

**Explaining Japanese Unions' Strategies for Organizing:
Examination of the Strategic Choice of Industry-Level Union Federations**

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1. Introduction

Declining union density is a phenomenon commonly observed in labor movements of advanced industrialized countries. In Japan, union density declined from 25.2% in 1990 to 19.6 % in 2003. A sense of crisis has deepened among some union leaders, and union federations at the industry and national levels have started to take measures, such as union mergers and organizing drives, to prevent further decline of union influence and density.

This paper examines Japanese unions' organizing strategies and their economic and institutional contexts. The paper's analytic framework is based on "union revitalization" studies that treat labor unions as "strategic actors" with varying policy-making and mobilization capacity, rather than as actors passively reacting to labor market changes and management's human resource policies (e.g., Cornfield and McCammon 2003, 9; Baccaro et al. 2003a, 127; Bronfenbrenner 2003, 40-41). Previous studies on union revitalization and organizing identify three main organizing strategies: "organizing model," "service model," and "partnership model." Organizing model aims to activate unions internally and externally. Unions taking this strategy promote involvement of rank-and-file members in union activities at the workplace level (internal organizing) and engage in organizing campaigns of unorganized workers by activists and some of rank-and-file members (external organizing). Unions whose strategy is based on service model regard themselves as service providers and their existing and potential members as "clients." In organizing campaigns, they attempt to recruit new members by appealing to the quality of services they provide. And unions

taking partnership model as their organizing strategy seek employers' consent in their efforts to organize new workplaces. These unions typically sign partnership agreements with employers on labor-management cooperation and productivity improvement (see Suzuki, forthcoming for a literature review on the three organizing strategies).

The second section of this paper further explores the analytical framework briefly mentioned above by examining the relationship between institutional arrangements of industrial relations (IR institutions) and organizing strategies of unions, from the perspective of comparative industrial relations. The section shows that the extent to which unions are embedded in IR institutions constitutes one of the important institutional contexts for unions' organizing strategies. It then examines differences in institutional contexts within Japanese industrial relations between large enterprise and small- and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs). The third section presents an outline of union organizing policies of Rengo (Japanese Trade Union Confederation, a dominant national confederation), and shows how Rengo increased its involvement in union organizing from the mid-1990s. The fourth section examines various organizing strategies taken by five affiliates of Rengo (industry-level union federations). It points out two factors, their relationship with their member unions (i.e., enterprise unions) and the way their leaders "frame" the issues of industrial relations and union organizing, as mediating factors between IR institutions and the organizing strategies of these federations. In the fifth, concluding, section, the paper summarizes the findings and arguments and briefly discusses implications of the paper's findings for organizing strategies of the Japanese labor movement as a whole.

2. The Relationship between IR Institutions and Union Strategies

While previous studies of union revitalization stress the importance of labor unions as strategic actors, they also point out that the importance of IR institutions as the contexts in which labor unions interact with management (e.g., Ross and Martin 1999, 16; Fairbrother and Yates 2003, 16). The labor union movements in many industrialized countries suffer from a decline in union density. However, IR institutions strengthen or weaken the sense of crisis with which union leaders perceive the declining union density (Frege and Kelly 2003, 20). While union leaders' sense of crisis tends to be strong under IR institutions where a decline in union density directly leads to a decline in union strength, their sense of crisis is not necessarily strong under IR institutions where a decline in union density does not necessarily weaken union strength. Whether a decline in union density has direct or indirect impact on union strength depends on the extent to which labor unions are embedded in IR institutions (Baccaro et al. 2003a, 120-121).

