

# Industrial Relations Trends in Japan

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# 1 Enterprise-based Unionism

- Trade unions established within individual enterprises
- Collective bargaining and collective agreements at the enterprise level
- Rare sectoral bargaining
- Include both blue-collar and white collar workers, but normally **exclude non-regular workers**
- ← Difference of interests between regular and non-regular workers
- Employment security of regular workers sustained by instability of non-regular workers

## 2 Decentralized Collective Bargaining and Shunto

- Collective bargaining at the company level
- Decentralized system → merit: **adaptability to changes**
- Defect: weakness in bargaining power and lack of universal impact across the sector
- **Shunto** (= spring wage offensive): sectoral federations and national confederation set the goal for wage increase and coordinate company-level negotiations
- Strong unions lead, other unions follow

### 3 Information and Consultation via Enterprise-based Unions

- Joint consultation committees based on (enterprise level) collective agreements
- EU: trade unions organized at sectoral level, works councils established at company level.
- Japan: **trade unions and works councils overlap**
- Collective bargaining and joint consultation: difficult to distinguish
- Majority of small-and-medium-sized enterprise workers: **excluded from proper information and consultation** procedure

## 4 Majority Representative and Labour-Management Committee

- 1947 Labor Standards Law: majority representative system as a **substitute for majority union**
- No detailed provision on majority representative of non-unionized workplace
- Often appointed by employer without consultation to workers
- 2005 Study Group on Employment Contract Legislation: **general legislation on labor-management committee** as a mechanism for decision and alteration of working conditions.
- Opposition from trade union side

# 5 Towards a New Employees' Representation System

- Difficulty in designing employees' representation system ← overlap of coverage and function with trade union
- **JTUC-RENGO proposal** on employees' representative committee: complementary committee

## 6 Regulatory Reform and Industrial Relations

- **Successive deregulations** on working time, fixed-term contract and temporary work from 1990s
- From 2005: reversal of atmosphere **from deregulation to re-regulation** in fear of polarized society
- Failure of white-collar exemption
- Proposal for re-regulation of temporary agency work
- Assertion by Council for Regulatory Reform
- Doubt on the **legitimacy of tripartite principle in labour policy-making**
- Challenge for trade union movement