sons and daughters. In brief, the migration of entire families from agricultural villages to industrial towns from 1874 to 1920 was an exception.

Dr. Hirano also points out the change in the percentage of agricultural households'. In 1874 the whole households numbered 7,167,260 of which 5,640,310 were agricultural households. The percentage of the former to the latter was 78.69 percent. On the other hand, in 1932, whole households numbered 12,346,956 of which agricultural households numbered 5,632,554. The percentage of the latter to the former was 45.62. It is true that the decrease in the percentage of agricultural households was considerable, but the absolute number of agricultural households was constant. The increase of wage-earners in Japan before the Second World War was not the result of the movement of entire families from villages to industrial towns, but of the movement of second and third sons and daughters.

⁷ It was in 'Japanese Labour Movement in the Earliest Stages', (Tokyo, 1957) by Prof. Ohkouchi that the conception of 'the type of emigrant labourers' was proposed for the first time, which was characterized as implying the same meaning as workers moving between agricultural villages and industrial towns seasonably and with trade cycles. However, its original model can be found in 'The Analysis of Japanese Capitalism' (Tokyo, 1934), by Dr. Moritaro Yamada.

emigrant labourers from the countryside characterize the wage-earners of Japan, but also many craftsmen and journeymen in the great cities became important part of the labour force.⁸ In brief, the relation between capital and labour in the nineteen-hundred of Japan can be summed up as follows:

1) As the result of governmental modernization policies, advanced technology was disorderly and unsystematically imported in a very short time⁹, and therefore, the highly skilled labour force necessary at the beginning of industrialization was insufficient to fill the demand. The survival of village communities resulted in the division of classes being incomplete. Industrial capitalists suffered under the pressure of shortage of a skilled labour force.

2) Secondly, the weakness of automatic growth of capital accumulation required supplementation and fortification by the state at the outset of the industrial revolution and it shows the clear contrast between the privilegedly established huge munition factories and heavy industries and small-scale domestic industries on the broad scope. Accordingly, appeared the monopoly of the skilled labour force by the former and its extreme scarcity in the latter in spite of over-employment.

3) Thirdly, and most important, the process of the industrialization in Japan took the form of transplanting the relatively higher industrial technology from the Western Europe to the soil, and as the result, a greater number of female as opposed to male labourers were employed by the cotton factories. The high standard of technology in the cotton industry required more unskilled female labourers than male skilled workers whose wage were higher. Such conditions were convenient for the accumulation of capital and successfully adapted for maximizing profit. The cotton workers of Japan in the earliest stages of industrial revolution were chiefly female labourers. They could not play a remarkable role in the earlier labour movement. In western European countries, the majority of cotton workers in modern factories were male. Their movement was militant and played an important part in the incipient stages of development. It never experienced organized resistance nor spontaneous and explosive uprising, and machine-breaking movement of the cotton industries which were the commonplace in the earlier stages of the British labour movement. The tragedy of the Iron Workers' Union lies in the historical fact that it emerged as the vanguard of the labour movement.

Moreover, the Japanese labour movement had no prominent members to guide the rank and file at the outset. Although the activities of such leaders as Fusataro

⁸ Prof. M. Sumiya locates the formation of wage-labourers in the underworld of the great cities in contrast with the theory of Ohkochi. ('Japanese Capitalism and the Labour Problem', by Sumiya, Hyodo and Kobayashi, Tokyo, 1967).

⁹ This problem is very intimately connected with the modernization policies of Japan. Our society was modernized superficially by the Meiji Government through rapidly importing western civilization without changing the spiritual structure or 'revolution of consciousness'. The westernization policy of the Japanese government was curiously mixed with the pre-modern society of Japan, and this was rightly the tragedy of Japan.

Takano, Sen Katayama, Sentaro Jo and Hannosuke Sawada were remarkable and highly appreciated, they sometimes fell into the deepest despair to find the lack of class consciousness and ignorance among their fellow-workers. These leaders who were conscious of their 'mission' as organizers, and sustained with self-confidence and a sense of responsibility as 'élites', could not help feel the difference between their way of thinking and that of their fellow-workers'. If the letters from Takano to Samuel Gompers and the writings of Katayama, are read, one finds not only their tragedies as the pioneers, but also the tragedy of the Japanese labour movement. Thus we often elicit the conclusion that the relation between leaders and rank-and-file in the Japanese labour movement were destroyed by the enormous speed of capitalistic development and the labour movement itself fell into decline because of ignorance and lack of class-consciousness.

The immaturity of workers' organization and low wages produced an extremely low standard of living which could not ensure the financial activities of trade unions and also support full-time officials. It is not strange that talented leaders and active members of the trade unions deviated from their course, despairing of the future of the labour movement.

As already mentioned, it is evident that Japanese labour movement had many distinct features separating it from the European movement. We must realize that the policies of Meiji government were absolutistic and antagonistic against all Democratic movements including the political-radical movement. The pre-modern Meiji government was also characterized by severely repressive policies against the working-class movement. These policies were the reflection of a weakness in the independent and systematic movement by the working people whose energies were diverted from a democratic movement to the aggressive policy of the state towards the Asian Continent. The state had established munition factories and naval arsenals for preparing war to secure markets. The rise and fall of the Iron Workers' Union which was an epoch in Japanese labour movement must be observed in this context.

