



NEWSLETTER

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Occupational Health and Safety Team Invited from Asia Nine POSITIVE Trainers from Five Countries Visit Japan

JILAF invited an Asian occupational health and safety team to visit Japan from September 2-15, 2004, to exchange experiences and share information. The team consisted of nine POSITIVE trainers, including three women, from five (Bangladesh, Mongolia, Nepal, Pakistan and the Philippines) of the seven Asian countries implementing POSITIVE programs.

POSITIVE (Participation-Oriented Safety Improvements by Trade Union Initiative) is a trade union-led action-oriented program to promote occupational health and safety. It aims to improve workplace conditions, reduce the incidence of industrial accidents, and improve industrial relations. It is characterized by simple and practical methods, using action checklists and specific local cases. With the cooperation of experts on occupational health and safety issues in Japan, JILAF has so far applied POSITIVE programs in seven countries in Asia (Pakistan, the Philippines, Bangladesh, Mongolia, Thailand, Nepal and China).

For the current team, a unique program was drawn up with a special focus on occupational health and safety, on the basis of the regular invitation programs. Through lectures on labor issues and a visit to the Japan Industrial Safety and Health Association (JISHA), the participants had an opportunity to learn about labor laws and occupational health and safety in Japan, as well as efforts for the prevention of industrial accidents. During their visit to RENGO Gifu, they conferred with officials of the Occupational Safety and Health Center and had a lively exchange of views. They also visited Pacific Industrial Co. and the new Koto Incineration Plant, and had a chance to learn on the spot about joint efforts by labor and management to address occupational health and safety problems. On top of this, a "Meeting to Hear about POSITIVE Activities" was

held on September 8 (Wednesday) and an "Trade Unions and Occupational Safety and Health International Forum" was held on September 13 (Monday) under the joint auspices of RENGO, the Institute for Science of Labour and JILAF to provide the participants with an opportunity to report on their activities at home. At the "Meeting to Hear about POSITIVE Activities" on September 8, which was joined by Japanese experts and JILAF officials and staff members, the participants presented activities to enhance occupational health and safety in their respective countries, using photos and other presentation materials, for the purpose of exchanging experiences and sharing information among them. The presentation was followed by a group discussion session, and then the participants actively took part in a lively question and answer session, trying hard to learn from the experiences in other countries (for example, the Philippine initiative to build an information network using the Internet). Japanese experts commented that they were pleased to hear about specific successful efforts and were convinced that the POSITIVE methodology was taking firm root. They also said they were able to ascertain anew the importance of workers themselves being proactive. At the International Forum on September 13, with the participation of many people involved in occupational health and safety activities, Mr. Kazutaka Kogi, advisory researcher at the Institute for Science of Labour, made a keynote speech, and then six of the Asian participants, representing their organizations, reported on respective activities related to occupational health and safety, giving a few specific examples of improvements. Ms. Shita Devkota of the Nepal Trade Union Congress (NTUC) told the



forum that she had come to realize the need for efforts on occupational health and safety at her own workplace after attending a POSITIVE seminar. She reported that she had been able to persuade management to hold an occupational health and safety seminar and achieved the establishment of a 24-hour medical care system. She had received a letter of appreciation from management for greatly contributing to the enhancement of occupational health and safety in the workplace. RENGO Headquarters, JEC RENGO and RENGO Tokyo also reported on their activities in a session on the "Introduction of a Variety of Japanese Experiences and Efforts." The forum provided the participants with an opportunity to make a range of related Japanese organizations aware of POSITIVE activities in their own countries.

Through the latest program, the participants acquired much knowledge and were able to enhance their skills, as each participated in various programs with a sense of purpose. It is hoped that in the future, they will make good use of the network they have developed through the latest program to facilitate the exchange of experiences and information sharing in order to improve the situation of occupational health and safety further in their respective countries.

CMTU/JILAF Seminar on Organizational Operations Held in Mongolia

On August 19-20, the two-day CMTU/JILAF Seminar on Organizational Operations was held in Ulan Bator under joint sponsorship with the Confederation of Mongolian Trade Unions (CMTU). For this seminar, the first to address this theme since the CMTU/JILAF seminars were launched in 1994, CMTU, which was then working on a revision of its union charter prior to its annual convention in September, made a specific request that it “would like to get hints from RENGO’s experiences for the solution to organizational problems.” Consequently, RENGO Assistance General Secretary Hitoshi Takahashi was invited as a guest speaker to give a lecture on the present state of the RENGO movement and its challenges. A briefing on the current union movement in Mongolia by CMTU Vice President Narmandakh and questions from participants demonstrated CMTU’s strong interest in the distribution of union dues and the financial management of unions, and also showed that one of CMTU’s challenges today is the expansion of its human resource base.

Unfortunately, communications with CMTU before the seminar to make decisions on the details of the event were somewhat infrequent, perhaps because the seminar was held at a time when CMTU was preoccupied with its forthcoming convention. The experience of the latest seminar points to the need for some improvements in terms of preparations for future seminars, including the timing of holding them.

