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Organization and Activities of the Federation of Machine Workers' Unions

—A Case Study of Industry-wide
Federation in Prewar Japan—

by *Ryuji Komatsu*

Among the labor movements carried in Japan after World War I, we can never forget one which was impressively performed by the Federation of Machine Workers' Unions. Any person who is interested in the activities of labor unions in Japan before World War II is sure familiar with the name of the Federation of Machine Workers' Unions.

It seems, however, that those interested people are not well posted in the actual steps taken by the Federation and the conditions in which it had to act. Needless to say, the Federation was an industry-wide federation composed of machine workers' unions in Tokyo. At the same time, the Federation turned to be a leading influence in the antagonism between the "Free Federationism" and the "Centralized Federationism" because of the withdrawal of the Japanese Federation of Labor (Sodomei) supporters from the Council of Trade Unions (Rodokumiai-domei-kai), and because of the unwillingness of the Japanese Federation of Labor to support the Federation of Machine Workers' Unions, exciting an antipathy against the Japanese Federation of Labor on the latter's part. This is the actual process of development which the Federation of Machine Workers' Unions had come through.

The majority of the people, however, who are interested in the prewar labor movements of Japan are very little aware of the Federation; all they know about it is that it is a labor union in line of "Free Federationism." They have very little knowledge of its history, organization and its component elements. Here we take up, therefore, this Federation as a case study which will help us to look into how the prewar labor movements of Japan operated.

The points that are clarified in this essay are as follows:

(1) The Federation of Machine Workers' Unions came into being at the time when machine workers in Tokyo were driven into a dilemma as a result of the depression set in after 1920, and felt the necessity of forming

themselves into a powerful organization so as to tide over the difficult situation.

(2) What they formed was a federation of the unions by enterprise or by industry or just general unions. It was a pioneer of the industry-wide federation of unions in Japan.

(3) The affiliated unions gradually gained in their enterprisewide feature of their organization, and the machine workers were rather in favor of this trend.

(4) It was however, not such a loose body of organization which works merely as an information exchange agency, but was a powerful body which will force its way over the affiliated unions, although it fully admits their autonomy.

(5) Apart from general or social affairs, all the economic activities were carried independently by each union. Excepting, however, a very few unions, they were not powerful enough to conduct collective bargaining against management.

(6) The Federation of Machine Workers' Unions was generally considered of Free federationism. It does not follow, however, that it upheld an anarchistic "Free Federationism" as its pivotal thought of control.

It admitted the independence of the affiliated unions just in a very broad sense. Rather it should be understood that the Federation took the seemingly liberal stand because of their impulsive reaction against the dictatorial trend of Japanese Federation of Labor.

A Quantitative Analysis of Wage Determination in Japan (1)¹⁾

by *Haruo Shimada*

It is widely accepted today that wages are determined, not only by market forces, but also by institutional forces under collective bargaining systems. Especially, the contracted increment of the level of wages of organized labor is largely the immediate outcome of negotiations between the management and the union.

1) This paper is the first report of our joint study with Associate Prof. Yoko Sano, Keio University.