II. THE STRUCTURE AND POLICIES OF THE IWU

The evolvement of a genuine labour movement in Japan began with the period of industrial revolution after the Sino-Japanese War.¹⁰ After the war, the frequent occurrence of strikes and labour disputes were reported in the newspapers

¹⁰ Guennosuke Yokoyama writes very impressively about Japanese society after the Sino-Japanese War. "What kind of war will occur after the Sino-Japanese War? It will be a war between the poor and the rich, a war between nationalism and socialism, . . . , now, comrades of workmen must challenge the capitalists and prepare the war against them by taking advantage of the weapon of socialism through the forces of solidarity." (G. Yokoyama, *NAICHI-ZAKKYOGO NO NIHON (Japan after repeal of Extraterriality)* Tokyo, 1954, (new edition) pp. 51-52.



Guennosuke Yokoyama in 1897

and created a great public sensation.¹¹ They were recognized as creative social problems which were intimately connected with the ordinary lives of the nation. Most noteworthy of these series of strikes was that of the steam-engine locomotive drivers of the Japan Railway Company which had been managing the north-east line from Tokyo to Aomori. It was not only a large-scale strike which stopped the transportation of goods and passengers, but an epochmaking strike in that over 4100 of all employees participated and were steadfastly united. Their demands included the elimination of semifeudal relations, the improvement of their

¹¹ After the Sino-Japanese War, a great many strikes occurred in various regions, and a remarkable change could be found in these labour disputes. It was the tendency of those struggles to demand the improvement of working conditions and of social status than an increase of wages, for instance, the strikes of the employees of the Tokyo Electric Company, of the potters of Arita, Saga, of Hashima Coal-miners, Nagasaki, of the carpenters of Yokohama, of the femaleworkers of the silk-industry company at Matsue, of the cabdrivers of Yokohama, of the book-binders, of the stock and share brokers of the Mishina Stock Exchange, Osaka, of the servants of the Ministry of Home office, and of the salt-manufacturing workers of Nishinoura, etc. were very famous (SHAKAI ZASSHI, May, 1900).

status to the position of clerks, an increase in wages, and the betterment of labour conditions. In that dispute, the leadership capacity of the Rodokumiai-Kiseikei (Association for Encouragement and Formation of Trade Unions) may be highly appreciated and succeeded in influencing public opinion toward the trade union members.¹² But it must be assumed that the success of this strike was owed to the rising influence of many small strikes which encouraged the strikers.

We can already find the pioneer of trade unions in the movement¹³ of Domei-Shinkogumi (the Union of Allied Engineers) formed in 1889, which organized the ironworkers of Ishikawajima Shipyard, Tanaka Naval Munition Manufactory and the Bureau of National Railway. This union dissolved because of the lack of support from the workers, and the weakness of the movement as a whole. This union of steamengine locomotive's drivers was indeed remarkable in firmness of organization, fighting spirit and continuity of militancy. It was also a great event peculiar to the earliest labour movement in that it gave an infiltrating impetus to later labour movements, especially to the labourers of private and nationalized railways who had endeavoured to associate themselves with it for the improvement of wages and working conditions which were worse than other industries, for example, the case of the Sanyo Railway and Kyushu Railway Companies.¹⁴ The Rodo Kumiai Kiseikai was established in June, 1897, under such conditions, as a preparatory and educational organization aiming at promoting and advancing the development of craft unions on a nation-wide scale. The founders of the Kiseikai were Fusataro Takano and his comrades who organized the Shyokko-Gyukai¹⁶ (the Friends of Workers) among emigrants in U. S. A., and Takano received advice from Samuel Gompers who was the president of the American Federation of Labour. Takano contemplated the building of trade unions in Japan on the model of The AFL craft unions. After his return to Japan, he established the Tekko-Kumiai (the Iron Workers' Union) with his colleagues, Sen Katayama, Hannosuke Sawada, Sentaro Jo.¹⁶

¹² Cf. NIHON RODO-UNDO SHIRYO (*The documents and Materials of Japanese Labour Movement*) Vol. 2 Chap. I.

¹³ Ryuji Komatsu, 'Trade Unions of Japan before the Second World War, the Industrial Relations at the Ishikawajima Shipyard' (*Mita Economic Journal*, the Organ of Economics Faculty of Keio Univ.) Vol. 60, No. 1.

¹⁴ "YOROZU CHOHO", 6th, March, 1898.

¹⁵ The Keisei-shimpo that was opened as the nationalistic newspaper by Saburo Kitamura reported about the 'Friends of Workers' as following. "Jo Sentaro and Eitaro Hirano who had been engaged in shoe-making in San Francisco set up the 'Friends of Workers' at 1888, Mission Street, San Francisco, which aimed at the improvement and advantage of the working class. It is said that they held meetings on the first and third Saturday of every month and now, numbers of members are increasing". (KEISEI-SHIMPO, 16th, October, 1891. Documents and Materials, Vol. I. p. 39).

¹⁶ Sen Katayama also played a part in forming the Association for Encouragement and Formation of Trades Unions with Fusataro Takano. But after the passing of the 'Police Laws for the Maintenance of Order', he was inclined towards Socialism to which Takano objected. Divergence of opinions began, but it must be noted that Katayama was far more persistent than Takano in maintaining his ground in the labour movement. See Hyman Kublin, *Asian Revolutionary, the Life of Sen Katayama*, Princeton, 1964.

