

High Level Consultation in Japan :  
The SANROKON, or the Round  
Table Conference on Industry and Labor  
in Japan, 1970-the Present : A Case Study  
of an Effective Tripartite Consultative  
Mechanism in an Advanced Industrialized  
Society in the Non-Western Region

Yutaka TSUJINAKA

Institute of Social Sciences, University of Tsukuba

Ten'nodai 1-1-1, Tsukuba-city Japan 305

Telephone 81-298-53-6545, 6289 Fax 81-298-53-6545, 6611

E-mail tsujinak@sakura.cc.tsukuba.ac.jp

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## **abbreviations**

*Domei* : the Japan Confederation of Labor, 1963-87.

*Doyukai* : Association of Corporate Executives, 1946-.

JSP : Japan Socialist Party (Social Democratic Party) (1945-)

IMF-JC : the International Metalworkers' Federation-Japan Council, 1964-.

*Keidanren* : Federation of Economic Organizations, 1946-.

LDP : Liberal Democratic Party, 1955-.

*Nikkeiren* : JFEA, the Japan Federation of Employers' Association, 1948-.

*Nissho* : Japan Chamber of Commerce and Industry, 1922-.

*Rengo* : JTUC, Japan Trade Union Confederation, 1987/89-.

*Sanrokon* : the Round Table Conference on Industry and Labor in Japan. 1970-

*Shingikai* : formal advisory councils in Japan.

*Shunto* : Spring Offensive or Spring Wage Negotiation Round starting 1955.

*Sohyo* : GCTU, the General Council of Trade Unions in Japan, 1950-1989.

### **Introduction :**

Needless to say, Japanese case of tripartism named *Sanrokon* or the Round Table Conference on Industry and Labor (1970-the present) can be a distinctive existence. It might be even described, by some observers, as paradoxical, therefore, "unique" institutional arrangement especially when it is compared to those of West European countries. For instance, followings are some evidences for its distinctiveness.

1) It started in 1970 under the conservative LDP one-party dominance (1955-93), not under the social democratic government. 2) The labor was less integrated and concentrated in comparison to European countries: being organized by four national centers, about two hundred industrial confederations and more than 60 thousand enterprise unions. 3) *Sanrokon* has been held on an "informal" basis (at least non-statutory, no law-base) and in a very low key. It seems however, that it has been functioning well. 4) It seems that the roles

of key figures were very crucial, such as those of Yoshiji Miyata who was a representative of labor circles, Takeo Fukuda of political ones and particularly Ichiro Nakayama of academic ones. 5) Thus, political "timing" and stratagems as well as shared feeling of "crisis" among the key figures were all indispensable factors to establish *Sanrokon* and to make it effective to go through a series of crises in the mid-1970's.

### **A : Background Situation**

As can be seen clearly in the three graphs concerning the rate of *Shunto* (Spring Offensive or Spring Wage Negotiation Round starting 1955) wage increase and the real GNP growth rate (Figure 1), the consumer prices between 1956 and 1987 (Figure 2), and labor disputes accompanied by industrial actions between 1956 and 1987 (Figure 3), Japanese industrial relations have changed drastically by nature since around the mid-1970s (Takanashi et al 1989, Figures are from Takanashi et al 1989. Kuwahara 1989). The wage increase has become reasonable and adequate corresponding to its national economic growth and productivity growth. This has been accompanied by a drastic decline in the number of severe disputes in the industrial place (Figure 3). These peaceful industrial relations smoothed and even promoted the flexible structural transformation of Japanese industries in the era of "oil shocks" in the 1970's and of the stronger yen in the 1980's.

How could such a "positive shift" be obtained in Japan during the turbulent period in the mid-1970's, despite the historical confrontation between *Sohyo* (GCTU, the General Council of Trade Unions in

Figure 1. Real GNP Growth Rate and Rate of Shunto Wage Increase



Source: Economic Planning Agency, *National Economic Accounts*.  
 Survey data of Labor Policy Bureau, Ministry of Labor.

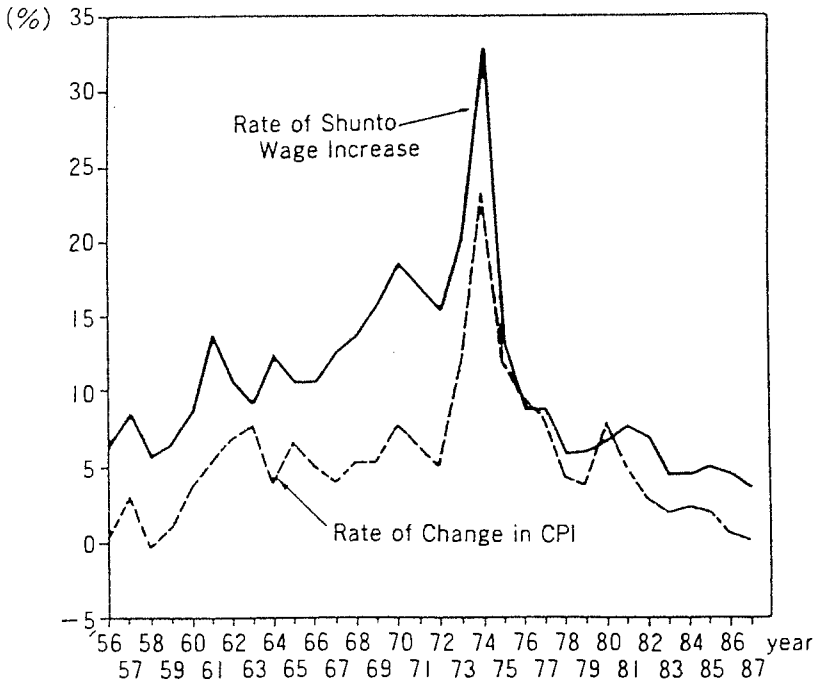
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cited from Takanashi et.al.1989:13.

Japan, 1950-1989) and the business-conservative government bloc in the 1950's and 1960's, (Stockwin, 1975) as well as the panic immediately after the first oil shocks in the end of 1973 ?

These puzzles have been discussed under the theoretical context

Figure 2. Rate of Change in Consumer Prices and Rate of Shunto Wage Increase

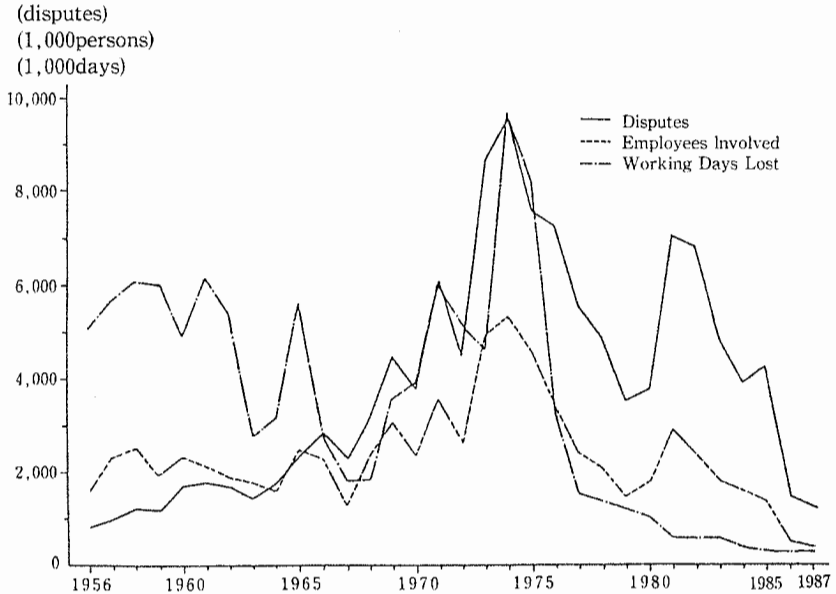


Source: Statistical Bureau, Management and Coordination Agency, *Consumer Price Index*.  
Survey data of Labor Policy Bureau, Ministry of Labor.

cited from Takanashi et.al.1989:13.

of neo-corporatism in the advanced countries (Inagami et al. 1994, especially Shimodaira's, Oumi's and Tsujinaka's articles included in Inagami et al. 1994). How did Japan manage to perform exceptionally well in terms of its industrial peace, low unemployment rates,

Figure 3. Labor Disputes Accompanied by Industrial Actions, Number of Employees Involved and Working Days Lost



Source : Ministry of Labor, Labor Disputes Statistics.  
cited from Takanashi et al. 1989 : 17.

steady growth rates and governability in general in comparison to the other advanced countries in the late 1970's and 1980's ? Especially why was it so successful in adjusting itself to newly emerged insecure situations after the end of Bretton Woods System, and after the oil shocks as well ? In this context, there should be some "organizational consultative mechanism" to mediate among various new actors. If so, it is to bring about reasonable and adequate solutions to them.

The question can be partially answered here by focusing on the



tripartite body named *Sanrokon*.