At the 18th convention of CMTU, held on September 8, an election was held for the presidency and vice-presidency following the resignation of former President Adiya, who became a



Seminar on organizational operations in Mongolia

member of parliament in June. In the vote, Mr. Sodnomdorj Nyamjav, a former member of parliament, was elected president, and Mr. Chimeddorj Mishig, former chairperson of Mongolian Enlightenment Workers’ Trade Union Federation, was elected vice president. JILAF hopes to deepen relations with CMTU under the new leadership, and to pursue meaningful exchanges and cooperation.

International Lecture Meeting on “EU Accession and Trade Union Responses”

As part of JILAF’s new project from last fiscal year to invite union leaders of Europe and North America to Japan, nine top union leaders from four Central and Eastern European countries were invited to visit from October 7-20. They came from the Czech Republic, Hungary, Poland and Slovakia, all of which joined the European Union (EU) in May 2004. Since these countries are attracting attention in Japan, with Japanese investment there rapidly rising in recent years, an international lecture meeting was held on October 12, under the theme of “EU Accession and Trade Union Responses” (cosponsored by RENGO with the support of JILPT).

Following brief introductory remarks about trade union organizations in the four countries, the lecturers spoke on present challenges they are facing, including historical backgrounds. They emphasized that the

accession to the EU was a major turning point in the reform process following the regime change, and that trade unions in



An international lecture meeting by European trade union leaders

principle supported the accession, working for labor law revisions to make it possible. However, they reported that there still remain a host of problems to be addressed in the future. The wage gap with Western Europe is large in the Czech Republic, “flexible” forms of employment such as temporary and fixed-term employment are on the rise in Slovakia amid the high joblessness (20%), and all four countries are experiencing widening regional gaps, according to the lecturers.

They stated that while EU membership is expected to help revitalize economic activities, increase employment and improve working conditions, it will also require further changes in the economic structures of their countries, including the need to abolish preferential treatment aimed at luring investment, as well as to prepare the fiscal conditions for the introduction of the euro. In Hungary, in particular, companies are moving abroad in pursuit of cheaper labor, underlining the need to increase skilled labor and enhance productivity. A lecturer from Solidarnosc of Poland, which had been seeking free migration within the EU, argued against the transitional period set for the free flow of labor, saying that EU member states should mutually guarantee the right of free labor movements.

Details of the lecture meeting will be covered in a report to be published later, but one thing was clearly driven home: with the accession to the EU as a turning point, these formerly socialist states are feeling an increasingly strong impact from globalization, and trade unions must address various problems in cooperation with their counterparts in other countries.

Exploitation Behind Gourmet Food:

Burmese Fishing Crews Drift in a Sea of Entangled International Relations

While being involved in the international trade union movement, I am sometimes appalled by the far too cruel and complicated realities of the world. I heard from a Burmese seamen's union about the problems being faced by their compatriot fishing boat workers in isolated Indonesian islands, and scratched my head hard trying to decide how to tackle the issue. The arrests of activists by the Indonesian police and their deportation to Thailand drew keen attention to the problem, which then grew to involve both trade unions and governments in Indonesia and Thailand as well as the ICFTU.

The Burmese economy has stagnated under the military regime, forcing millions of citizens to go abroad in search of jobs. Most flow into neighboring Thailand, where they provide support at the base of the Thai economy. Thailand's fishing industry has undergone a major transformation from coastal fishing for the domestic market, to deep-sea fishing to catch tuna and other high-priced fish for export to Japan and other countries. Few Thais are willing to work in fishing because of the backbreaking work and low wages, and Burmese and Cambodians are now the main sources of labor on fishing boats.

Burmese workers who are desperate for jobs pay exorbitant fees to brokers to cross the border, with some even being forced to pledge to give up future wages. They first go to Thai fishing villages, and then to fishing grounds off Indonesia. What waits

PROFILE



Shigeru Wada

Born in 1955. As ITF (International Transport Workers' Federation) Asia-Pacific Regional Secretary, he supervises ITF operations in the region. He has engaged in international labor activities since being sent to the ITF London headquarters from the trade union headquarters of the former Japanese National Railways in 1982. He has served in his current post since 1993, after serving as head of the ITF Japan office.

for them there is slave-like labor that continues for years, and in fact some die at sea. There are nearly 1,000 Burmese stranded on isolated Indonesian islands, after having had no choice but to escape from Thai fishing boats.

From the Indonesian point of view, there is no doubt that they are illegal entrants. They are also illegal migrant workers from Thailand's perspective. At the same time, however, they are unmistakably victims of exploitation. Japanese people should be aware that these realities lie behind their diet.

International Cooperation Efforts by Trade Unions – No.6

NTT Union's Drive for the Elimination of Child Labor

Koichi Osawa

Member of the Central Executive Committee
NTT Trade Union

The NTT Trade Union designated January-June 2004 as a period for a campaign to eliminate child labor, and organized two study tours during the six months. The first was to India and the second to Thailand and Pakistan. These three countries are all members of IPEC (International Programme on the Elimination of Child Labour), an international organization that carries out programs for the elimination of child labor around the world. With the cooperation of



"Thank you for coming from a faraway country"
- Indian girls shake hands with the participants

the ILO (International Labour Organization), IPEC's parent organization, meetings with representatives of government, labor and management in these countries were held during the study tours. These opportunities added to the significance of the tours, which often tend to be limited to field experiences.