The organization of Japanese labourers by the Kiseikai played an important part in establishing the Iron Workers' Union and the Nihon-Tetsudo-Kyoseikai (the Friendly Society of Employees of Japan Railway Company) and eventually established branches of the Iron Workers' Union and trade unions in many districts. At Shimbashi Railway Manufacturing Company, Tokyo Munitions Manufactory, and Akabane Naval Arsenal (strong branches of the IWU) were established and from 1889 organizations among printers, tailors and shoe-makers as well as the formation of trade unions in the northern districts of Kanto, Kansai and Kyushu Area occurred.¹⁷ The members of the IWU were not only comprised of iron-foundry workers but also of so-called machine and metal-workers¹⁸, the majority of whom were engineers, iron-foundry workers, tin-workers, smiths, model-workers, etc. Most of these workers were educated by Apprentice Training Centres or Mechanics Institutes, or recruited from handicraftsmen and journeymen.

After the Sino-Japanese War, there was a urgent demand for labour because of advancement of capitalistic large-scale production, and the pressing need for skilled labourers on the huge iron industry. Under such conditions it was very natural that worker-consciousness increased, and an enthusiasm for the formation of the IWU grew.

As soon as the IWU was established in December, 1897, its members numbered about 1,000 and increased to 2,000 in February of the next year, 2,500 in June and 3,000 at the end of the same year.¹⁹ The first branch of the IWU was at the Tokyo Munitions Manufactory²⁰, and later other branches were established at the Ishikawajima Shipyard and the appendent factories of the Japan Railway Company. By the end of 1899²¹, the number of branches rose to 40. A few branches were established in the living area in north-east down town Tokyo, most of them around the workshop²². The IWU then had the following features. First, it was a horizontal organization of skilled and master iron-craftsmen of the military and naval arsenal, and key major factories.²³ They were often the 'upper-class wor-

¹⁷ Yoshitaro Hirano, "RODO-UNDO NO JOMAKU—YOKOYAMA GUENNOSUKE, KATAYAMA SEN O TSUJITE MITARU" (The First Stage of Labour Movement, through the activities of G. Yokoyama and S. Katayama), *KEIZAI HYORON (Economic Review)*, January, 1936.

¹⁸ Norikuni Naito, *TEKKOGYO NI OKERU ROMU-KANRI NO KEISEI* (The Formation of Labour Management Policies in the Iron Industry) (*Rikkyo Economic Studies*, Vol. 17, No. 3, p. 77).

¹⁹ *Ibid.*, Documents and Materials, Vol. I. cf. an Introduction.

²⁰ Sen Katayama and Kojiro Nishikawa, *Labour Movement in Japan* (New Edition in Japanese). p. 79.

²¹ G. Yokoyama, *ibid.*, p. 82.

²² *Ibid.*, Documents and materials, Vol. I. p. 469, An Introduction.

²³ Mr. Moritaro Yamada understands the emergence of the IWU as a reflection of the military policies of Japanese capitalism. "The training of the labour force and the convergence of labouring men at the giant military and naval arsenals under the control of imperial capitalism was characterized by a semi-serf small scale farming relationship, semi-servile sweating labour and enthusiastic policies for obscuring the territory contributed to the advance of the formation of the Union of Allied Engineers (1889) and the IWU (1900) which were organized by the workers of military and naval arsenals, who participated in the disputes of Osaka and Tokyo Arsenals. (M. Yamada, *ibid.*, p. 139).

kers' or free-lance artisan' proud of and having self-confidence in their crafts, and so it might be assumed that they had higher sensibility, self-respect and self-reliance than other workers in the modern factories and workshops.

Secondly, it is noteworthy that they paid more attention to the maintenance of friendly benefits, which is demonstrated in the rules of the IWU which called for the alleviation²⁴ of any calamity and misfortune that might befall a member.

Thirdly, they promulgated the policies of their union which were conciliatory and not militant. Their aims were not only the securing of their standard of living, but arbitration in labour disputes and the enlightenment, cultivation and development of capacities of members. It is very curious that the improvement of labour conditions such as wages and working hours were not mentioned and so it is appropriate for us to regard this association as a mutual-aid, friendship society.²⁵

The 2nd item of the rules of the IWU defines members of this union as those engaged in engineering, smith, tin-plate, iron-foundry, model, copper, iron-ship building trades, engine-men of iron-works and firemen. Although the majority of members were, in general, factory workers, some of them were independent iron-workers who had their own small-scale workshops. The 26th item states: 'A branch consists of 25 members of one or several factories, and iron-workers independent of factories can also enter the Union and 25 members can form a branch'. In 28th and 29th, items of 4th chapter the financial affairs are mentioned as following: 'A member must pay an entrance fee, thirty sen that is due to the Union fund', and further, 'A member must pay twenty sen on the 15th day of every month'.

The headquarters that controlled all branches had a Sanjikai (executive committee) which was only an executive machine, and was located in Tokyo. The Union made a remarkable progress so that it had a membership of 3,600 people, and accumulated 1,000 yen on the middle of August, 1898²⁶. However, it will be seen that the extraordinary development of its organization was closely connected with its sudden setback and collapse. The importance of friendly benefits was essential to the earliest labour movements of every country, but in the case of the Japanese labour movement, the Union was confronted and had to deal with sickness, unemployment and labour disasters under the worst conditions of low wages, insufficient nourishment and bad housing. The expenditure of sick and funeral

²⁴ The Rules of Association for Encouragement and Formation of Trades Unions, RODO-SEKAI No. 42 (15th, August, 1899).

