

Selected articles (tentative translation)
from collection of essays commemorating the 90th Anniversary of the ILO

“My memories with the ILO” (ILO and Me)

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The ILO and Me

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My fated initial connection with the International Labour Organization (ILO) came in 1960 when I became Deputy Director in the International Labour Affairs Division of Ministry of Labour in the Japanese government. In 1962, I was given the opportunity to study in Europe on an ILO fellowship for six months. I visited many countries and learned about workers' welfare in northern European countries and other places.

At the time, there was no system in place for Japanese civil servants to study abroad, and assistance from an international organization was perhaps the only opportunity available. I felt very grateful for the opportunity. The exchange rate was 360 yen to the dollar, so I had to use money very wisely.

At the end of my half-year training period, the ILO Conference was held in Geneva and some representatives from my own Ministry of Labour arrived and I was lucky to be given some leg work. That was my first experience of the ILO Conference. I became friends with young people from other countries' delegations, some of whom I have remained in touch with over these many years. After that, I attended many ILO-related meetings.

Around 1975, the International Year of Women, I promoted my senior, Takahashi Nobuko, as a candidate for ILO Assistant Director-General. She was successfully elected, which remains as a proud memory of mine.

After becoming a parliamentarian in 1980, together with my senior, Nakanishi Tamako, from the ILO Tokyo Branch Office, we established the Japanese Parliamentarians' League on the ILO Activities to bring greater attention of politicians to the ILO. As the League's President, I kept in constant contact with the ILO. When the ILO Director-General and other officials visited Japan, we held study meetings, and when I visit Geneva on other business, I pay a courtesy visit to the ILO. I had particularly close contact with the ILO's Regional Office for Asia and the Pacific in Bangkok, and sometimes went to visit countries in the region.

The ILO has always been close to me, helping and encouraging me in my life.

My Memories with Mr. Juan Somavia, Director-General of the ILO

OTSUJI Hidehisa, Mr.

Former Minister of Health, Labour and Welfare

Member of the House of Councilors

The First Meeting with Director-General Mr. Somavia

In December of 2004, when I was the Minister of Health, Labour and Welfare, Director-General Mr. Somavia of the ILO visited Japan for the second time since taking his office. The primary purpose of his visit was to attend a symposium in Tokyo which was being held by collaboration amongst the Ministry of Health, Labour and Welfare, the ILO and the United Nations University. The second purpose was to attend the ICFTU (International Confederation of Free Trade Unions) World Congress, being held in Miyazaki. Taking advantage of this opportunity, the Director-General and I had a meeting at my Ministry. I touched upon some Japanese concerns at the time, namely, civil-service reform, etc., and obtained his understanding.

The Director-General asked for Japan's assistance, after giving me a detailed explanation about the situation surrounding the ILO and its budget. In turn, I recall telling him how difficult the financial situation was in Japan. Taking into consideration that the Ministry of Health, Labour and Welfare was running on a negative budget, I wanted the Director-General to understand that we had to ask the Japanese taxpayers to bear the burden for Japan's contribution to the ILO. It was understood that Japan was obliged to make such a contribution but nevertheless, I wanted to ask Mr. Somavia to find more effective ways of spending the ILO budget.

Further, the dinner party with Director-General Mr. Somavia was most enjoyable. I took some wine from Chile, his mother country, and it just so happened to be his favorite brand; this coincidence sparked a friendship between us. I shared some of my experiences in Chile, recalled from the days of my youth when I was a hippy travelling around the world. We never ran out of stories to share, and our friendship continued to deepen. I reminisce his telling me with a laugh about how he was mistaken for a Santa Claus on his former visit to Japan by a child in Roppongi, the place where our dinner party was held.

An Unwavering Friendship

Since then, our friendship has continued for a long time. When the Director-General came to Japan last May, I was no longer the Minister of Health, Labour and Welfare, but we still had dinner together and recalled the dinner party we had enjoyed four years earlier. It solidified our friendship.

When I went to Geneva in August, he invited me for lunch and we spent a pleasurable time together. After lunch, Director-General Mr. Somavia himself guided me around the ILO headquarters. He showed me the assembly hall for Governing Body meetings, various displays and portraits of former Directors-General. Furthermore, when Mr. Somavia was reelected as Director-General for the third time, I sent him a congratulatory bouquet to express my happiness with his further contribution to the workers and employers of the world.

The concept of decent work, advocated by Director-General Mr. Somavia, and promoted by the ILO, is now accepted all over the world. This concept must also be used as a guiding principle in Japan, where various anxiety concerning employment issues are surfacing with the onset of the financial crisis.

Ninety years after its foundation, the ILO has only become increasingly important. I hope that the organization will continue to play an important role in the field of labour as ever before.