Let me describe briefly some of the preceding conditions and contexts in Japan after World war II (Tsujinaka 1994, and 1993. Nakamura 1988). As for political climate surrounding the industrial relations, it was basically colored by the cold-war effect. In this context, Japanese industrial relations and labor policies were not particularly different from those of other Western industrialized countries, which means that it was not so peaceful even worse in the industrial relations at least until 1960<sup>1</sup>. In addition, generally speaking, the conservative party, named Liberal Democratic Party (LDP) was neither friendly nor sympathetic. It was rather antagonistic toward labor.

The labor movement was led by GCTU, whose major forces came from the public sector labor, and which was strongly allied with the Japan Socialist Party (1945-, reunited in 1955); its affiliated mass democratic movement promoted anti-war policies and conservation of the democratic Constitution, and generally held a socialist-sympathetic ideology. Sohyo (GCTU)'s leadership was remote from the problems of the private sector union leaders, who had to cope with rapid change in employment conditions in terms of "rationalization" (modernization) of companies and establishments in the period of high economic growth. Sohyo (GCTU)'s leadership was prone to the political movement and anti-government activity, because it was based on labor of the public sector whose strike right had been taken away in the 1950's. Recovering those labor rights was major target for them and, to do so, they needed more political power in the Diet. Sohyo (GCTU) was not sensitive to the productivity, international

competitiveness and rationalization (modernization) of industries and companies. Therefore, the policy process in Japan was considerably antagonistic between two Cold-War-like blocs, the LDP-Business bloc (and Agricultural Cooperatives in rural areas as a junior partner) and the JSP-GCTU Labor bloc. Stockwin (1975) characterized this situation as "Divided Politics in a Growth Economy".

However, because of rapid expansion of the private sector and the affluence of each of the members which was brought about by the high economic growth, the private sector labor leaders, supported by the enterprise unions in leading industries, had become correspondingly powerful in the mid-1960's. Due to the logic of enterprise unions, union leaders mutually share information and interests with their companies. They are also sensitive to the productivity and competitiveness of their company because of a direct correlation between wage hike and company performance.

Nakamura summarizes the situation of private union members as follows: first, in the enterprise, the work community is rather

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- 1 Japanese industrial relations were comparable in terms of labor dispute to U. S. A., U. K., and France. The numbers of Japanese labor dispute respectively in 1965, 1970 and 1975 were 1542, 2260 and 3391; those of U. S. A were 268, 381 and 235; those of U. K. were 2354, 3906 and 2282; those of France were 1674, 3942, and 3888. The numbers of labor loss days per 10 employees in Japan in 1965, 1970 and 1975 were 2.0, 1.2, and 2.2; those of U. S. A. were 2.5, 7.4, and 2.3; those of U. K. were 1.2, 4.8, and 2.7; those of France were 0.7, 1.1, and 2.2. West Germany was quieter and Italy was more frequent. (Data are from Nihon Seisansei Honbu, 1988, 1993).

homogeneous than heterogeneous and class-oriented in nature ; second, Japanese workers seem to have strong concerns for the employment stability and performance of the enterprises which they work for ; third, a blooming success of the trade unionism and realism was brought about in big business enterprises, because of their catching up with the wage standard of the Western level during the high economic growth period (Nakamura 1988 : 52-53).

Here it should be confirmed some of the characteristics of enterprise union and its corollary, because they are most unique organizational features of Japanese union, strikingly distinctive from those of other Western countries. The enterprise union is organized by each individual enterprise and company as a unit. In contemporary Japan, 91.3 percent employees out of total unionized employees and 93.4 percent unions are set up in 1991 led by the enterprise unionism<sup>2</sup>. Their membership is limited to its regular employees. There is a union shop agreement between the enterprise union and management. They have complete independence of handling budget and personnel affairs from upper level unions as well as their affiliated company. Collective bargaining is set at the establishment and company level, not at the industrial and national level.

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2 The proportion of the enterprise unions in the union sector has been increasing : In 1954 : 76.6% union members and 81.8% unions were organized by the principle ; in 1964, 84.6% and 93.6% ; in 1975, 82.5% and 93.6% ; in 1991, 91.3% and 93.4 respectively. (Nihon Seisansi Honbu, 1993 : 164 based on *Rodokumiai Kiso Chosa* : (Labor Union Fundamental Survey) by Ministry of Labor, Japan)

In addition, being based on the trusty relations fostered by the enterprise unions and their management employers, a variety of consultation and communication matters are proceeded through a joint consultation body, which prevailed in the 1960s and 70s inside of the majority of companies (in 1977, 70.8% out of total companies and 92.8% out of a total of big companies with 5000 or more employees) (Inagami 1988).

This kind of cooperative consultation was reached in many major industries in the late 1960s and 1970s, such as textiles, shipping, cement, coal mining, automobile, electric power, ship building, steel, electric machines, hotels, fine machine and etc. The productivity movement strongly promoted this tendency with the support of enterprise union leaders in the private sector (Fujita 1981).

In addition to the existence of enterprise union and related consultative mechanism, there has been a remarkable movement overarching both business and labor sectors focusing on productivity improvement. The Japan Productivity Center was established with the strong support of the US government to improve productivity of Japanese industries in 1955. It was the starting point for the movement and it rapidly spread over the private sector in the 1960's not only by employers but also by big enterprises' labor union leaders. The movement emphasized three basic principles: improvement of productivity, labor-management consultation and cooperation, fair distribution of the fruits of economic growth among management, labor and consumers. In this regard, Sohyo (GCTU) solely declined to participate in the movement, while other major enterprise unions in the private sector agreed to do so (Nakamura 1988 : 12-15).

Finally we have to touch upon the famous *Shunto*, or Spring Offensive (or more precisely, I prefer to use the spring wage negotiation round, instead) movement, which is the most important characteristic of Japanese labor-related activity. This movement was invented to overcome a dilemma between the terribly decentralized structure stemmed from the enterprise unionism and the commonly shared demand for the wage-raise in proportion to the economic (productivity) growth.

As a mechanism of wage determination, Shunto has played two roles : first, the raising or at least the stabilization of wage levels, and second, the standardization of wages. Takanashi describes its characteristics as follows :

In the early years of Shunto real wage increases were less than the growth rate of real GNP per capita and the share of labor in national income was around 50 percent. However after Shunto became broadly established, the real wage increase exceeded real GNP growth per capita, and eventually the share of labor increased. (Takanashi et al. 1989 : 13)

#### Changes in the Pattern Setter :

During the late fifties and early sixties, the Shunto rate tended to be set either by unions in the chemicals industry, private railways or the public enterprises. In the late sixties and early seventies this role was more or less taken over by unions in iron and steel. More recently the four metals industries under the IMF-JC have come to the fore.

The main factor behind these changes has been structural change in the Japanese economy. During the late fifties and early sixties the weight of the public sector in the postwar economy was still large. Dependence on international trade was small, since its economy was led by the domestic demand. Thus, it was inevitable for the industry such as private railways

which reflected only domestic trends to come to perform as a pattern setter.

With the liberalization of trade and intensified competition of investing in plants and equipments in the early 1960s, industries such as iron and steel and shipbuilding with their huge economies of scale began to blaze for greater roles. Then the development of exports and efforts to remain competitive reinforced iron and steel's positions as a pattern setter.

In addition iron and steel was a particularly stable industry in the period of high economic growth as its output was absorbed by the broad spectrum of its customer industries.

When the economy became export-led in the late 1970s, typical leading exporters such as the shipbuilders and manufacturers of automobiles and electrical appliances also became pattern setters alongside of iron and steel. (Takanshi et al. 1989: 15)

Needless to say, along with the this kind of *Shunto* logic prevails, relative power of the private labor unions, especially those of steel and other metal and manufacturing industries became strengthened in the sector through the 1960's. This should be noted because one key actor of the Sanrokon drama, Yoshiji Miyata is from this particular sector's labor union.

The private union leaders formed, as its national central organization, Domei or the Japanese Confederation of Labor, against Sohyo (GCTU). Furthermore, significantly the most powerful metal-and machine-related industries' leaders formed the International Metal-worker's Federation-Japan Council (IMF-JC) in 1964, the same year of the foundation of Domei (JCL). Regardless of their affiliation to any of the four national organizations ; Sohyo (GCTU), Domei (JCL),

Churitsu and Shinsanbetsu, they joined in IMF-JC.

In the private sector, Domei (JCL)'s membership as well as that of IMF-JC outstripped that of advance Sohyo (GCTU) in the late 1960s. This change in the balance of power allowed union leaders to set out the reunification movement of 4 different national centers in 1967 (Tsujiinaka 1994).

It was this timing that the Sanrokon was established by the Ministry of Labor.

### **B: Sanrokon : Its Status**

Sanrokon was created in January 1970 as a non-statutory consultative committee to give advice to the Minister of Labor (Please see table 1 ; Outline of Sanrokon). In its outline, it claimed that its purpose is "to establish a forum of supremely wise people regarding industry labor policy which aims at exchanging of views from wide range of aspects, asking cooperation of them, and deepening mutual understanding. It further claimed that the time had come to create it, in considering the forthcoming changes in the overall economy and industrial structure that accompany the development of the Japanese economy. It was really a brilliant prediction of such a drastic change (Ministry of Labor 1993).