²⁵ Sen Katayama declared that the IWU was a progressive society which supported socialism and protested against any one who ignored social Justice (Sen Katayama and Kojiro Nishikawa, *ibid.*, p. 148, and S. Katayama, *The Tendencies of Labour Movement in Twentieth century*, in "Rodo Sekai", No. 69, 1st Jan. 1901. Attention must be paid to the fact that these views were promulgated in 1901 when the IWU was severely suppressed by the state authority and his thoughts were moving toward socialism.

²⁶ The RODO-SEKAI (*World of Labour*). No. 18 (15th, August, 1901).

benefits accelerated with the growth of membership, and it is apparent that the increase of friendly benefits for members extremely endangered the financial condition of the Union.

However, the leaders of the Union, Fusataro Takano and Sen Katayama endeavoured to establish a craft union on the model of European trade union movements in spite of such defects and showed the following as goals to be sought. They argued for 1) compensation for losses arising from sickness, injuries and other accidental disasters, 2) the establishment of educational institutions necessary for adult skilled labourers and the management of apprentices, 3) the old-age pension system, 4) policies for the welfare of the unemployed, 5) maintenance of the value of labour throughout the fluctuation of the supply and demand of the labour market, 6) the protection of the rights of labourers in consultation with the employers with regard to trade associations and finally, 7) advice given to their marriage counselling.²⁷ It can be seen that it had the characteristics of modern trade unions, so far as the apprenticeship, old-age pension system and unemployment insurance schemes are concerned, and because it highly appreciated the role of the trade union as a monopolistic machinery of the labour force. Notwithstanding their conciliatory policies, the Union suffered from repressional governmental action which was undertaken to destroy its convention at Ueno commemorating the first anniversary of the founding of the IWU on the 8th January, 1899. The union received a fatal blow by this event. The Rodo-sekai (the World of Labour), the paper of the IWU, protested against the threatening attitude of government as follows:

'Our union has already a membership of 3,000 and branches throughout Japan. It is now endeavouring to reach its goals and to give financial help its many members who have suffered such untimely accidents as injury and death of labourers and their families.' 'None of the 3,000 members of our Union has ever been punished for disorderly behaviour. Furthermore, by not striking in the past year, they have not disrupted society. Rather, they made more remarkable progress than before the foundation of the Union. It is a great regret for our trustworthy, innocent and honest members that they were not able to hold their festival commemorating the one year's anniversary of the Union. The cost of this festival was met by their meagre savings and provisions of the members, and it was hoped that many honoured guests invited would attend'²⁸.

It is impressive that in this proclamation strikes are said to be an anti-social and disruptive activity. It shows an immature attitude of the Union towards strikes.

However, as well as the severe repression of the state authority from outside the union there emerged another difficult problem from inside—that was the financial problem. We can read an interesting report in the headquarters's circular of August, 1899.

²⁷ *Ibid.* (*World of Labour.*)

²⁸ *Ibid.*, 15th, January 1899.

'At Seven p.m. on 20th, August, the temporary conference of the headquarter executive committee was held and the following were resolved.

Resolutions: (a) a decrease of money from 5 sen to 3 sen from headquarters, (b) a decrease of money to the Kiseikai from 5 sen to 2 1/2 sen inclusive of the distribution of the Rodo-sekai once a month, (c) headquarter expenditure is limited to 3 sen per member of the IWU²⁹. It will be found from these resolutions that the IWU which had expended a large sum of money for social welfare benefits was plunged into the distressed financial conditions. But contrary to the urgent financial conditions, the movement of the IWU was not as inactive as supposed in the first half of 1899. It worth paying attention to the development of its organization. The number of branches at the time of its foundings was only 13 of which 8 were located at the workshop of the Tokyo Munitions Arsenal; it increased to 40 at the end of 1900, and the scope of its organization extended from the factories of the Japan Railway Company in the North-east areas to the ship-buildingyards on most northern Hokkaido Island.³⁰

Moreover, as early as 1900 an important labour dispute at Ohmiya factory of the Japan Railway Company occurred. Eight members of the IWU were highly indignant at the violent manner³¹ of a foreman and demanded his apologies, but the company dismissed them on grounds of arrogant behaviour. This was an open challenge to the IWU and it was obliged to struggle with employers to the utmost of their powers. Though they developed many types of movements such as speech meetings, interviews with the president, and appeals to the public through the Rodo-sekai, the question was not settled, and finally was taken to court.

But, behind this dispute the IWU gradually began its decline. This was apparent in the increase of members' who could not pay the union-fee. Those who left the Union, didn't pay the fee increased, and in April, only 1,000 of the 5,400 members were paying and 251 were receiving some money from the relief fund of the Union, and twenty-seventy members died of diseases, sixty-five left the Union, fifty-seven were expelled from the Union. As a result, the financial conditions became worse. It was decided that the revision of the relief money to deceased members be reduced from 15 yen to 10 yens, that payment of relief money to the sicked and injured for the time being suspended, and that the revival policies of the Union be considered, and in September, 1900, it was difficult even to maintain publishing its own organ, "Rodo-sekai".³²

But most shocking to the IWU was the passage of 'the Police Laws for the Maintenance of Order' which implied intention of suppressing all democratic movements inclusive of the working-class movement. The causes of decline of the IWU were

²⁹ *Ibid.*, 1st, February, 1899.