Previous studies point out two types of institutional arrangements where a decline in union density does not necessarily lead to a decline in union strength. The first type is the existence of social partnership at the level of industry or region between labor unions and employers' associations based on which the two sides sign encompassing labor contracts (Baccaro et al. 2003a, 128; Frege and Kelly 2003, 16, 20). Germany is often seen as a country with this type of IR arrangements. Labor unions in this country are embedded in IR institutions through industry- or region-wide collective bargaining and works councils at the enterprise level. Leaders of German unions are characterized as being conservative and as not being strongly committed to organizing

beyond unions' "traditional" membership base (i.e., male blue-collar workers). Because of their "embedded" nature, German unions are said to be slow in adapting their strategies to wider social and economic changes, particularly to "the emergence of union-free and works council-free" enterprises in the private service sector and in the SME sector (Jacobi 2003, 212; Behrens, et al.2003, 37; Turner 2003, 39-40).

Second, in countries such as Italy, France and Spain, IR institutions are arranged in such a way that they compensate the weak organizational power of unions. More specifically, the system of workplace representation such as works councils allows unions to gain collective bargaining rights if their candidates win elections for delegates of these representation bodies. The organizational weakness of unions is also compensated by the "extension clauses" of industry-level collective agreements to non-unionized enterprises (Baccaro et al. 2003b, 44-45; Daley 1999, 199; Fraile 1999, 273-274). Despite the low rate of unionization (Italy is an exception), organizing strategies of labor unions in these countries are rather passive because of IR institutions that compensate their organizational weakness. Another reason for the passivity in their organizing strategies is that the low union density limits unions' financial resources, making it difficult for unions to allocate enough resources to organizing efforts (Daley 1999, 199).

Previous studies point out decentralized collective bargaining, a lack or weakening of institutional support for unions, and a radical transformation of IR institutions themselves, as examples of institutional conditions under which a declining union density directly leads to a decline in union strength (Heery 2002, 29; Baccaro et al. 2003a, 128; Turner 2003, 25, 32). In the U.S. and UK where the system of collective bargaining is decentralized to the level of enterprises, a decline in union membership

results in a narrower coverage of collective bargaining and collective agreements (Frege and Kelly 2003, 16). Moreover, labor unions in these countries are not institutionally protected by employers' hard-line policies toward unions. Unmediated by institutional protection for unions, employers' anti-union policies directly lead to a decline in union influence by de-unionizing organized enterprises or by making it difficult for unions to organize workers of unorganized enterprises.

In Australia and New Zealand, labor unions depended on the government-sponsored and centralized conciliation and arbitration system for high union density. However, neo-liberal government policies starting from the mid-1980s weakened and even abolished the conciliation and arbitration system, resulting in a sudden decentralization of IR institutions from the national to enterprise level and in a rapid decline in union density (Griffin et al. 2003, 84; Cooper et al. 2003, 189-190; Walsh and Crawford 2003, 119; Fairbrother and Yates 2003, 6). Union leaders in these countries thus have found it necessary to reform the hitherto centralized union organizations and to establish workplace-based union organizations (Griffin et al. 2003, 84).

Labor unions are thus at a disadvantage when unions are not embedded in IR institutions or when IR institutions that have favored unions' position are weakened or abolished. These disadvantageous institutional conditions, however, also provide "opportunity structures" for labor unions to adopt "innovative" strategies because they are relatively free from institutional constraint. For example, labor unions are likely to adopt strategies based organizing model, by which unions try to increase their membership by mobilizing rank-and-file members and activists, when their leaders perceive labor unions as a part of social movements rather than as actors in

institutionalized socio-economic systems (Turner and Hurd 2001, 10; Turner 2003, 25; Carter et al. 2003, 73; Frege and Kelly 2003, 20, Fairbrother and Yates 2003, 16; Cooper et al. 2003, 193).

Previous studies reviewed above consider country-based differences in the relationship between IR institutions and union strategies. IR institutions, however, may vary from one economic sector to another within one country. In the case of Japan, the paper posits that the extent to which labor unions are embedded in IR institutions differs between large private-sector enterprises and small- and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs), and that such differences form the background for organizing strategies of labor unions whose membership are mainly based on the two respective sectors. That is, enterprise unions of large private-sector enterprises are more embedded in IR institutions than those in SMEs. And it can be hypothesized that unions in the former sector are either not strongly committed to organizing new members or (if they choose to organize new members) are likely to take organizing strategies based on partnership model, while those in the latter sector are more strongly committed to organizing new members and are likely to take strategies based on organizing model.