Its status is a "non-statutory" consultative committee. In terms of legal status, it is different from its proto type in West Germany, the Economic Consultation Committee (the Five Wisemen Committee, consisting of five scholars, 1963-) and Cooperative Action Commission (1967-). In other countries, just as in the same way, a more-or-less formal status is attached to the consultative bodies such as

National Economic Development Council in UK, Labor Foundation in Netherlands, both of them based on particular law, and the LO-SAF Consultation in Sweden based on the central labor-management agreement (Fujita 1981).

Table 1 Outline of Sanrokon (The Round Table Conference on Industry and Labor): January 1970  
Ministry of Labor (Ministry of Labor 1993: 43)

1. In Prospect

Japanese economy may well experience the forthcoming changes of nature in the economy and industrial structure. Therefore, top leaders from government, business, labor, and academia should establish a forum of "supremely wise people" regarding industry labor policies which aims at exchanging of views from wide range of aspects, asking cooperation among them, and deepening mutual understanding.

2. Characteristics and Contents

- 1) Minister of Labor entrusts from business, labor, and academia with being members. As occasion demands, he or she convene a forum to ask their opinion on related policy matters. (Therefore state administrative organization law Article 8 does not apply to this forum.)
- 2) The number of the members is about 25. (It is not tripartite structure.)
- 3) Chair should be elected by the members.

3. Proceeding

- 1) General labor problem and related industry problem should be discussed.
- 2) Depending upon its policy matters, it can ask related minister to join the talk.
- 3) If necessary, it can provide to special committee member to engage in the specific item.
- 4) It guarantees to exchange views freely and does not open to the public.



*Sanrokon* is also different from *Shingikai*, or a formal consultative committee based on the State Administration Organization Law in Japan. There are 212 *Shingikais* in 1995 in Japan, some of which have a structure of tripartite body and most of which are designed to answer the government request for formal authoritative advice. Besides, there is a category of non-statutory advisory committees which is formed on an ad hoc needs basis at various levels from the Prime Minister to the director-general (Tsujinaka 1985). They generally last 1 to 2 years depending on its duty to make some advisory reports. Among *Shingikais* and non-statutory advisory committees, some of them consist of high-grade top leaders like *Sanrokon*, but their function is generally to answer government requests, different from the purely consultative role of *Sanrokon*.

## 1 A History : *Sanrokon*, 1970-the present

As the ILO emphasized the significance of tripartite cooperation<sup>3</sup> and labor-management consultation at the industrial and national level at every available opportunity especially since 1960. When the ILO adopted the Consultation Recommendation (No. 113) (Trebilcock et al. 1994 : 5), the Japanese government tried to set up regular consultation with labor national centers under the Ikeda cabinet. It could not last long in the mid-1960s, however, because of persistent confrontation and distrust among labor towards the conservative government regarding the problem of civil servants' and public sector workers' right to strike.

(Regarding description of history, the author relied on various news

papers' articles and interviews to the key persons in charge of Sanrokon. Interviews were conducted in January 1995<sup>4)</sup>).

### 1-1: A Difficult Delivery in Establishment of Sanrokon

As for the case of *Sanrokon*, the Ministry of Labor (MOL) started to examine the prospects in the summer of 1966. Because of the success of the high economic growth policy and moderation in confrontation of the labor movement, MOL, especially its central core bureau, the Bureau of Labor Relations, ironically, needed a new *raison de etre* to compensate for its erosion of significance. It considered the introduction of an equivalent to the German Wisemen Committee in Japan in the form of a quasi-tripartite body in order to discuss and to consult the issue of wages, settlement economic development and the property-making system for workers (Enjoji et al 1981 : 21).

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3 Trebilcock expresses this as follows: "Tripartite cooperation is an ideological thread that has run through the International labor organization (ILO) from its founding in 1919 to contemporary statements by its international and regional conferences, its Governing Body and its Director-General." (1994 : 5)

4 Interviewees are Masao Matsunaga (1995, 1, 19 at Nihon Club, Tokyo) Yoshiji Miyata (1995, 1, 19 and 1, 23 at Matsushita Seikei-Jyuku Tokyo Office), Kunihiko Dosho (1995, 1, 24 at Zaikei Kinyu KK).

Mr. Matsunaga (born in 1918) was Director-General of Labor Relations (November 1966-October 1970) and Administrative Vice-Minister of Labor (October 1970-August 1973).

Mr. Miyata (born in 1924) was Deputy General Director of Japanese

It was felt that this system should be a more informal or quasi-formal system than those of other countries. It was partly because the cabinet as well as business circle preferred to emphasize the tenet of liberal enterprise capitalism as opposed to the social democratic welfare capitalism typically professed in UK. Beside the Japanese cabinet and bureaucracy has gradually turned from the central bureaucracy-controlled system to the more de-centralized network-like system in the 1960s, people preferred the informal and information-sharing networks and indirect guidance to formal and rigid system and direct control.

The Minister of Labor at that time, Kenzaburo HARA (1968, 11, 30-1970.1, 13) was enthusiastic in introducing the tripartite consultation system. He was quite popular in the business community. Later

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Federation of Iron and Steel Workers' Union (JFISWU) in 1959, President of the JFISWU in 1968 (-1980) and the Chair of IMF-JC between 1973 and 1984.

Mr. Dosho was Deputy Vice Minister for Administration of Labor (October 1970- January 1972), Director-General of Labor Relations (July 1973-July 1975), Administrative Vice-Minister of Labor (July 1975-December 1976), and the Deputy Chief Cabinet Secretary (December 1976-December 1978).

In addition, several intensive interviews were conducted to the officials currently in charge of Sanrokon, especially Hideo Sugawara, Director of Labor Relations Division and Kinya Shirakawa, Deputy Director of Labor Relations Division.

All interviews were coordinated by Mr. Hiroshi Yamashita, Vice-Director, ILO-Tokyo Office. I appreciate his cooperation very much.

he became the chairperson of the House of Representatives.

The Business community in Japan consists of four major national organizations, *Keidanren* or Federation of Economic Organizations, *Nikkeiren* or the Japan Federation of Employers' Association, *Nissho*, or Japan Chamber of Commerce and Industry, and *Doyukai*. Their attitude, especially *Nikkeiren*, which is specifically in charge of industrial and labor affairs among them, was very cooperative in creating such an opportunity to talk frankly with and to persuade labor leaders (Enjoji et al 1981 : 22. MOL 1993 : 6)

Before the establishment of Sanrokon, they had become gradually satisfied with having a consultative body in the industry level as well as at the company level. It was the national level that was needed to fill the gap between the management and labor leaders' opinion. Until the mid-1960's the Central Labor Relations Commission, a formal tripartite entity that examined a trade union's eligibility and cases of labor practices to check the coverage of the collective agreement, and to conciliate, mediate, or arbitrate labor disputes, was also a very important place for knowing the real intention of labor, consulting the serious labor problem with labor leaders as well as persuading them. In effect it had remained, however, merely in name. Ironically it was because of its success in consolidating the labor union system in post-war Japan. There existed no other serious debates than on unfair practices regarding problems between labor and management of the private railway industry, as well as wage negotiations (Enjoji et al 1981 : 21-22).

In academia, by the same token, some of the labor problem specialists were worried about the situation. Ichiro NAKAYAMA<sup>5</sup>,

the chair of the Central Labor Relations Commission and the President of Japan Labor Institute, was gravely concerned, and he became the most enthusiastic academic person in establishing Sanrokon, and was appointed the chair of it for first 10 years.

The difficulties laid in the labor sector which had been divided into four competing or even mutually antagonistic national centers. Moreover, there is the inner sectoral difference between the private and public. The leader of labor in Japan, Sohyo (GCTU) and its public sector union leaders were very suspicious about such a consultative meeting as a sort of trap. They felt that it was intentionally designed to promote co-optation and involvement by business, as a capitalist initiative to serve big business profiteering. They warned that this system would become an excuse to introduce the mandatory income policy which also would revive statist control over industrial relations.

As mentioned, key figures in Domei (JCL) and IMF-JC were

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- 5 Ichiro NAKAYAMA, an economist, born in 1898 and died in 1980. Professor of Hitotsubashi University between 1937 and 1962 and the President of the university 1949-1956. Schumpeterian. Introduced first into Japan "Modern Economics" concerning equilibrium theories. Established and became the chair of several prestigious academic associations. One of the brain trusts for prime minister Yoshida. Became a neutral side member of Central Labor Relations Commission since 1946 and the Chairperson between 1950 and 1960. Besides, he was very active as chairpersons of many important policy councils like Tax System Council, Central Minimum Wage Council and several price-problem-related study committees.

cooperative for MOL and business in establishing Sanrokon, especially Yoshiji MIYATA, who was the key person to form IMF-JC in 1964 and had just become the chair of the central committee of Japanese Federation of Iron and Steel Worker's Union in 1968. He had just completed their union's plan to acquire a wage level of European standards, and he was one of the key persons who promoted the epoch-making company merger between Fuji Steel and Yahata Steel to give birth to the number one steel company of Nippon Steel in 1970. Under his leadership at Yahata Factory in the steel industry throughout the 1960's, he had established strong trust relationship with the president of the Yahata Steel later Nippon Steel, Yoshihiro Inayama. After forming the Japan Steel, and Japan Steel Labor Union for his home base, his power in the private sector labor became unassailable because of absolute importance of the relative weight of steel and iron industry in Japan's economy. In order to give substance to his intention more articulately, he needed a place for his voice heard, regarding governmental decision-making on national economic affairs and industrial affairs.