Great Expectations for the ILO

KOGA Nobuaki, Mr.

General Secretary, RENGO (Japanese Trade Union Confederation)

The Preamble of the ILO Constitution Still Shines Brightly Today

Ninety years ago, in 1919, the ardent wish for peace held by those who witnessed the tragedy of WWI gave rise to the tripartite organization in an effort to bring about social justice. Article 13 of the Versailles Treaty dealt with labour issues, and was used as the Preamble to the present ILO Constitution; it still shines brightly to this day:

“Universal and lasting peace can be established only if it is based upon social justice.”

“Conditions of labour exist involving such injustice, hardship, and privation to large numbers of people as to produce unrest so great that the peace and harmony of the world are imperilled; an improvement of those conditions is urgently required.”

“The failure of any nation to adopt humane conditions of labour is an obstacle in the way of other nations which desire to improve the conditions in their own countries.”

It has been 90 years since the birth of the ILO. The present global recession triggered by the Lehman shock has seriously affected the real economy of Japan, and in so doing, the shortcomings of this entirely market-centered economy have been overtly disclosed. Many people are concerned about their future as they face a widening disparity gap that is difficult to curb, as well as the serious unemployment problem symbolized by the dismissal of temporary workers in Japan. In addition, there are issues such as an aging society with a declining birth rate, the erosion of welfare services, and global environmental problems. There are many who feel a sense of danger with regards to the future of this country, and that if matters persist at this current rate, society itself will cease to function.

Under such critical conditions, the social missions that labour movements must achieve are only increasing.

RENGO believes that labour movements must lead the way towards a paradigm shift that creates a humane and embracing society; it has been promoting a campaign to this end, using the slogan “stop social disparity.” What RENGO is trying to achieve is a labour-based welfare society governed by concepts such as “security, safety, stability”, “fairness and equity.”

Some of these ideas very much overlap with the principles of the ILO. We are

aiming to create a sustainable society by achieving fair working conditions and realizing decent work.

Great Expectations for the ILO

In today's globalized world, more attention should be paid to the ILO, consisting of tripartite constituents, namely, governments, workers and employers. The ILO provides a forum for discussion and collaboration amongst these parties. Precisely because we live in an era of social insecurity, the strength of the tripartite structure should be used to the fullest advantage in order to maximize its potential. As such, there are great expectations for the ILO.

Furthermore, we should exert greater efforts in order to uphold and apply the international labour standards. The ratification and complete application of the 8 fundamental conventions of the ILO alone would lead to the great improvement of existing labour issues. In addition, we face many issues such as gender equality, fair work rules and working hours as well as occupational safety and health, which require much efforts to be achieved.

I cannot help but point out the issue of the infringement on the basic labour rights of Japanese civil servants. In 2002, RENGO filed a complaint to the Committee on Freedom of Association about this infringement. The ILO subsequently issued 4 recommendations, all of which pointed out that the Japanese government was violating the Convention, and thus urged the government to rectify. Assuring basic labour rights for Japanese civil servants, together with the ratification of the Convention No. 105 (Abolition of Forced Labour) and Convention No. 111 (Discrimination in Employment and Occupation), is a long-standing issue related to the fundamental international labour standards that remains to be resolved. These are problems that definitely need to be solved urgently in the near future.

In the next year or two, the RENGO movement will be put to a true test. RENGO must accelerate its efforts in organizing workers, including non-regular ones, and must ensure that it is capable of protecting the interests and rights of employees. Finally, RENGO must work towards the realization of humane working conditions, as well as a fair and sustainable society. To this end, we are determined to exert our utmost efforts.

On the Occasion of the 90th Anniversary of the ILO

TATEISI Nobuo, Mr.

Executive Advisor, OMRON Corporation

Vice President, ILO Association of Japan

I heartily congratulate the ILO for its 90th anniversary. Looking back, I have been involved with the organization for over a decade. I first participated in the 84th ILO Conference in 1996, as a representative for Japanese employers. Since then, I have been blessed with the opportunity to participate a total of nine times, contributing to recent ILO endeavours from the position of a corporate manager.

The Role and Social Responsibility of Enterprises

Within the two-faced process of “growth” and widening “disparity” that characterizes globalization, the ILO has been striving to achieve the goal of decent work (work that is both worthwhile and humane). To this end, the organization has been trying to tackle various global issues, such as poverty and disparity. In particular, the ILO has recently identified “sustainable enterprises” as those that can contribute to both continuous economic development and the creation of employment opportunities. By promoting such enterprises, the ILO has endeavoured to support the sustainable development of societies. Formerly, only the negative aspects of multinational enterprises were highlighted, but now the roles they play as well as their positive aspects have come to be appreciated.

