

Voice

National Union

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May 2002, Vol. 1 No. 3

News from the General Union (Kansai & Tokai), NUGW Tokyo South, Fukuoka General Union, Kumamoto General Union, and the Language Teachers' Union of Sendai

Migrant and Immigrant Workers' Rights Day Injured at Work and Fired

NUGW Tokyo South

On March 10th, at the SeniorWork Auditorium in Idabashi, Tokyo, more than 150 Japanese and foreign union members met at the 10th Anniversary Symposium for the Day for Migrant and Immigrant Workers' Rights. The theme of the discussion was "Foreign Workers Speak Out: Questioning the Role of Labor Unions and Issues for the Labor Movement to Address." Participants delivered their own views on organizing foreign workers in Japan, outlining a pronounced shift in both the orientation of the symposium over the past ten years and in the future of organizing efforts in Japan.

Mr Asif Siddiqi (Pakistan) of the

Zentoitsu Workers' Union opened the discussion with the sardonic observation that a problem with organizing foreign workers is that they tend to join the union when they have a problem and leave soon after its resolution.

Mr John McLaughlin (USA) spoke from his experience as a teacher, labor researcher and organizer, and suggested a shift in emphasis in organizing foreign labor. Rather than continue to concentrate on consultations to attract foreign members, McLaughlin suggested training foreign workers to engage in consultations and collective bargaining, and mobilize the foreigners to organize themselves. This would require language training and (see p.2 "10th Annual Migrant...")

Fukuoka General Union

FGU held a consultation with a worker who is third-generation Peruvian of Japanese descent. He has been living in Fukuoka for ten years and is a permanent resident. He is married and he has three children. The youngest son is elementary school, and the next son is high school. The eldest son is working.

On November 15, 2001 he was injured at work and lost his thumb on his right hand. He has been receiving medical treatment, but still cannot use his thumb. His doctor recommended that he should be restarting work for rehabilitation purposes, so he went to his factory.

However, upon arriving at work, he received a dismissal notice. He and his family were very angry and made up their mind to fight against this unfair dismissal and joined FGU.

Our first negotiation will be May 8 and an update will follow in the next "Voice".

AEON Needs a Union!

Forced by GU to Join Unemployment Insurance

General Union

On April 21st, AEON became the last of the big five national eikaiwa chains to enroll their foreign employees into the unemployment insurance (UI) scheme as required by law. This came about after the GU made its first true contact with AEON regarding a grievance over a contract non-renewal. We weren't able to solve the individual's problem due to the weakness of the case and our lack of any formal relationship with AEON, but we were able to solve the outstanding UI problem and get the company to agree to a formal (see p.3 "AEON")

Grandom Teachers Declare Union

General Union - Tokai Branch

April 18 saw the declaration of the third ever company-based branch of the General Union Tokai Branch at Grandom Academy. Regular readers of the old General Union "Voice" will remember that this was the school which in August 2000, in an act of blatant unfairness, dismissed a GU member, and, after being summoned to bargaining by the union, agreed to pay her a generous severance package.

The background to the formation of the branch was the announcement by Gakken School Management (GSM), the company which operates the school, that the Grandom schools in Tokyo would be closing in May 2002.

This came in the wake of the closure last year of another Grandom school in Fukuoka.

GSM continues to insist that the Nagoya school will continue its operations. However, staff of a sales company working for a competing operation are being allowed to enter the school premises and, with the management's knowledge, tell students that Nagoya school is due to close, in order to lure them to the other school. Clearly, the management feels that it is better to deceive its teachers than to treat (see back page "Grandom Union")

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National Union of General Workers

10th Annual Migrant and Immigrant Workers Rights Day **NOVA**

General Union

familiarity with labor law; addressing a problem shared with the US labor movement. McLaughlin called for a greater integration of foreign workers into the labor community, transforming them from clients of the unions into partners with Japanese organizers.