Since 1967, the first reunification movement occurred in crosscutting central organizations. Therefore there were a lot of opportunities for the cooperative labor leaders to persuade other reluctant leaders.

In order to come to terms with Sohyo (GCTU) as well as business leaders who were worried about the introduction of the formal mandatory income policy, MOL promised not to use this place for introducing that policy in November 1969. At the final stage in December 1969, although appointment of members in the labor side

was still problematic, Akira IWAI, a prominent anti-establishment labor union leader in Sohyo (GCTU) gave the last post to Mr. Miyata for him (Enjoji 1981: 23). This is a kind of mystery, because all newspaper articles covering the topic before its establishment took it granted that Mr. Iwai would be joining Sanrokon as a key figure. Without some deals behind the scenes, this might not have happened between two leaders in the different confrontational factions in the Sohyo (GCTU) labor movement.

Consequently, Sanrokon was established in January 1970.

## **1-2: Four Stages in the Development of Sanrokon**

Please see table 5 and table 7 (see also MOL 1993, Enjoji et al 1981).

The First Stage: 1st-45th meeting (1970, 1-1974, 11): An Approach Run Period (Sato Cabinet, Tanaka Cabinet)

It was quite fortunate that Sanrokon was formed just before the Nixon Shocks along with the first high appreciation of the yen against the dollar since 1949 and with his approach to Communist China in 1971, and the subsequent drastic changes of the first oil shock and shift to floating system of foreign exchange in 1973. These shocks were intermediated by Sanrokon and other shock-absorbing mechanism from the micro to macro-level to adjust the Japanese economy and society to the new situations. They encouraged the structural change of Japanese industry (see next section, a case study).

The members got into an imbroglio over how the wage hike

problem should be discussed. Especially because of a report issued by the Ohkawa committee in the Japan Economic Research Institute on wage and prices at the 11th meeting December 1970, plans for the 12th Sanrokon meeting became entangled because it was to be an introduction of talks regarding income policy. The meetings were not held during the period between February and September in 1971. However, at that time period, cooperative members as well as the MOL tried to reopen the meetings. In this rocky process, the character of the system was becoming more clearly articulated by members before it restarted in October 1971.

The topics varied and included some research-oriented reports on macro economics. Some of the labor side members took the initiative in discussing the topic of *Shunto*, the spring wage negotiation round, in the spring of 1972. During this process, there were three oversea inspection tours made by members of Sanrokon, which in the end facilitated mutual understanding. After the first oil shock, opportunistic price and wage hikes became the central topic. Chief of Economic planning Agency (EPA) as well as the Director-general of the Research Bureau of the agency attended several times to explain the significance of the problems and government policy. Other minister, however, had not attended yet.

The Second stage : 46th-96th meeting (1974, 12-1980, 5) : A Full-Scale Development  
(Miki Cabinet, Fukuda Cabinet, Ohira Cabinet)

The cabinet itself emphasized the function of Sanrokon : consensus building and voluntary implementation of adequate wage raise



without government intervention and control in the name of the income policy. Especially Takeo FUKUDA took a strenuous role in persuading Sanrokon members by attending 10 times as the vice-prime minister and Chief of EPA under MIKI cabinet and three times as the Prime Minister. He was the first vice prime minister to attend it. Thereafter, Miki finally became the first prime minister to take part in the meeting.

On the other hand, after the successful performance of the wage negotiation round, a labor side member, Mr. Miyata, demanded to be allowed to take more seats for labor in the advisory councils and other consultation committees (48th meeting) and further requested enlargement of the function of Sanrokon to discuss overall economic policies and to promote more attendance of related ministers (70th, 71th). In addition, the issue of upgrading of Sanrokon was discussed several times (for instance, 63th, 64th). As can be seen in Table 5, Ministers of International Trade and Industry, Finance, Agriculture and other ministries started to attend the meeting in this period. This kind of custom is considered to be very exceptional in Japanese bureaucratic sectionalism. Since 1977, the items reaching consensus were to be formally reported in the cabinet meeting (*Kakugi Hokoku*, or formal cabinet reporting relations).

The primary topics moved from the prices and wages to the employment, counter-measures against recession. In general, as claimed by Mr. Miyata, the topics shifted toward more and more its macroeconomic policies. "Presentation of the current economic situation" by the director of EPA has become customary since the beginning of this period. Consequently, different from other periods,

there appeared three formal reports and proposals on the prices between 1979 and 1981. Also, remarkably enough they have already gotten a head start on discussing the administrative reform, which will be major political agenda in the 1980's. (See table 6)

The Third Stage: 97th-159th meeting (1980, 7-1987, 11): A Stable and Generalized Period  
(Suzuki Cabinet, Nakasone Cabinet)

In the period, Sanrokon was held quite regularly with increased attendance of various ministers and director-generals over time. In addition to the MOF, MITI, MOA, ministries and chiefs of foreign affairs, welfare and health, education and others started to send ministers there. The Chief of the Administrative Management Agency and chair of *Rincho*, Provisional Committee of Administrative Reform also appeared. The chair, Mr. Toshio DOKO himself had been a member of Sanrokon for 10 years. Later then on, the topics discussed there became hot political agenda in Japan. In this context Sanrokon became a comprehensive consultation body beyond the limit of labor and industrial problems.

On the other hand, whether Sanrokon should be publicized was discussed, but they decided that it should be kept unpublicized (108th, 109th). Outside of Sanrokon, there appeared a variety of advisory councils, including large councils like *Rincho* and statutory committees to form new policies, But Sanrokon kept its informality as pure discussion style in nature.

The Fourth Stage : 160th meeting-the present (1987, 12-) : A Transformation Period?

(Takeshita, Uno, Kaihu, and Miyazawa LDP Cabinets, Hosokawa, Hata and Murayama Coalition Cabinets)

The topics became more varied, including the environment, commuting, the consumer price gap between Japan and overseas etc. Influenced by the frequent cabinet shuffles, the number of meetings held generally decreased. After the end of LDP one party dominance in 1993, Sanrokon seems to be entering its transformation period.

## **2 A Case Study : Sanrokon's Effective and Successful Consensus Building an Adequate Wage Hike in 1975 Wage Negotiation Round without a Formal Income Policy**

### **2-1: Background**

In this section, let us focus on a concrete case of successful and effective consensus building through Sanrokon (Shinkawa 1984. Nikkeiren 1981. Inagami 1994, especially Oumi's article, 1994). It concerns the wage raise in the 1975 round just after the epoch-making increase in 1974, 32.9%. Although the increases generally followed "me-too" price hikes and rapid GNP growth of preceding years, which can be seen in the two previous graphs (Figure 2, 3), the gap of increase rates between wages and prices, and between wage and real GNP growth were increasing especially since 1970 round.

This tendency was not only brought by labor offensives regarding "1970 political problems" (extension of US-Japan Mutual Secu-

rity Treaty, recovering Okinawa territory, university strikes, anti-Vietnam War etc.) but was also accelerated by several policy failures by LDP government. This included inappropriate policy measures against the dollar crisis, based on its bad-forecasts and wrong evaluations of the international currency system in 1971. Furthermore it was aggravated by the following inadequate economic, financial, and budgetary policies like enlarging economy policy by Japan Archipelago Re-developing Plan (Tanaka cabinet, 1972) and its related land policy. Also, it took a noncommittal and evasive position to oil crisis or energy problem in 1973.

As noted earlier, business as well as labor were repelling the formal income policy, although for different reasons. The government was inclined not to take that policy, as shown in the Sumiya Report by the Prices/Income/Productivity Committee in the Economic Council of EPA in May 1972. There was the creed that the income policy should not be taken.

But a 32.9% wage increase was quite shocking for business and government. The usually peaceful, and stable society turned into a panic at the end of 1973, because of an impending hyper inflation and lack of daily necessities such as toilet paper (the stocking-up-on-toilet-paper panic: between November 16th and 20th, 1973). Then Sanrokon, generally unknown and inconspicuous consultation body, suddenly became a light or leading in the consensus building to pass this national crisis.

## **2-2: Sanrokon's Condition**

Let me review the settlement condition of Sanrokon as for

dealing with this kind of wage settlement (Enjoji et al 1981. MOL 1993).

Before establishing Sanrokon, MOL promised not to use this forum for introducing the income policy, in responding the strong opposition by Sohyo (GCTU), the dominant center of labor group.