³⁰ Documents and Materials, Vol. I, p. 504, An Introduction.

³¹ The Ohmiya dispute is treated in each number of 15th, November, 1st and 15th December, 1899 and 1st February, 1900, of *World of Labour*.

³² Katayama and Nishikawa, *ibid.*, pp. 88-89.

not simple, but compound. Even though the forbidding conspiracies of employers and repressive attitudes of government authority were one of the main causes of its collapse, they were not the only causes. The rapid rise and downfall of the IWU make a tragedy of Japanese labour movement in the earliest stages. This is not only attributed to the repressive policies of employers and 'the Political Laws for the Maintenance of Order', but the lack of "worker-consciousness" on the part of labourers and the weakness of their organizations. The causes must be observed from assessing both factors outside and inside of the labour movement.

III. THE FALL OF THE IWU AND ITS CAUSES

It has been mentioned already that one of the main causes of the decline of the IWU was due to financial difficulties. If the table of relief-expense of three months from June to August, 1899, is examined, one is surprised to know that 6,848 yen, at that time an enormous amount, was the relief money. 4,994 yen was appropriated for payment of sick-benefits to members who occupied 90 percent of all benefits-receiver.³³ The fact that the greater parts of diseases were lung-disease, rheumatic trouble, stomach-catarrh, inflammation of the lungs, cerebral hyperaemia and injury³⁴ should also be noted.

The IWU paid more than 12 yen to those who suffered from chronic diseases over two months with relief of 20 sen per day a member, but within the maximum limit of eighty days of diseases. One can surmise that even these benefits were not sufficient to support the members who faced the double burden of expense of convalescence and cost of living. Nevertheless, it was an adventurous, courageous attempt to the IWU, because its history was very short and the fund was not so fully secure. It was natural that the Union fell into financial difficulties. At that time, the Japanese working class did not have any kind of insurance, except the small scale friendly society. Therefore the IWU was compelled to assume the responsibility of labour disasters and diseases resulting from the tremendous speed of capital accumulation. It is clear from the records that the Union had to pay out the enormous amount of 4,994 yen in only ninety days. This sum represented the benefits paid to 83 members for 2,497 days. It shows that the iron and munitions industries of Japan were enforcing the lowest possible wage on the members of the IWU in order to rapidly accumulate capital.

Sen Katayama called the 'tramping artisans' ('free lance artisans') who found the basis of the IWU the 'superior workers' excellent in technological knowledge. He categorized these skilled workers into two groups. One was composed of the faithful workman who found uppermost enjoyment in endeavouring to increase the membership of his union. The other group was composed of the young apprentices who were fond of speaking and agitating among the workers.³⁵ The

³³ The ROSO-SEKAI (*The World of Labour*) No. 46 (15th October, 1900).

³⁴ *Ibid.*

³⁵ Sen Katayama, *An Autobiography*, Tokyo 1954 p. 222.

IWU was an association of free lance artisans who were also handicraftsman, and were regarded as such by the society of master and skilled workers. However, it is most important to examine whether they had been earning wages appropriate to the skilled workers.

Guenoske Yokoyama, the outstanding researcher on the labour problem and famous journalist, wrote as following in his excellent study, "NIPPON NO KASO-SHAKAI" ("The Underworld of Japan").

'In the Tokyo Arsenal Manufactory are employed more than three hundred women workers now, for only ten or twenty sen, and ten hours a day, and most of them are wives and children of the iron workers who are also employed there. Though the women workers who engage in cotton-spinning and weaving might have other motives than earning their daily bread, the wives and children of iron workers who work with their husbands seem to have entered into the factory for the necessity of their living. We discover how the lives of our working-class fall into destitution.'³⁶

The women workers were, indeed, employed as helpers at the lowest wages in the Military Arsenal Manufactory, even if relatively small in number, and so the wages of the iron workers were not high, since their wages were also regulated by their lowest wage. Yokoyama continues further.

'The Military Arsenal Manufactory had two types of wage-payment, and one was the daily wage and the other was the sub-contract wage. In the case of the former, a worker is paid from twenty-five to thirty sen for ten hours, and a wage of thirty-five sen was not scarce. Even though some of the workers would earn seventy, eighty sen or more in one yen, the wage of the average worker remained between thirty sen to fifty sen at most. However, if it is thought that their wages were decent, this was incorrect, because their wages were a result of intensive labour of thirteen or sixteen hours above ordinary working hours. This was because they could not maintain their ordinary life, unless they worked overtime.'³⁷

Yokoyama tries to show the true condition of low wages, by comparing the wages of Japanese workers with the iron workers of the United States of America, and remonstrates against the low wages policy as following, "How miserable our iron workers are, if we think of the highest wage, 139 pound a month to American iron workers,³⁸ while our workers generally receive forty sen or fifty sen a day, with over one yen very rare." The forlorn and deserted conditions of Japanese workers, the extremely low wages and pauperization were so intimately connected with the decline of the IWU. The fundamental policies of Japanese government at that time were concentrated at transplanting and promoting heavy industries through state authority, and the unparalleled rapid accumulation of capital, so that even skilled labourers were relegated to the throng of paupers, not leaving room for

³⁶ G. Yokoyama, *The Underworld of Japan*, Tokyo 1958 p. 208.