Based on his experience while with the East Japan headquarters, Koichi Osawa believes it is important that international activities by trade unions should be carried out in a way that is visible to members. During the six-month campaign period, he put extra efforts into publicity activities, preparing three different kinds of posters and contributing campaign-related articles every month to the union newspaper. Thanks to these efforts as well as the strong interest of union members in volunteer activities, a total of 190 people applied to join the study tours, far more than the upper limit of 20 participants. The fact that

applicants were not biased in terms of generation or gender indicates that there is a foundation within the NTT Union for carrying out work to further cultivate understanding on international activities among the membership. In order to further solidify this foundation, the NTT Union plans to redouble efforts to nurture personnel who can play an active role in the international arena in the future.

The NTT Union plans to mount a second campaign for the elimination of child labor next year, and plans are currently underway for, among other things, another study tour. "We just launched this campaign and there are still so many things that give us pause. But this stage of struggling to discover what we should do is also the most interesting part," says Osawa. We sincerely hope the NTT Union's international cooperation activities, underpinned by the spirit of public services of its members, will continue to flourish.

13th ICFTU-APRO/OTCILS/JILAF Senior Leadership Course Held in Singapore: 31 People from 20 Countries Take Part

This year's Senior Leadership Course was held in Singapore from August 17-31. Though the course was shortened to two weeks from four last year, the substance of the training remained intact. This made this year's course all the denser.

Beginning this year, country reports, which took up many hours of the training course up until last year, were



dropped, since in many cases they proved to be nothing more than monologues by the reporting speakers. This year, an emphasis was put on discussion, with participants, based on country reports brought along to the session, actively exchanging views each day on more than 10 subjects, including occupational health and safety, gender equality and child labor. Participants also learned about teamwork and leadership through fieldwork, and had the opportunity to see union activities in Singapore firsthand.

Participants acted with mutual respect for one another under the shared slogan of "diversity and unity," and left for home with an enhanced sense of international solidarity. After returning home, the participants, as union movement leaders, are expected to contribute to the improvement of labor conditions in their respective countries from an international perspective.

Thank You So Much for Clothing Aid to Japanese-Cubans!

In February this year, Japanese Ambassador to Cuba Tatsuaki Iwata, who is the former executive director of JILAF, asked us to provide assistance to a project to provide clothing to Japanese-Cubans. Japanese-Cubans have survived a welter of hardships — such as interment during World War II and the confiscation of property amid the Castro regime's communist revolution — to firmly establish their presence in the country. However, since they were not part of the mass emigration organized by the Japanese government, they have not received any financial support from the government and thus their lives in Cuba have been far from easy. When asked what they needed, one representative of the Japanese-Cubans said, "we would like to have old clothes."

We immediately called upon relevant organizations for clothing aid, and soon afterwards received generous donations of 80 carton boxes full of clothing. The clothing was delivered this past summer, and we received a letter of appreciation and some a photograph from Ambassador Iwata. The letter stated that Japanese-Cubans were "very grateful for the assistance" and asked the ambassador to

be sure to convey their appreciation to people in the RENGO organization cooperating on the aid project. Organizations that supported the aid project include All NTT Workers Union of Japan, UI Zensen, Japan Automobile Workers' Union, Jyoho Roren, Denki Rengo, Denryoku Soren, the RENGO Headquarters staff union, and RENGO Yamanashi staff union. Concerned individuals also contributed.



Representatives of Japanese-Cubans from across Cuba

JILAF Calendar (September-November 2004)

1. Invitation Programs

- Asia Occupational Health and Safety Team: September 2-15
- South Korea/Hong Kong/Vietnam Team: September 23-October 6
- Europe Team: October 7-20
- Women Trade Union Training Team: October 21-November 3
- Middle East/North Africa Team: November 4-17

2. Field Projects

- Trade Unions and Occupational Safety and Health: September 13; Sohyo Kaikan, Tokyo
- Philippines TUCP Monitoring: October 5-17; Manila, Quezon, Bacolod, and Cebu
- China ACFTU POSITIVE Follow-Up Meeting: October 18-19; Taicang, Jiangsu Province
- Vietnam VGCL Productivity and Wages/POSITIVE Seminar: October 26-November 12; Ho Chi Minh

City/Hanoi

- India INTUC School Project: November 8-13; Markapur

3. Others

- Social Asia Forum "The Future of East Asia and the Role of Trade Unions": October 14-18; Seoul, South Korea
- ICFTU-APRO Coordination Meeting: November 1-5; Singapore

Inside Out

Toshihiro Motobayashi joined JILAF on October 1, 2004, from Jyoho Roren.

I have taken part, to some degree, in intra-company trade union activities as well as community activities. Since the

activities I am about to get involved in are somewhat different in perspective from those of the past, I am now a bit (very much, to be honest) worried. But I will do my best, and I am looking to receiving guidance from you all.

Toshihiro Motobayashi
On loan from Jyoho Roren