Ms Monica Nakahodo (Peru) spoke of her pay and gender discrimination disputes with the management of a Mitsubishi subsidiary in Kanagawa. She emphasized her determination to continue to remain active in the resolution of workers' grievances through union offices.

Mr Iko Pramudiono (Indonesia) spoke of the problems of trainees sent from foreign countries to learn technical trades in Japan who are all too often treated merely as cheap labor by companies. All too often the management of these companies are in woeful, if not willful, ignorance of workers' rights. As a volunteer organization, the Advocacy Network for Foreign Trainees has achieved some success working with unions.

Professor Totsuka Hideo of the Center for Transnational Labor Studies remarked on the progress the organizers of the Symposium had made since his previous appearance at the event, several years ago. In contrast to that time, when he delivered a lecture to a group of organizers, this day's events were focused on the statements in Japanese of foreign workers themselves in the context of their own struggles to organize. He outlined a historical perspective on the labor movement, noting past contributions of foreign workers to Japanese labor culture, and the need to involve the communities of foreign workers in the labor movement. He spoke of the need to empower workers to promote their own organizations in their own communities. In all, the tenth anniversary symposium showed both progress in the involvement of foreign workers in the Japan labor movement and the need to move onward to greater participation in the administration of their unions.

NOVA would like you to think that its bi-yearly "evaluation" of you as a teacher and employee is accurate, objective, and fair. In fact, it is none of these. Consider the following points:

Evaluations of the same teacher are very different from one evaluator to another. Sometimes the evaluator has less experience teaching than you do, and fewer qualifications. Always, the evaluator is a person trying to "make it" in the company hierarchy, and almost always the evaluator does what he or she perceives the company would like in the particular case. Sometimes the company tells the evaluator precisely what it wants the evaluator to say.

Actually, you do not even see your final evaluation, although NOVA wants you to think that you do. The real evaluation is in the AM's office. You must make a special request to "view" it there. You don't get a copy. Until very recently, it wasn't even available for you in English!

Many of the categories on the evaluation sheet are vague, even fuzzy. This is so the company can spin it anyway it wishes, in other words, so the evaluation procedure can be used mostly for the purposes of manipulation and coercion of the employee. The evaluation form allows the company to penalize employees who have questioned or disagreed with any company policies or procedures. It even allows your manager to penalize you for complaining when she isn't doing her jobs up to scratch. If you complain about these matters, you may be downgraded at evaluation time in "company spirit" or in "uncooperativeness". Your school's manager has a very big role in determining these and other parts of the evaluation.

Similarly, be careful about what you say at Teachers' Meetings. It isn't an accident that the AAM usually attends. The only safe way for you to deal with problems at work is through your union. If you ask directly about your feelings about a problem at work or a controversial area, simply say, "I have no comment." Or, if you do intend to make a complaint through the union, you can say so and leave it at that. Let's examine some of the other evaluation categories more closely.

Popularity among students - The data to determine this goes only to your manager. She tells your Trainer the degree of your popularity; she keeps and in some cases makes the "records" that support this. There is no check, no balance, on this; no

GU - Tokai General Meeting

Last March 17 we were pleased to hold a general meeting of Tokai Branch at the Union office in Nagoya's Chikusa Ward. As the last general meeting in Tokai had been held some four years previously, this event demonstrated the Union's success in re-establishing itself here. A dozen members attended, and the agenda included the following: Branch activity reports: the meeting Chair reported on the Union's success in obtaining severance for a member who been unfairly dismissed by ECC, and a former teacher at Tokai Gakuen High School reported on his grievance at that workplace, satisfactorily resolved through

negotiation between the School and the Union (see last month's issue for details). Election of branch officers. The General Union - Tokai Branch now has a functioning executive committee.

Branch organizing session: members were asked to contribute their ideas for strengthening the Union further in the region, and from the discussion emerged a number of valuable suggestions regarding publicity (branch officers are now following these up).

Thanks to everybody who attended!