³⁷ Yokoyama, *ibid.*, pp. 217-218.

³⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 224.

them to attain labour aristocracy. It was the so-called 'Higher Economic Policies' to use a modern expression that destroyed the social welfare benefits system of the IWU. However it would not be right to attribute all of the causes of its destruction to them. It must be borne in mind that the collapse of the IWU could not only be attributed to the pressure policy of the government, but also to the lack of workers' sense of responsibility or voluntarism, and to the structural weakness of the organization.

Guenoske Yokoyama mentioned the history, policies and organization of Operative Bricklayers' Society of Britain, comparing them with the IWU in his famous essay, *NAICHI-ZAKKYOGO NO NIHON*³⁹ (Japan after the Repeal of Extraterritorial Jurisdiction). However, the Operative Bricklayers' Society fundamentally different from the IWU, because it was a large scale craft union over the national area and aimed at the maintenance of vigorous limitation of union members and the protection of occupational interests. In brief, the IWU was not provided with conditions for its success. It was the lack of these conditions as well as the weakness of their organization that deeply disheartened Fusataro Takano and Sen Katayama.

We have many studies which analyse the formation of the IWU and the causes of its very sudden fall. According to common interpretation, we can find two types of opinion, that is, one is the theory on the Enterprise Union by Prof. K. Ohkochi and the other is the 'labour market theory' represented by Prof. M. Sumiya. At the present time the latter theory is dominant and is supported by Prof. N. Naito and Dr. Hyodo. This writer will scrutinize and criticize these various views on the decline of the IWU.

At first, in the essay 'On the Formation and Training of Iron Workers in the Period of Industrial Capital of Japan,'⁴⁰ Prof. Naito lays great emphasis upon the necessity of giving light to the *raison d'être* of the labour force of the iron industry which had previously been neglected and unappreciated, and especially, of the male skilled labour force in the age of industrial revolution of Japan from 1890 to 1900. Because the traditional methods of inquiring into the labour problem in Japan were devoid of an approach from the point of view of labour market, 'Social Policy' (Sozial-politik) research method being the most common method of inquiry. He was of the opinion that it was necessary to research into the question of skilled labourers who occupied essential positions within early trade associations in order to get a clear understanding of the establishment and development of life-time employment system. The most crucial point of his assertion was that while the IWU were not able to build up their own institution for cultivating and training a skilled labour force, the government had intended to have sufficient numbers for the heavy industries, especially, the engineering, shipbuilding and metal industries. This was to be accomplished by reorganizing the old-

³⁹ G. Yokoyama, *Japan after the Repeal of Extraterritorial Jurisdiction*, Tokyo, 1954 p. 82.

⁴⁰ Norikuni Naito, *On the Formation and Training of Iron Workers in the Period of Industrial Capital of Japan* (*Rikkyo Univ. Economic Studies*, Vol. 16, No. 2, July 1962).

type handicraftsmen into skilled workers in the newly-established public ship-yards and munitions manufactories where modern European techniques had been introduced by the government, but it was not successful. In his opinion, it was because apprentices, who were often sons of handicraftsmen, had a marked tendency to become wage-earners, without finishing the normal process for skilled workers.

As the natural course of things, a great army of unskilled labours poured into the labour market, but were not able to adapt themselves immediately to the advanced techniques of western Europe, and accordingly, the system of 'learning operatives' was adopted in the modern factories in order to secure the labour force. The paralyzation of the old apprenticeship system descended from feudal times, and the failure of new machinery for training the skilled labourer resulted in the growth of unskilled labourers who were called 'apprentices of the second class'⁴¹. They were introduced into the factories as the industrial labour force recruited by the boss-masters for the absolute deficit of the skilled labour force. The extraordinary demands for skilled labour force led to the institutionalizing of the system of 'regular operatives' in the military and naval factories by which the frequent labour migration, and the vigorous rivalry for skilled labour might be interrupted. The urgent demand for skilled labour, (It was in extremely short supply after Sino-Japanese War) gradually enhanced the sense of consciousness of the workers and saw the appearance of the 'migrant workers' different from model-workers and apart from 'regular operatives,' who did not feel grateful for the favours of enterprises which employed them. Sen Katayama recognized in them the true organizers for the establishment of the IWU. Prof. Naito sums up the causes of the collapse of the IWU as following: the members of the IWU consist of two types of workers. One is the master-artisan (boss-master) who manages the recruitment, employment and guidance of the workers, and plays the role of controller in the planning and practice of production to the administration of lives of operatives such as caring for their physical and mental conditions. They were originally independent but subcontracted handicraftsmen and entered the factories with their apprentices. The other is the rank and file operative, that is, the 'migrant worker.' It could easily be supposed that both groups fell into contradictory positions within one union, and with the promotion of the policy of systematising labour management or the policy of enclosing the workers inside the enterprise, the division became decisive, and the IWU moved towards its decline step by step.

The next noteworthy opinion is the view of Prof. Hyodo. He maintains that the IWU had the largest association that Japan had ever seen, and its members were the main body of engineers and iron-workers employed by the military and naval factories, the representative gigantic enterprises. He agrees with the assumption that they had knowledge enough to organize a craft union in the earliest

⁴¹ Naito, *ibid.*

stages of labour movement⁴², but nevertheless is critical of two other points of view. Firstly, he asserts that the IWU had the basis as a craft union in the development of Japanese labour movement even if for very short time, in contrast with the pessimistic view of Prof. Ohkochi that there has never been both the economic background and the modern workers to promote the formation of the IWU as a craft union.