However, both labor and business side had some strong supporters like Mr. Miyata (JFISW, IMF-JC) and Mr. Sakurada (JFEA, Nikkeiren) to deal with topics on the relations between wages and the national economy (macroeconomic policy). Therefore, after the meeting was once entangled by the Ohkawa Report on the matter in the early stage, these members succeeded in taking up this kind of topic, like the spring wage negotiation round into the major subjects of Sanrokon in 1972.

In 1973, Mr. Miyata became the chair of IMF-JC which assured him a more influential voice for wage hike problem.

After the oil shock in this year and next year, top rank officials of EPA such as Vice-Parliamentary Chief, Director of Research Bureau in EPA strenuously explained the economic situation of the Japan. But it was not until December 1974 that the major minister started to attend Sanrokon.

### **2-3: The Consensus Building Process of 1975 Wage Negotiation**

The sequential process of consensus building can be summarized as follows: (See Shinkawa 1984, Nikkeiren 1981, Oumi 1994 in Inagami et al 1994, MOL 1993, Fujita 1981)

In the 1974 wage negotiation round the labor side got an unexpected 32.9% increase in average, which was a record high and

considered to be the first victory of Labor, for its level put up by Sohyo (GCTU) group (30%) and JC group (25%), and even in comparison to the consumer price hikes in 1973, (11.7%) and in 1974, (23.2%).

Immediately after the result, Mr. Fukuda, Minister of Finance in the Tanaka Cabinet, proposed a research on potential effects on the national economy and business of the record increase in the cabinet meeting. Consequently, EPA started the research. Then in quoting the EPA's research result on the effect, he suggested the "voluntary" guideline method for the prospect of wage level in the Diet (May 23, 1974). The Hayakawa committee in LDP also proposed the same method (May 12, 1974).

At the 41th meeting of Sanrokon (June 3, 1974), the Director-General of the Research Bureau in EPA explained "the economic effect of the record wage raise on the national economy and management in Japan." He attended Sanrokon continuously from the 41th to 44th (June, July, September, October) meetings to explain the wage and prices relations. MOL made a non-statutory study group named "Wage-Prices Problem Round-table" as an advice group for the ministers (August 21, 1974-, Chair Toshihiko YOSHINO. Later he became a member of Sanrokon in the academic side). Sanrokon's core members ; Mr. Matsuzaki (Business, JFEA), Mr. Miyata (Labor, IMF-JC), and Mr. Dosho (Director-General of Labor Relations Bureau, MOL) went to Brazil and Mexico for an inspection tour (September 19-29, 1974).

At the annual meeting of the Japanese Federation of Iron and Steel Workers' Union on August 28, 1974, Mr. Miyata insisted "now is the time for change from the incremental pay-raise system on an

annual basis,” and “we have to turn to the struggle seeking *a substantive raise rather than a nominal raise*, in considering national economic growth in Japan”.

Mr. Amaike, the president of Domei, the Japanese Federation of Labor and a member of Sanrokon, expressed his support for Miyata’s opinion on September 5th. For the meantime Mr. Ohta, also a Sanrokon member and ex-Sohyo (GUTU) Chair strongly opposed Miyata’s opinion, dismissing it as yielding to the capitalist intentions (Sep. 18) because the labor distribution ratio in Japan were still relatively low compared to those in western advanced countries.

On the business side, Nikkeiren or JFEA set up a study group named “A Study Committee on the Future of the Record Wage Hikes” on May 20th, 1974, which included 7 businessmen of Sanrokon. This Committee reported after 5 intensive meetings that in order to maintain the high-g geared growth of Japanese economy and peaceful social life, “a 15% wage hike in 1975 round and followed by 8% in 1976, and 7% after 1977 may be an adequate guiding post.” JFEA’s Committee also emphasized the avoidance of the compulsory income policy, which meant government initiative as well as labor involvement. On the other hand, JFEA put emphasis on “voluntary” consultation between labor and management and declared its resolution to establish this guiding post through meeting of presidents of member companies. Before the report, JFEA had strong solidarity support from all national federations, including the most influential organizations like Keidanren or FEO and Kansai Economic Federation on September 1974.

The labor national centers concluded their demand for the wage

raise in the 1975 round around November and December 1974 : Joint Struggle for Spring Offensive (Sohyo (GCTU) group); 30%, Domei (JFL); 27%, IMF-JC; 25%. Although the figures claimed by the different groups were appeared to be similar, the hidden meanings were revealing the uncompromising difference between two blocs ; Sohyo (GCTU) group vs. Non-Sohyo (GCTU) private sector or Class Struggle faction vs. National Economy faction.

Within the cabinet council, the High Prices Counter-Measure Cabinet Council, declared the cabinet policy goal on the upper price restraints to be 15% at the end of March, 1975 in comparison to the same month of the last year. Here, the targeted price hikes by government and targeted wage increase by business coincided or were linked in the figure. This meant that, in a hidden dimension, the government/business coalition did engage an informal social promise with the private sector labor union leaders to exchange less than 15% price constraint by the government/business with 15% increase endurance by the private labor. Thus "15%" became a serious mutual target zone for both sides.

The Miki cabinet started on December 9th, 1974, succeeding the Tanaka cabinet. Mr. Fukuda became the Vice-Prime Minister and the Chief of EPA. His comrade, Shun Hasegawa, returned as the Minister of MOL after a one month interval. Fukuda's 1975 wage round policy was "While the government will do its best to restrain prices, it will not impose an income policy, and the government trusts and expects a consensus with wisdom between labor and management concerning wage negotiations." (December 1974).

At Sanrokon 46th meeting on December 18th 1974, Mr. Fukuda



delivered an "impassioned speech" arguing for the change of the nature of inflation from the demand-pull type to cost-push type, to ask the members, especially the labor side, for cooperation with government policy. Fukuda sequentially attended Sanrokon from the 46th (December 1974) to 53th (October 1975) meetings. The prime minister Miki accompanied Mr. Fukuda at the February 1975 meeting. Needless to say, February and March are the most important periods for spring offensives in the light of labor.

The government strongly held on to the restraint policy on general demands such as restraints of public works. Also, it exerted its preference of price stabilization through the both cabinet meeting decision and the Economic Related Ministerial Councils led by Mr. Fukuda (July 23, 1974, December 17, 1974). Despite the economy was obviously entering into the recession period in January 1975, the government stuck to the high official rate (9.0%) until getting over the difficulty of the Shunto (wage negotiation round), April 16th, 1975.

Major companies in steel industry and ship-building industry replied to their respective labor unions as the first runner on 9th April in the 1975 round and the unions accepted them. The agreed-upon wage raise was 14.9% for steel and 15.2% for ship-building. Since both industries were strongest among the industries in that year, in addition to their core positions in the national economy, other industries inevitably followed pay-raise level. Thus, the averaged wage increase of that round turned out to be 13.9%. It was even below the target previously set by JFEA.

Government as well as business, especially steel industry, had tried to restrain price-uprise at least by March 1975, when the spring

offensive reached at its peak. The prices in March could be considered as a very serious criteria for the possibility of inflation in the year. Steel companies, pressured by other industries, had to shelve steel price-raise that year and promised their companies' wage increase lower than 15%. By their effort, prices turned out to be only 2.0% up as for retailer prices and 10.4% up as for consumer prices in 1975. The governmental goal and promise was also fulfilled.

In effect, the informally promised increase of "15%" was achieved by the three members' desperate endeavors despite the complicated tensions among three parties.

As noteworthy epilogue, since the 1976 wage negotiation round, there has appeared the round-table consultation body on both business and labor sides in metal and machine industries, consisting of 4 industries and 8 major companies and their respective 8 major labor unions affiliated with IMF-JC (Shinoda 1989. Ishihata 1990). The fours include steel and iron (Nippon Steel, Nihon Kokan), ship building (Mitsubishi Jyuko, Ishikawajima Harima Jyuko), automobile production (Toyota, Nissan), and electric machine and instruments (Hitachi, Toshiba). Each round-table has integrated wage standards in each year for both side and both of them informally negotiated then jointly decided upon a standard wage increase ranges; this is called the JC-initiative wage round by the labor side.

Thus, the increase was 8.8% in 1976, 8.8% in 1977, and 5.9% in 1978, all of which were considered to be fallen within the adequate zone, set by the major parties in charge, although Sohyo (GCTU) groups criticized this vociferously as managed wage negotiation initiated by cruel and heartless capitalists and government.

## 2-4: Significance and By-products of the 1975 Consensus Building

The process was clearly significant. It avoided hyper-inflation by moderate socially initiated guidance on pay raises and by restraint of prices without compulsory income policy and price control. This Japanese way of the reciprocal consent (Samuels 1987) mechanism was maintained even at the time of economic crises.

The wage increase standard for the labor side was drastically switched from the annual incremental method of "plus something more based on the preceding year performance" to the "adequate wage increase in considering the economic growth and maintenance of substantial income."

By turn, this change has assured the adequate economic growth and has encouraged the structural change of Japanese economy without reducing the employment level as a whole throughout the late 1970's and 1980's.

The side effect was that, systemic transformation has become to occur at the national and industrial levels of industrial relations and even in the policy process itself.