The next meeting will be on Sunday May 12 at 5.30, location to be announced.

PLEASE SEND ME MORE INFORMATION

Name:

Employer:

Address:

Tel:

Email

Fax entire sheet to a local union listed on the front page or email to the local union involved. For all other areas, fax to the General Union at (06)6352-9630 or email to voice@generalunion.org

Evaluations General Union 10 Year History Project-1996

independent verification by anyone.

Self-Analysis and Development - If you object to or disagree with things said in your evaluation, you may actually lose points in this area.

Demo Lessons - Some teachers have been given a "satisfactory" because they have rarely or never been called by staff to do demos. Other teachers who have rarely or never been called have been given "good" on the grounds that they are ready, willing, and able, and that the evaluator things they would be good at it. Why the inconsistency? The evaluator is told what to do by NOVA. This point is easily seen with older teachers who are rarely called because of their age.

Student Complaints - These come through your manager. Often you won't hear about them for months, even up to a year, after they are made. Often the company can't or won't even tell you the date they were made. Complaints have been fabricated. Several witnesses to these fabrications have come forward. If you believe a complaint against you may have been fabricated, contact your union immediately!

Our next NOVA news story will cover the issue of student complaints more thoroughly. If you have any anecdotes, please contact us.

AEON Organizing Drive

grievance procedure, such as we have at other companies. We were also able to make some good contacts amongst teachers and found some very interesting information that would make organizing a union at AEON a very beneficial experience for workers there.

It appears that AEON teachers and staff are being cheated out of their paid holidays. AEON offers only five flexible days while the Labour Standards Law makes ten days the minimum in your first year. It's sad that about six years after all major companies agreed to follow the law at the insistence of the union, AEON workers still don't have their proper paid holidays. Why? Simple. AEON teachers and staff have never organized a union.

The GU hopes to rectify this situation and on April 19th sent information to all AEON teachers and staff asking them to take a stand to improve their own working conditions. We hope that soon, our fellow workers at AEON will be members of the General Union.

General Union

1996 saw a lot of firsts in the General Union. The first united pay demands were submitted, the first pay raise at Nichibeigo Gakuin was achieved, and we won our first victory in civil court over a dismissal.

Despite the big dispute that was going on at GEOS at the time, we were still able to

continue building the union. The dispute helped our members build an identity as members of a single union rather than just as members in their own workplaces.

The pay rise won at Nichibeigo was significant, as a much larger branch was then built that has gone on to further victories. The Nichibeigo story enters a dramatic new phase in 1997.

See www.generalunion.org for more.

1996

Jan 7	GU files against Nichibeigo Gakuin (Fukui) at LSO and Unemployment Insurance Office.
Feb 16	GU makes all-branch united pay demands (reported in media).
22	GU Geos Branch Chairman Dennis dismissed.
Mar 21	Shunto General Action Day. Protests against NOVA and Berlitz, and strike at GEOS Umeda School.
Apr 3	GU Nichibeigo Branch wins agreement; company gives pay rise and promises to provide material for group lessons.
May 1	Resolution to support GU in Geos dispute at May Day. (K. Yamahara returns to activity after recovering from a serious illness)
18	Hunger strike starts at Umeda Geos. Union members and students leaflet together.
24	GU files case against Geos at District Court for unfair dismissal, and at Osaka LC December 9.
Jul 13	YMCA promises to renew contracts of all union members during restructuring.
Aug 2	Protest action at a Geos school in Brighton, England.
Sept ~	Actions against Geos in Kobe, Kyoto, Osaka, Sendai, Yokohama, Fukuoka.
Oct 19	Agreement with ECC over legal annual paid holidays. GU ECC Branch members were taking annual holidays against the school's regulations.
Nov 21	New Otani Union, a HERE branch in L.A., visits GU. Joint protest against the hotel begins.
Dec 16	Victory in District Court against GEOS over unfair dismissal of Branch Chair.
19	NUGW Tokyo South discloses at a press conference that NOVA lied in the document submitted on listing of their shares, claiming there is "no trade union at NOVA".