Secondly, Prof. Hyodo analyses the theory of Prof. Sumiya which is in direct contrast to the view of Ohkochi. Mr. Hyodo criticizes Mr. Sumiya regarding the understanding of labour market. He comments on assumption of the existence of the horizontal labour market which provided the foundation for establishment of the IWU as following; that it is wrong to consider both the IWU and the Amalgamated Society of Engineers as similar. He says, "if a craft union was formed in the same model in Japan as in England, why did the IWU not regulate the wages of the workers⁴³."

Prof. Hyodo implies many interesting problems, but, nevertheless his view is inconsistent, because, while he recognizes the existence of the horizontal labour market which was a necessary condition for the IWU, he denies its true character as a craft union. It is nothing but a contradiction. It must be asked whether the IWU had been organized as a craft union in a true sense. In conclusion, let us inquire into this important problem.

It is very interesting that Samuel Gompers wrote to Takano about the importance of the craft unions in his letter, dated March 9, 1894.

New York, March 9, 1894

Mr. F. Takano, Great Barrington, Mass.

Dear Sir: I am in receipt of your favor of the 6th instant the contents of which are carefully noted.

In reply, permit me to say that I experienced more pleasure in the perusal of your letter than I have time or opportunity, or possibly the ability to express. To my mind it appears that no growth or permanent good can come either to the workers of America, Japan or any other country without the essential factor to secure it, namely organization. That you after a stay of a few years in our country have arrived at the same conclusions, and proposed on your return to Japan to do what you can to instill thought upon your fellow countrymen and to the human family.

Truly as you say I cannot enter into a full discussion of this subject in a letter nor answer your questions as I believe they deserve to be, but the initial step to be taken by any people must of necessity be the right to coalesce, the right to organization. That right I am aware is

⁴² T. Hyodo, *The Formation and Decline of the IWU (1)—The Industrial Relation in the Heavy industries after the Sino-Japanese War* (*Tokyo Univ. Economic Essays*, Vol. 31, No. 4 pp. 14-15).

⁴³ Kyodo, *ibid.*, p. 16.

not accorded to the subjects of the Japanese empire.

The workers should be organized in the unions of their respective trades and callings at the earliest possible time. That brings unity of feeling and action and instills in the hearts and minds the feeling and knowledge of interdependence, security and progress. The indiscriminate organization of workers regardless of their trades and callings is by no means to be compared in its stability and results to the organization upon trades lines.

As per your request I mail a number of documents to you with this and commend them to your careful study.

Should you at any rate be able to make a visit to this city and have an hour to spare, it would afford me pleasure to discuss this matter at length with you. In all likelihood a better understanding could be had than a mere correspondence could secure.

Again expressing my appreciation of your kind thoughts upon the organization of the Japanese workmen, and trusting that your effort may be entirely successful, I am.

Very respectfully yours
Samuel Gompers, President

American Federation of Labour⁴⁴

This letter shows the efforts and pains of Takano who began to organize the trade unions, using the AFL as a model. This gave him the privilege of forming the Japanese branch of the AFL in the name of President Gompers. We have an excellent study⁴⁵ on the life and thoughts of Fusataro Takano by Prof. Hyman Kublin.

F. Takano was born in 1868, the year of the Meiji Restoration at Nagasaki which was the only place of contact for the Japanese people with western civilization. When he was ten years old, his family moved to Tokyo, where his parents opened an hotel and transportation business. But his father soon died in 1880, and moreover, the family house burnt down.

Fusataro moved to the house of his uncle and was engaged in his business, while attending Yokohama Commercial School. In 1886, after his uncle's death, he left Japan for the United States of America⁴⁶. In U.S.A., he tried to manage a business, but as this did not succeed, he had to earn his living another way. When Takano went to America, Samuel Gompers was beginning to build the basis of the AFL, the strongest organization of American labour movement, and he wrote in his autobiography that Takano who had been exceptionally interested in the labour movement and at that time, a student of Columbia University, called on him in his office for the information pertaining to the Japanese labour move-

⁴⁴ A Letter to Takano from S. Gompers, New York, March 9, 1894.

⁴⁵ Hyman Kublin, Fusataro Takano, *The Life and Thought of a Labour Leader*, Tokyo, 1959.

⁴⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 24.

ment⁴⁷. It is very natural that Takano was very deeply shocked with industrialization and the progress of civilization of American society. He thought that the waves of mechanical production of capitalism would overflow the society of Japan and in accordance with such tendencies, the labour problems would emerge, taking a menacing form.

When he returned to his own country, he felt painfully the backwardness of the Japanese labour movement, the low consciousness, the miserable living conditions and low wages of the working people. Above all, he deplored the non-existence of a labour movement.

“A labour movement, as I understand it, is a systematic effort put forth by the workingmen themselves to protect and advance their interests. A labour movement in that sense, I am sorry to say, does not exist in Japan.”⁴⁸ Takano mentions the ignorance of Japanese working people who had no interest in elevating their social status.