As observed earlier, the cooperative labor representatives overtly demanded more formal and substantial participation in the policy process of advisory councils etc. in return. At the same time, they also claimed a variety of policy actions in order to maintain the full employment system even under the harsh circumstances.

The business side has become very cooperative in promoting such policy actions by government with the private labor leaders. They conceded their posts in the advisory councils for labor (the percentage of business in the advisory councils declined from 27.9%

in 1973 to 22.7% in 1988, while that of labor slightly increased from 3.6% to 4.3%. This is more articulate in the councils related to economic affairs (Tsujinaka 1994).

Consequently, a variety of corporative policies supported by both labor and business were embodied in a law and budgetary plans. For instance, a lot of laws concerning counter-measures for the local -industry depressed area (1978-83), and for the structurally depressed industries, (1977-83), the employment security for such areas and for such industries (1983, 87, 88), the revision of the Health Insurance Law (1986), and making new systems for human resource development promotions (1985, 88), for equal opportunity and for the handicapped (1987) and for senior workers (1986), etc (Nakamura 1988 : 27-29, 32 -35).

As a political by-product, having gained confidence, policy means and personnel network for information through Sanrokon and other related organizations, the private labor union leaders have formulated their way of activity as the "Policy-Institution Demand Strategy," which became a strong alternative form of leverage against Sohyo (GCTU)'s political campaign strategy (Tsujinaka 1994. Shinoda 1989). They created their forum named Policy-Institution Promotion Council in 1976. This became a core organization, bringing other unions into their movement policy and finally in the late 1980s they reunified the labor sector into Rengo, the Japanese Trade Union Confederation by their initiative. This kind of reunification itself is very rare in the advanced industrial countries (Tsujinaka 1994).

This private union group eventually became a friendly, however

low profile, partner to carry out a series of reforms such as administrative, budgetary, tax and political reforms, throughout the 1980s (Oumi 1994).

Therefore, the harsh political contests in the high economic growth era had been replaced by putting up battle over chances for participation and consultation under the structural change and globalization (Inagami 1994, esp. Oumi's article. Shinoda 1989).

### **3 Analysis I: Organization Structure and Representation of Sanrokon**

The most distinctive and important characteristic of Sanrokon regarding structure is its quasi-formal status as a non-statutory advisory committee for the Minister of Labor. There is an interesting contrast between the impressive titles of each member and the committee's low publicity among people. Even Ichiro KATO, the current chairperson confessed "I myself did not know of the existence of Sanrokon where such influential figures of labor and management got together regularly, before my participation. Thus the man in the street does not aware of its existence, just like me." (MOL 1993 : p. 4). The mass media in general, even specialized papers like the Japan Labor News, have not put efforts to cover Sanrokon meeting so much.

#### **3-1: Structure and Composition of Sanrokon**

Sanrokon is by name, supposed to be a tripartite body. But precisely speaking, so-called "the Guideline" did deny the character-

istic of a tripartite body because MOL resists to render up its appointment authority to each sector. Moreover, it consists of four types of actors : labor union leaders, business and employers' association leaders, academic scholars and intellectuals, and government officials. In fact, Sanrokon has been a quartet or a quat-partite body organization (See table 3 and talbe 4).

The Government-side is the host, consisting mainly of the Minister and more than 20 senior bureaucrats from the Ministry of Labor but also includes some officials from the Economic Planning Agency. Usually, every other meeting invites a guest speaker from outside of MOL.

A neutral side consists of academics and intellectuals. The number of its members is the half of the both labor and business sides. The expected role is a moderator and professional advisor. Regardless of the side they took, many members recalled how important Mr. Nakayama's role as the chairperson was between 1970 and 1980, thus these academics were reliable intermediator.

Although it was not always so, the number of members from labor and business side had been almost equivalent, as the table 3 shows.

### **3-2: Representativeness of Sanrokon**

Sanrokon is neither a representative committee nor a rigid tripartite system. Yet, it is meant to represent most influential organizations in both business and labor. Table 2-A, 2-B and table 3 indicate that there are all the cream of the crop in Sanrokon. These members, especially from business side have been serving as chair

Table 2-A Original member of Sanrokon (1970. 1)  
(Ministry of Labor 1993 : 45-49)

**Labor side**

- OHTA Kaoru President of Japanese Federation of Synthetic Chemistry Industry Workers Unions (Goka Roren)
- OHYA Tetsutaro General Secretary of National Federation of Industrial Organizations (Shinsanbetsu)
- OKAMURA Kei General Secretary of Federation of Independent Unions of Japan (Churitsu Roren)
- KIYOTA Hirosuke President of All Japan Federation of Electrical Machine Workers' Unions (Denki Roren)
- SHIGEEDA Takumi General Secretary of Japanese Federation of Labor (Domei)
- TAKITA Minoru President of Japanese Federation of Labor (Domei)
- MINAMIHAZAMA Yutaka President of All Japan Seamen's Union
- HARAGUCHI Yukitaka President of All Japan Mining Workers Union (Zenko)
- HORII Toshikatsu President of General Council of Trade Unions of Japan (Sohyo)
- MIYATA Yoshiji President of Japanese Federation of Iron and Steel Workers' Union (Tekko Roren)
- MIYANOHARA Sadamitsu President of Japan Teachers Union

**Employer side**

- ANZAI Hiroshi President of Tokyo Gas Corp.
- SUNANO Hitoshi Chairman of Kawasaki Heavy Industries, Ltd.
- IMAZATO Hiroki President of The Nihon Mining & Concentrating Co., Ltd.
- KAWAMATA Katsuji President of Nissan Motor Co., Ltd.
- KIKAWADA Kazutaka Chairman of Association of Corporation Executive (Keizai Doiyukai).  
President of The Tokyo Electric Power Co., Inc.
- SAKURADA Takeshi President of Japan Federation of Employers Association (Nihon Keieisha Dantai Renmei)
- STAO Senju President of Senju Metal Industries, Ltd.
- SHINOSHIMA Hideo President of Mitsubishi Chemical Indus-

tries, Ltd.

DOKO Toshio     President of Tokyo Shibaura Electronics Corporation

NAGANO Shigeo    President of Federation of Chambers of Commerce and Industry

HAYAKAWA Masaru   Executive Director of Japan Federation of Employers Association

**Academic side**

ARISAWA Hiromi    Professor Emeritus of University of Tokyo

ISHII Teruhisa     President of Central Labor Relations Commission

EBATA Kiyoshi     Chief Editor of Asahi Shinbun Publishing Co.

ENJOJI Jiro        President of Nihon Keizai Shinbun Inc.

NAKAYAMA Ichiro    President of Japan Institute of Labor



Table 2-B Current member of Sanrokon (1995. 1)  
(Ministry of Labor. Material.) mimeo.

**Labor side**

- ASHIDA Jinnosuke President of Japanese Trade Union Confederation (Rengo). President of Japanese Federation of Textile, Garment, Chemical, Distributive, and Allied Industry Workers' Unions (Zensen Domei)
- IKEMURA Ryoichi President of General Federation of Private Railway Workers' Unions of Japan (Shitetsu Soren)
- ITO Mototaka President of Japan Postal Workers' Union (Zentei)
- IWAYAMA Yasuo President of All Japan Federation of Electrical Machine Workers' Unions (Denki Roren)
- KAJIMOTO Koji President of Federation of Information and Telecommunication Industry (Joho Roren)
- KAWAO Yotaro President of National Federation of Life Insurance Workers Unions (Seiho Roren)
- KAWACHIYAMA Daisaku President of Japanese Confederation of Chemical and General Trade Unions (Zenka Rengo)
- GOTO Morishige Deputy President of Japanese Trade Union Confederation (Rengo).  
President of Japan Prefectural and Municipal Workers Unions (Zen Nihon Jichidantai Rodo Kumiai)
- SASAMORI Kiyoshi President of Confederation of Electric Power-related Industry Workers' Unions of Japan (Denryoku Soren)
- TOKUMOTO Teruhito President of Confederation of Japan Automobile Workers' Unions (Jidosha Soren)
- NAKANISHI Shojiro President of All Japan Seamens Union (Kaiin Kumiai)
- MAEKAWA Tadao General President of Japan Council of Metal Workers' Union (Kinzoku Rokyō)
- WASHIO Etsuya Secretary of Japanese Trade Union Confederation (Rengo)

**Employer side**

- INABA Kosaku President of Federation of Chambers of Commerce and Industry (Nihon Shoko Kaigisho). President of Ishikawajima-Harima Heavy Industries Co., Ltd.