To begin with, an enterprise is not only an economic entity, but it is also a social entity that contributes to the fabric of society. Through its business activities, an enterprise offers employment to employees, provides better products and services to consumers, gives dividends to its shareholders, and pays taxes to the nation-state. Due to its important role and pervasive influence in today’s society, the corporate social responsibility has come to be critically examined.

An enterprise can only be trusted and can continue its operations if it lives up to the expectations of society. Instead of blindly pursuing profits, it is now mandatory for CEOs to be highly ethical, which requires them to be widely responsible for respective stakeholders such as their employees and the local community.

On the other hand, the development of enterprises cannot be expected without the

development of a sound society. It will become increasingly important for society as a whole to promote the sustainable growth of enterprises, in order to nourish the sustainable development of a social-economy. In particular, positive partnership between management and labour in the sphere of economic activities will ultimately lead to social progress.

Decent Work and Labour Relations in Japan

The greatest challenge Japan faces at the moment in attaining decent work is the creation of employment.

On 15 January 2009, facing a challenging employment situation, Nippon Keidanren and RENGO announced the “Labour-Management Joint Declaration for Job Security and Job Creation.” It was based on the common recognition that employers and workers should sincerely develop policies that would promote employment security and job creation. In the past, Japan faced and overcame two economic crises, namely, the oil-shock and the collapse of the bubble-economy. To deal with the present challenges, both employers and workers must share this sense of economic crisis and work as one, by remembering the experiences and lessons of the past.

In that process, it is crucial to encourage the attitude of human-respect that would maximize the wisdom, motivation and vitality of each and every worker as the source of enterprises’ ability to add value. In order to develop human resources who will promote innovation, and in turn to apply the rich ideas and challenging spirit of the employees to managerial activities, it is essential to provide a corporate infrastructure that enables employees to work proactively as well as in autonomy.

In addition, there are an increasing number of workers who value personal life such as child rearing and elderly care other than work. In this context, the promotion of a work-life balance is required to deal with these diversifying needs of workers.

The global storm of recession that has been blowing since the latter half of last year has seriously affected employment. As a severe winter is always followed by a warm spring, mid to long-term management approaches that envision a brighter future are especially indispensable during times of crisis. In Japan, 83% of the working population are employees, and remuneration paid to employees by corporations accounts for 71% of the national income. These figures force one to reassess the gravity of role and responsibility of enterprises.

Sound and positive labour relations in Japan, based on mutual trust between employers and employees, have demonstrated their power in overcoming numerous crises up

until now. This is an asset we should boast to the world, and it is at the very base of Japanese corporate management. I believe it also shares common traits with the tripartite structure of the ILO. Through the activities and support of the ILO, the merit of such Japanese corporate management will hopefully be further appealed to the world.

To this end, I wish for the further development of the ILO.

Attending the Asian Employment Forum in Beijing

TANIGAKI Sadakazu, Mr.

Member of the House of Representatives

My Encounter with Director-General Mr. Somavia

I am honoured to be given the opportunity to contribute an article to this publication commemorating the 90th anniversary of the ILO due to my participation in the “Asian Employment Forum: Growth, Employment and Decent Work” held in Beijing in August 2007, despite the fact that I have not been quite familiar with the history and activities of the organization up until rather recently.

I believe I was invited to the Beijing Employment Forum because of my meeting with Director-General Mr. Juan Somavia during his visit to Japan a few years before, when I was the Finance Minister. Mr. Somavia explicated the concept of decent work, and various ILO endeavours related to it. In turn, I explained to him how Japanese economic policies during the postwar period have focused on the maintenance and expansion of employment, as well as the contributions this has made to the sustainable economic development of this country. Though the meeting was short, it has left a lasting impression on me. The ideas I presented to Mr. Somavia at the time were based on what former Prime Minister MIYAZAWA Kiichi used to elucidate to me. This was as follows:

“The focus of German economic policies is on the suppression of inflation, and that of the U.S. leans towards the maintenance of stock prices, while Japan’s focus is on the maintenance and expansion of employment. These policy differences derive from each country’s respective experiences during both World Wars.”

What I Emphasized at the Beijing Forum

I feel this background with Director-General Mr. Somavia provided me with the invitation to the Beijing Forum. Therefore, one of the things I emphasized at the Forum was the importance of regarding growth in relation to employment, for the purpose of realizing decent work, as learned from Japanese experiences.

The validity of this approach is evident when the history of Japan’s postwar economic development is taken into account. Under the basic philosophy that the fruit of economic growth must be shared amongst workers and that productivity must be improved while

focusing on the security of employment, stability in workers' livelihood and a low unemployment rate were maintained to a large extent. Together with the long-term employment system adopted by enterprises, as well as the accumulation of skills through in-house human resources development, Japan's international competitiveness and sustainable economic growth were upheld.