The cause of the non-existence of a labor movement in Japan is non other than the ignorance among the Japanese working people. This is the reason that the wage workers in their position without advancement, while in social and industrial affairs, the progress of which even the most active social and intellectual leaders have amazed us been advancing with steps during the last thirty years. It is the only that the working people into a rank lower than the merchant. A quarter of a century ago it was common to arrange the ranks of the people, as: 1. Military: 2. Farmer: 3. Mechanic: 4. Merchant; but now the orders of the ranks are somewhat changed; namely, military, farmers, merchants, and mechanics.”⁴⁹

From these expressions, it is easily supposed that Takano was very annoyed at the ignorance and low consciousness of the working people. He had to search out the means for organizing them in a short time. He wrote to Samuel Gompers on 15th April, 1897. In this letter, he told of his determination.

“I myself advanced the organization of workers as the best means to promote the interests of the workers, dwelling at considerable length upon the method of formation of the trade unions, explaining the plan of American trade unions and the American Federation of Labor. It cannot be said that the meeting has done much for the labour movement in this country, but it serves as a foundation of future work.”⁵⁰

The design for contemplating the labour organization in Japan had been already discussed in San Francisco. The “friends of workers” under whose auspices the meeting was held, consisted of four remaining members of an association

⁴⁷ Kublin, *ibid.*, p. 26, Samuel Gompers, *Seventy Years of Life and Labour*, 2 Vols. (New York, 1925), II. p. 59.

⁴⁸ F. Takano, *Labour Movement in Japan*, *American Federationist*, Vol. I, No. 8 (October 1894).

⁴⁹ *Ibid.*

⁵⁰ Takano, *Our Organizer in Japan*, *American Federationist* Vol. IV, No. 4 (June, 1897).

formed years ago in San Francisco by some dozen Japanese living there. These remaining members were Takano, a tailor and two shoemakers who had been staunch advocates of trade unionism. But Takano often felt depressed, for he realized that even those who were enlightened on the subject of labour were reluctant to admit the necessity of unions, putting a great emphasis on the mistaken idea that to the workers the mighty powers of unions would lead to repeated strikes and industrial disturbances. Takano was a promoter of conciliation policy between capital and labour, but was against socialistic and revolutionary movements. He endeavoured to expect the support and assistance from the enlightened people of the industrial world. Teiichi Sakuma who was called the 'Robert Owen of Japan' was his warm sympathizer. Sakuma established a model factory of printing and provided the best conditions for the workers which gave an extraordinary impression to Takano who wrote with great fervour the experiences there.⁵¹ It is very natural that Takano became an agitator who gave much effort to try and reconcile relations between employers and employees.

"It is now axiomatic with the labour movement that the peaceful solution of the labor problem can come only through organized effort on the part of working people on the one hand and through understanding of the labour movement on the part of employers on the other."

However, if you read the writings of Takano, you will feel the very strong tone of encouragement, exciting and strengthening the docile and lazy working-men. After all, it seems as if Takano did not have any confidence that the Japanese labouring classes could embrace a feeling of enthusiastic sympathy and cordiality. That was coincident with the fact that he attributed the causes of the decline of labour movement more to the ignorance and lack of self-confidence or self-reliance of the working people than to the repressive policies of the state authority.

Sen Katayama had another point of view. He was a son of a small farmer in Okayama, and throughout his life, had held the spirit of small farmer at the bottom of his own heart. As is well known, he was a unique person among the international socialist movement as well as the Japanese labour and socialist movement. His life-time was the succession of many ventures into social radicalism. While young, he was a Confucian scholar, and thereafter became a Christian Socialist in America and successively a Marxist, and a Bolshevik. But he was a social reformer during the day of the establishment of the IWU. After the passing of the Police Laws for the Maintenance of Order, he gradually progressed towards socialism. Contrary to Takano, his comrade, he believed that the fall of the IWU was due to the repressive and reactionary policies of government and strongly advocated struggling with the government, uniting the working people in a common front.

Takano soon retired from the trade union movement, while Katayama persistently went his own way. Takano died in China in 1904 at the age of 36.

⁵¹ Takano, Prospects of the Japanese Labour Movement, Special Correspondent of the American Federationist, *American Federationist*, IV, No. 9 (November, 1897).

After the disappearance of Takano, the IWU rapidly declined and thereafter, before the advent of imperial enthusiasm of the Russo-Japanese War, the IWU trod the way of collapse.

What were the causes of the IWU? First, the repressive policy of government. The Police Laws for the Maintenance of Order smashed the IWU which was preparing to solidify the working classes, namely, by rectifying the mental immaturity of skilled workers and weakness of organization and repressive attitude of the state authority. Secondly, the basis for craft-unions on the western European model was not sufficiently developed in Japan, for instance, lack of regulations for apprenticeship. Thirdly, extremely low wages and failure of social welfare benefits.

The movement of the IWU which makes an interesting episode in the earliest stages of Japanese labour movement was not only the trial of the first craft union on the national level, but an autonomous mutual-aid association which demanded the improvement of labour conditions and appealed the protection of their livings to the capitalists and the governing classes. The causes of its decline must be found in the policy of extraordinarily rapid accumulation of capital as well as the repressive policies of the state authority which undermined the basis of their mutual assistance.

Now, we can't be indifferent to the history of the IWU. The historical event in the period of 1900 might be an example to the current labour movement shaken by the higher economic growth policy.

The collapse of the IWU and the decline of the Kiseikai significantly influenced the later development of labour movement. It can be interpreted from these processes that the enterprise unions peculiar to the Japanese labour movement resulted from industrial relations based on the Japanese model.

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