IOSHI Kazuo     President of The Mitsubishi Bank, Ltd.  
KANAMORI Shigeichiro     President of Kinki Nihon Railway Co.,  
                  Ltd.  
KUME Yutaka     Chairperson of Nissan Motor Co., Ltd.  
SAITO Yu     President of Nippon Steel Corporation  
SUZUKI Kazuo     Counselor of Toppan Printing Co., Ltd.  
SEKIMOTO Tadahiro     President of Nippon Electric Co., Ltd.  
TSUTSUMI Seiji     President of Saison Corporation  
TOYODA Shoichiro     President of Japan Federation of Economic  
                  Organizations (Keidanren). President of Toyota Motor Co., Ltd.  
NAGANO Ken     President of Japan Federation of Employers  
                  Association (Nihon Keieisha Dantai Renmei)  
HAYAMI Suguru     Executive Director of Japanese Association of  
                  Corporation Executive (Keizai Doyukai). Counselor of Nissho  
                  -Iwai Co., Ltd.  
FUKUOKA Michio     Executive Director of Japan Federation of  
                  Employers' Associations (Nikkeiren)  
MIMURA Yohei     Counselor of Mitsubishi Corporation

**Academic side**

ISHIKAWA Kichiemon     Professor Emeritus of Tokyo University  
                  (Chairperson)  
KATO Ichiro     President of Seijo Gakuen, Professor Emeritus of  
                  Tokyo University  
TAKAHARA Sumiko     Economy Critic  
TSUJIMURA Kotaro     President of Japan Labor Organization,  
                  Professor Emeritus of Keio Gijiku University  
MATSUYAMA Yukio     Friend of Asahi Shinbin Publishing Co.  
MIYAZAKI Isao     Chairperson of Daiwa Research Institute Corp.  
YOSHINO Toshihiko     Special Advisor of Economic Research  
                  Institute of Yamaichi Securities Co., Ltd.

Table 3 Change of Number of Members from Each Side

Members	1970	1975	1980	1985	1990	1995
A Labor side Number	11	11(11)	12	12	13	13
B Employer side Number	11	11	12	13	12	13
C Academic side Number	5	5	7	8	8	7
-----						
A Labor side by national center						
Sohyo	4	4	5	4	(4)***	(5)
Domei	3	3	3	3	(3)	(3)
Cyuritu	2	2	2	2	(3)	(2)
Sinsanbetsu	1	0	1	1	-	
JC	1	1	1	1	(1)	(1)
Rengo				1*	2**	2
* Rengo's former body Zenminrokyo (Japanese Private Sector Trade Union Council), formed in 1982.						
** Rengo Japanese Trade Union Confederation, first formed as private sector national center in 1987 and reorganized as a private-public sector center in 1989.						
*** Since 1989, all labor-side member were recruited from Rengo. These members in parenthese indicate ex-affiliation of members.						

-persons or key members in many prestigious advisory committees and non-statutory study groups across the many other ministries and agencies (Fujita 1981). Such committees and councils include Industrial Structure Council, Economic Council, Tax Commission, Advisory Council on Social Security, Advisory Council on the Public Service Personnel System, Financial System Research Council and Employment Council. Especially, through the 1980's the administrative reform had been discussed in the Provisional Council for Administrative Reform and its related councils. All chairpersons were recruited from Sanrokon members, which means they were recruited

Table 4 Government-Side Attendance (Regular)

<p>A : Ministry of Labor  Minister of Labor  Parliamentary Vice-Minister of Labor  Administrative Vice-Minister of Labor  Assistant-Minister of Labor for International Affairs  Deputy Vice-Minister for Administration      Director-General of Policy Planning and Research Department      Director of General Affairs Coordination Division      Director of Finance Division  Director-General of Labor Relations Bureau      Director-General of Worker's Welfare Department      Director of Labor Relations Division (Secretariat of the Sanrokan)  Director-General of Labor Standards Bureau  Director-General of Women's Bureau  Director-General of Employment Security Bureau      Director of Measures for the Aged and the Disabled Department  Director-General of Human Resources Development Bureau  Secretary-General of Central Labor Relations Commission  Ministerial Councilors (4)</p> <p>B : Economic Planning Agency  Administrative Vice-Minister  Director-General of Coordination Bureau</p>
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from Keidanren, FEO.

In this sense, besides Sanrokon members are representatives of national labor and business, they also directly and/or indirectly reflect most of the important advisory and policy research councils. Sanrokon can work as a real elites' forum for the kingpins of policy making in Japan.

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### 3-3: Selection Procedure for Members and Secretariat for Sanro-

## **kon**

Since Sanrokon is an advisory committee for the Minister of Labor, the appointment authority is attached to the Minister and the secretariat of Sanrokon. The officials in charge, however, have to consult informally with major organizations in advance to select and recruit new members. The most important point to which they must be attentive to is to keep the balance of power among members and a good atmosphere to have a heart-to-heart talk with members and organizations represented.

The Secretariat service is conducted by the Labor Relations Bureau, Labor Relations Division. It consists of the Director, Deputy-Director and Section Chief in the division.

### **4 Analysis II: Issue, Agenda and Procedure for Discussion at Sanrokon**

Please see table 7: Content of Sanrokon Discussion.

The outline claims the subject of general labor problem and related industry problem. As can be seen in Table 7, there is a wide variety of topics tabled for discussion at Sanrokon. Almost all are discussed at the morning breakfast table. In fact, it tends to be rather highly articulate there.

#### **4-1: Included Topics and Emphasized Issues**

Primary topics and subjects are related to employment, prices, economic forecast and current situations, wages, and counter-recession measures. They are more or less positively related to the labor

Table 5 Guest Attendants (Minister Class)

	The number of times	1st 70-74	2nd 74-80	3rd 80-87	4th 87-
Prime Minister	20	0	6	7	7
Vice Prime Minister (Director-General of EPA)	10	0	10	0	0
Director-General of Economic Planning Agency	32(42)	4	11	9	8
Other Minister level ;					
Minister of International Trade and Industry	5	0	3	1	1
Minister of Finance	4	0	2	2	0
Minister of Foreign Affairs	3	0	0	3	0
Minister of Transport	2	0	0	1	1
Minister for Agriculture, Forestry, and Fisheries	2	0	1	1	0
Director-General of the National Land Agency	2	0	0	1	1
Director-General of the Admin- istrative Management Agency	2	0	1	1	0
The Chief Cabinet Secretary	1	0	0	1	0
Minister of State (special mission)	0	0	1	0	0
Director-General of Adminis- trative Affairs in the Prime Minister's Office	0	0	0	1	0
Minister of Health and Welfare		1		1	
Minister of Education		1		1	
Director-General of Science and Technology Agency		1		1	
Director-General of Environ- ment Agency		1			1
President of the National Personnel Agency	1			1	
Chair of Provisional Committee on Administrative Reform	1			1	
Governor of the Bank of Japan	3	1	1	0	1
Secretary of Labor of the United States	1	1			
The United States' Ambassador to Japan	1				1
Total	96	6	36	33	21

Table 6 SANROKON Meeting Frequencies

1 the number of times by fiscal year	2 the number of time by a cabinet	3 Average interval of the conference number/length of the cabinet	4 the number of the attendance of Prime Minister	
1970	11 Sato	22	41.7	0
1	5			
2	10 Tanaka	23	38.5	0
3	10			
4	10 Miki	17	43.9	1
5	8			
6	8 Fukuda	20	35.7	3
7	11			
8	10 Ohira	15	39.2	2
9	9			
1980	9 Suzuki	19	45.5	2
1	9			
2	7 Nakasone	42	42.9	5
3	9			
4	9			
5	9			
6	9			
7	8 Takeshita	10	57.4	2
8	6			
9	6			
9	6 Uno	2	34.0	0
1990	7 Kaifu	16	51.1	2
1	8 Miyazawa	12	53.3	2
2	8			
3	5 Hosokawa	3	87.3	1
4	5 Hata	1	65.0	0
	Murayama	(3)	(61.7)	?

market policy. Since the 1975 wage negotiation round described in the case study, the topics of economic forecasts and current economic conditions have become conventionally reported by officials of EPA : prices, inflation, economic growth, currency, exchange rate, and finance problem etc., topics concerning macroeconomics.

The range of issue seems to have widened over time. It sometimes covers diplomacy and political reforms to some extent. Almost all important political issues reported by the Minister of Labor, the ministers in charge or even the Prime Minister himself, are freely discussed there.

#### **4-2: Excluded Topics or Un-emphasized Issues**

Among labor policies, some typical matters like collective bargaining, employment, labor, and working conditions, and discrimination problems were tabled for discussion very few times there. Fundamental labor rights problems of the public sector workers was once discussed just after a historical strike on November 1975 (54th meeting), but this sort of thing is exceptional. Labor condition issues were touched upon in relation to other issues, such as the multi-national corporation problem and the equal rights law, etc. In addition, social policies, social securities and welfare topics were hardly mentioned since the Ministry of Health and Welfare, not MOL is in charge of these items.