Thanks

NUGW would like to thank the following establishments for displaying copies of the National Union "Voice".

Kansai Area: Balabushka (Shinsaibashi), Bar Isn't It (Abeno), The Cellar (Shinsaibashi), Dubliners' (Kobe), Pig and Whistle (Kyoto), Shinsaibashi & Umeda), Ryan's Irish Pub (Sannomiya), Someplace Else (Shinsaibashi), Tin's Hall (Tennoji), Tramps (Kyobashi), Rumours (Nara), Bar and Grill Pump (Shinsaibashi), Green Leaf, Rakkan (Shinsaibashi), Community House Information Centre (CHIC-Kobe),

Kitano Catholic Church (Umeda).
Nagoya Area: Jerry's Uno, Queen's Head, Pub Restaurant Usquebaugh, Bumphy's Irish Pub, Marky's, Pelican Pete's, The Lazy Lizard, Kakuozan Bar, The Exit, The Book Shack, Tokuzo, Jazz Room Exit, Nagoya International Centre, The Elephant's Nest, Red Rock Bar and Grill, Dos Delfines.

- ◇日米英語学院でスト!
- ◇福岡ゼネラルユニオン報告
- ◇東海支部報告
- ◇NOVAの不当な評価制

2 0 0 2 年 5 月 号

ゼネラルユニオン(関西・東海)、全国一般東京南部、福岡ゼネラルユニオン、熊本ゼネラルユニオン、仙台外国語教員労組

Voice

Nagoya Increases Staffing Nichibei Starts To Move After Strike

Following the decision made by the General Union Executive Board, the Nagoya office will now be staffed on a regular basis. This decision was made based on the incredible growth in union membership in the Nagoya area. The new office hours are as follows:

Mon: 11:00-5:00 **Tues: 11:00-5:00**
Wed: 2:00-5:00 **Fri: 2:00-5:00**

Of course these hours are subject to change. If you have a workplace issue that you need addressed, please call for an appointment so we can make sure that staff have time to meet with you.

Grandom Union

them with honesty and respect.

Prompted by the desire to protect their jobs and working conditions, teachers at the Nagoya Grandom have formed a General Union Branch, while their colleagues in Tokyo have joined NUGW Tokyo South. The GU has summoned GSM to a bargaining session to be held in Nagoya later this month. More news on this situation in the next newsletter.

Kakunima Circus

As reported in the last edition of the National Union “Voice”, six foreign circus performers were owed many months of back salary.

Even though these workers have had to leave Japan due to their visas, we are continuing to follow up this problem and will soon begin a court case against the circus company.

More news to follow in the next edition.

General Union

After winning a historic 3-year battle against Nichibei Eigo Gakuin, the union branch there put in Shunto demands in November last year, asking for a pay rise. Some members there have not had one for 10 years.

After two rounds of bargaining, with no progress made, a one-hour strike was held on April 13th, the first in the company since January 1999, and the first in the General Union for two years. The company brought in scabs and handed out a letter to the students, telling them that they would not give in to the union's demands. We talked again on April 18th, when the president admitted they were in the black, but still had no proposal on the pay rise. After four months of hearing changing stories, and knowing that a non-union teacher was recently given a pay

rise, the members threatened to start a real dispute again, as in 1998.

The company immediately made a proposal of a pay rise, but on condition that we would give up bargaining rights over pay rises forever, accepting the company's performance-based pay rise system.

The union explained that the Trade Union Law lays down a 3-year limit for collective agreements, and we simply cannot bind the union branch forever to an agreement giving up one of our fundamental rights. Nichibei then offered a 1% pay rise, but excluding two of our members. The union responded with a higher counter-proposal, insisting that all our members must benefit. The company is now considering our proposal.

We hope that at last the company is prepared to bargain pay with the union, and that we can move on with our organising.



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