However, along with the recent progress of globalization, the traditional system of distributing the fruits of economic growth seems to modulate in its function, and due to this concern, I explained at the Forum that "trusting bonds" between a nation- state and its people should be established following the concept of decent work. It is within the process of forming these "bonds" that a sound work-life balance must be aimed for. The second point I emphasized was the increasing importance of responding to the future challenges of demographic change and environmental sustainability.

The Increasing Importance of the Debate Held at the Forum

I believe it was of great significance that the Forum was held in China, a country which is witnessing dynamic growth and change, and is consequently facing new challenges in the field of labour and employment.

At the time of the Forum, the global recession triggered by the so-called subprime loans had not yet emerged substantially. In today's world, however, the debate held at the Forum has become even more significant, thus I adamantly believe that it is necessary for us to further discuss these issues and take action.

As we welcome the ILO's 90th anniversary, a particularly auspicious birthday to be celebrated in the Japanese culture, I believe the organization still has a lot to accomplish.

Serving as a Member of World Commission on the Social Dimension of Globalization

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Chairman of the board of the Tokyo Stock Exchange Group, Inc.

On average, the prime of a corporation's life is said to last for about 30 years. Of course this rule of thumb does not apply to the fields where there are continuous innovations. The ILO is commemorating its 90th anniversary. Since its inception, the ILO has, without fail, endeavoured to improve working conditions and to protect worker's rights. The organization's long lifespan can be attributed to its adaptive reforms in the context of a changing environment. These changes include the increased membership of mainly developing countries and the end of the Cold War.

ILO's Challenge – World Commission on the Social Dimension of Globalization

Looking at the ILO's long history, I believe World Commission on the Social Dimension of Globalization (the Commission) that I participated in was one of such examples of reform. The Commission was established as a result of a decision made by the ILO Governing Body in November 2001. It was entirely different from other traditional ILO forums in terms of its composition and the nature of the issues to be dealt with. The discussions held at the Commission encompassed a broad range of fields exceeding the ILO's mandate. I feel it was meaningful to probe for the kind of roles the ILO should assume, as well as to properly situate the organization's activities within the larger, panoptic framework which was the Commission.

Members of a variety of fields of expertise and genders were chosen to represent the diversity of regions. The Presidents of Finland and Tanzania acted as the co-chairs, and were joined by 24 members with various backgrounds, including politics, business, trade unions, academia and NGOs. The duty of the Commission was to examine governance, such that globalization would bring about well balanced economic and social development. For this purpose, a report was drawn up after two years of work which started in February 2002.

The Commission resembled a miniature version of the world, and was well suited to dealing with global issues. The singularity of the members who participated in the candid

debates impressed upon me various value systems; the experience was stimulating and worthwhile. As indicated by its title, “A Fair Globalization: Creating Opportunities for All,” the principal theme of the report was to bring the benefits of globalization to all people in all countries, so that it may lead to the betterment and increased security of their lives.

From the beginning, I repeatedly tried to explain that as a matter of fact, the creation of wealth by enterprises – in other words business activities – would play an integral role in materializing such benefits. I therefore argued that it is crucial to create an appropriate business environment. Although I had a difficult time gaining the sympathy of respective members, the report included the following thought:

The presence of responsible and able enterprises is necessary in order to facilitate development and growth in connection to the global market. Such enterprises will become the source of employment, wealth and innovation, and at the same time will contribute to public funding.

Remaining as a Relevant Organization to the International Community

In the meantime, this aforementioned understanding is steadfastly broadening at the sites of economic activity. Developing countries are making more and more efforts to invite direct investment. This must be due to the recognition that for such countries to develop and improve the welfare of their people, they must stand upon their own feet instead of remaining as the recipients of development aid. The Yokohama Declaration from TICAD IV (Tokyo International Conference on African Development) held last May clearly upholds the contributions of trade and investment to sustainable growth of African countries, which will inevitably lead to the alleviation of poverty, improvement of living standards and self-sufficiency.

The phenomena of the global financial crisis and the aggravation of the real economy, which started last year and has continued on through this year, awakened us to the extent of globalization – a process which has intimately interlocked the countries of the world. When the economy goes astray, it is immediately felt through unemployment and other such employment issues. We have become keenly aware of the importance of “the presence of jobs”, which directly affects our living and consumption. We cannot ensure this presence without the sustainable development of enterprises.

At the ILO Conference in 2007, “the promotion of sustainable enterprises” was an agenda for the general discussion. I believe this illustrates that light is finally being shed on the roles of enterprises in economic development and employment creation at the ILO.

I welcome it as a sign of change.

I ardently wish that the ILO, which now commemorates its 90th anniversary, will continue to accurately grasp the reality and promote reforms reflecting social needs, in order to remain as a relevant organization to the international community.