Consequently, Sanrokon's agenda and issues seem to be limited to the areas in which conflicts could be considered negotiable and, thereafter could be agreed upon from the macro point of view in terms of national economic policies, or the topics which are favorable



Table 7 Contents of Discussion at Sanrokon

	Total	4期 87/12	3期 80/7~ 87/11	2期 74/12~ 80/5	1期 70/1~ 74/11	
a) Management of Conference	9	1	1	4	3	営
b) Domestic Politics/Foreign Affairs	36	12	18	4	2	運
c) Economic Forecast/Economic Situation	38	5	19	7	7	の
d) Currency Problem/Exchange Rate	4	1	0	0	3	内
e) Financial Conditions	4	1	1	1	1	政
f) Energy. Oil	2	0	0	1	1	一
g) Productivity/Statistical Problem	10	1	0	6	3	般
h) Industrial Structure	6	0	2	3	1	外
i) Prices/Public Services' Fee	35	5	4	17	9	政
j) Wages	13	0	1	4	8	の
k) Spring Offensive	7	0	0	1	6	内
l) Employment	38	8	12	15	3	政
m) Foreign Worker Problem/Vocational Training	6	6	0	0	0	一
n) Unemployment Insurance	2	0	0	1	1	般
o) Counter-measure against Recession	13	1	0	12	0	外
p) Housing and Land Problem/the Property-making System for Workers	9	3	1	1	4	不
q) Retirement Age	5	2	1	0	2	住
r) Reduction in Working Hours	13	4	5	2	2	財
s) Tax System/Reduction of Tax	7	1	2	3	1	定
t) Multinational Corporation	4	2	0	1	1	時
u) Administrative Reform	13	0	4	6	3	稅
v) Others	40	9	13	10	8	多
					3	行
						の
						他

視察(3)

for general discussion, like the current political task by the cabinet and the explanation of foreign and domestic affairs.

In this sense Sanrokon is not the specialized policy council for labor problem but rather the general advisory organ for the cabinet, whose members are recruited from the top elite of labor, business and academics.

### **4-3: Sanrokon's Operating Procedure**

#### **Frequencies of Meeting**

Please see the table 6: Sanrokon's Meeting Frequencies

The Outline says "as occasion demands, he or she convene a forum to ask their opinion on related policy matters." There is no exact rule of the schedule, but they have regularly met once a month, except for the period of spring wage negotiation and during summer. However it was often cancelled when too inconvenient for the Minister of Labor or other senior bureaucrats, or for the Cabinet. Recently, the volatile political climate has seemed to reduce the session of the meetings.

#### **Notice of meeting**

Two to three weeks before a meeting, the notice is delivered to each member by the secretariat by the name of the Minister. For some reason, the attendance is said to be very high, close to full. This high attendance is an exceptional case for other meetings and councils.

#### **Agenda Setting**

In reviewing matters for meeting discussion and consulting with a guest speaker, the secretariat sets up the agenda and the Minister

has to approve it. The materials are usually provided by the guest speakers.

Since 1974, "Monthly Current Economic Indexes" by EPA has been delivered and explained by the EPA officials in charge. This material includes the indexes as follows: 1 National Income Statistics (GDP, Import and Export etc.); 2 Individual Consumption, Commercial Sales; 3 Residence Construction; 4 Civil Capital Investment, Amount of Civil Order; 5 Public Work Investment; 6 Manufacturing Industry and Mining Production, Shipping, Stock; 7 Employment Situation, Rate of Job Hunting/Job Offering, Unemployment Rate; 8 Corporation Profit, Survey on Corporation Performance; 9 Corporation Bankruptcy; 10 Import and Export Statistics; 11 Current Account of Balance of Payment; 12 Prices; 13 Finance, Stock Market Statistics; 12 Foreign Countries' Economic Statistics. These indexes cover generally 5 years.

### **Time Schedule**

Ordinary Sanrokon meeting is held as following schedule:

Opening at 8: 30 A. M. (serving breakfast)

1: Minister of Labor delivers address.

2: Topics Presentation by the Guest Speaker

3: Discussion on the Topics.

4: Explanation on the Current Economic Situation by EPA Official in Charge

Closing at before 10: 00 A. M.

This kind of morning breakfast meeting becomes a very common practice for the political elites in Japan.

### **Reporting Relations**

There are no reporting relations, because it is a non-statutory advisory committee for the Minister of Labor, and all related officials in MOL attend it. It is said "to be closed" and there are no minutes and records for the meetings.

There is no custom of replying to the request from the minister. Sanrokon publicized its report and proposal concerning prices only three times between 1979 and 1981.

After the meeting, at the press conference, the Director-General of Labor Relations Bureau conducts a briefing but does not mention the individual names with regard to the opinions, but only referring to anonymous opinions of each side.

## **5 Analysis III: Factors Strengthening or Weakening Sanrokon's Consultation**

It must be a consciousness of "need" among parties in concern that strengthens a national tripartite consultative mechanism.

This consciousness should be coincidentally felt among three parties or four parties. Their initiative and leadership plays a crucial role to promote the formation. In the case of Sanrokon, Masao Matsunaga, Director-General of Labor Relations Bureau, Yoshiji Miyata for the labor side, Takeshi Sakurada for the business side among others, especially Ichiro Nakayama from academics, performed a decisive role.

In the development of Sanrokon, the attitude of the Cabinet was also crucial. As was elaborated in section 1-B, Mr. Fukuda, vice-prime minister in the Miki Cabinet, took a pivotal position to up

-grade Sanrokon as a substantial advisory organ for the cabinet in 1975. Therefore, leaders attitudes, especially that of the Prime Minister, has had significance in it, as shown by Mr. Fukuda and Mr. Nakasone.

In general, it is said that maintenances of a tripartite body is easier if there is a high degree of integration among peak organizations of business and labor. In the case of Japan, however the both sectors, especially the labor sector, were terribly fragmented by nature having four national centers and hundreds of industrial confederations and federations. Yet, such dispersed situation made it more substantially necessary for labor leaders to attend Sanrokon. This eventually led to, as noted above, the second reunification movement since 1976.

On the other hand, which factors weaken Sanrokon?

Needless to say, if major actors between labor and business are at odds, or if actors in the same sector begin inner conflict, the Sanrokon-like body inevitably becomes weakened. These have been some sources of conflicts and confrontation among them, such as famous administrative reform problems, including especially the privatization of the major public sector industries of National Railways, Telecommunications, and Tobacco. However, it seems the secretariat has successfully avoided such issues or has carefully presented such matters.

Only one factor which can be noted is that the relative weight of labor problems and the necessity of mutual consultation have been gradually reduced. This is because of the "success" of informal institutionalization of national industrial relations through Sanrokon,

or of the success of attaining growth in cooperative and corporative labor partners, which is evidenced by the reunification of the labor sector by Rengo (Japanese Trade Union Confederation) in 1989. This is true in terms of pure consultation or information-sharing, and sharing mutual trusts beyond differences through Sanrokon. Now, yet, in the 1990's, having to face more of global transformation in every aspect, more general policy oriented consultation might be increasingly necessary in Japan.

## **6 Conclusion : Function and Contribution of Sanrokon**

Let me reiterate the gist of Sanrokon's function and its contribution to consensus building and social stability and development (see Fujita 1981).

First of all, Sanrokon has provided a forum for information sharing as well as jointly recognizing problems. It should have been more precious for the labor side. There were many opportunities to receive presentations to be informed economic indexes, concept definitions and theories, especially the relations between wages and prices. Consequently the wage demands at the spring round by different national centers and groups have begun to converge since 1980.

Secondly, it has been a good place for all participants to express their frank opinions to government officials, including the Prime Minister and Minister of Labor. It can be said that it was an exceptional case to have a such opportunity.

Thirdly, by turn, the government, especially the MOL can get

immediate feedback through frank opinions and straightforward reactions by the top leaders in the both labor and business sectors towards governmental policies and plan. It is also very rare and precious for them. Most of the major reports by other advisory councils and non-statutory policy research committees in MOL were introduced or presented to know their reactions.

Fourthly, when the both sector leaders agree on some items, they can immediately ask the government about that matter. Such items include extension of retiring age, counter-public pollution measure by MOL, stabilization of employment, tax reduction, residence construction increase, counter-measures against recession and price stabilization.

As was mentioned earlier, these participants are also key actors and serve as chairs in many prestigious councils. Therefore once issues are discussed at Sanrokon, the thoughts articulated there could prevail or influence the issues of other related councils. Thus, Sanrokon functions as a comprehensive advisory body for major industrial policies. This would be a fifth function. As a corollary, governments try to utilize this hidden function.

This intention can be evidenced by the case of administrative reform, the most drastic and critical policy issues in the political scene in the 1980's which were discussed in the late 1970's before they became real issue.

Finally Sanrokon has been precious in providing a place for communication in the same sector. Labor union leaders belonging to different (sometime mutually confrontational) national peak organizations could not communicate with each other without Sanrokon at

least in the 1970's. Or at least it was very difficult for them and even for business leaders to do so.

Thus, only Sanrokon has been functioning as the intermediary mechanism at the national level. This function has facilitated overall structural change of industry and economy from the 1970's to 1990's.

As an important episode, there have appeared several cooperative organizations as a result of the agreement reached by discussions at Sanrokon. For instance, National Social Economic Council was organized in 1973 supported by many of Sanrokon members in the private sector whose chairperson was Ichiro Nakayama, who was the chair of Sanrokon at that time. Multinational Companies Labor Liaison Conference, as Japan Overseas Enterprise Association for the business side was set up. And Labor Union Council for Multinational Corporation Problem for the labor side was established in the mid-1970's through the agreement at Sanrokon (21th, 36th, and 38th meetings).

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