Since Japanese industrial relations are characterized by their decentralized structure and by the relative absence of regulation of industrial relations by the government or IR actors at the industry or regional level, IR institutions in the Japanese context mainly refer to those based in enterprises. Such enterprise-based IR institutions include the system of labor-management consultation (joint consultation committee) through which representatives of enterprise unions and management exchange opinions on issues related not only to wages and working conditions but to

broader corporate policies. Also included is union shop provision in collective agreements that enterprise unions sign with management. This provision protects organizational base of an enterprise union of a given firm because newly recruited workers automatically become members of the enterprise union (that is, union membership becomes a precondition for employment by that firm). Since many enterprise unions have signed union shop agreements with employers that covered only full-time employees and excluded part-time and other non-regular employees, these agreements often deter enterprise unions from organizing part-time employees working in the same firm.

Differences in the “embedded” nature of enterprise unions between large private-sector enterprises and SMEs are indicated by how widespread these IR institutions are in the two economic sectors. The system of labor-management consultation is not legally-mandated as in the case of many European countries, but is established by collective agreements or customs (see Sugeno and Suwa 1997, 60). According to a survey of enterprise unions (in the private sector) affiliated with industry-level federations of Rengo in 2000, the larger the size of enterprises where the surveyed unions are organized, the system of labor-management consultation is more likely to be established. The rate of enterprises with labor-management consultation is 91.4% for those with 5,000 or more employees, while this rate goes down to 65.5% for those with less than 300 employees. Concerning exchanges of information on corporate policies on daily basis between union leaders and managers (regardless of the establishment of labor-management consultation), the larger the size of enterprises where enterprise unions are organized, the more frequent such exchanges take place. The rate of unions that frequently exchange information with management is 46.0% for

enterprises with 5,000 or more employees, while the rate goes down to 18.9% for those with less than 300 employees (JTUC-RIALS 2001, 63, 81-82).

Sector-based difference in union shop provision in collective agreements is much less clear than sector-based difference in the establishment of labor-management consultation. According to a survey of private-sector enterprise unions conducted in 2000 by Ministry of Health, Labor and Welfare, the size of enterprises where unions is organized is not associated with union shop provision, as shown in Table 1. If the size of union membership is compared, larger enterprise unions are more likely to be protected by union shop provision than smaller unions, as shown in Table 2 (MHLW 2000).¹ These data, however, should be assessed in reference to the fact that union density among SMEs is much smaller than union density among large enterprises. Union density in 2002 among private-sector enterprises with 1,000 or more employees, those with 100-999 employees, and those with 99 or less employees are 54.8%, 16.8% and 1.3%, respectively. This means that, even if the chance of enterprise unions of SMEs being protected by union shop provision is not much different from those of large enterprises, the presence of labor unions themselves is much weaker among SMEs than that among large enterprises.

3. Union Organizing Strategies of National Confederation

This section presents a brief outline of organizing policies of Rengo (Japanese

¹ The size of enterprises does not necessarily correspond with the membership of enterprise unions. Enterprise unions refer either to plant unions or to enterprise-level federations of plant unions (if there is more than one plant in an enterprise). Thus, if a union, organized at one of an enterprise's plants, is regarded as a single union, a membership of that "enterprise" union should be much smaller than the number of employees of the whole enterprise that include not only non-unionized managerial employees but also unionized employees in other plants and in the head office.

Trade Union Confederation). Rengo is a dominant confederation with a membership of 6.6 million (accounting for 63.6% of all organized workers) with about 60 affiliates (mainly consisting of industry-level federations) in 2003. Besides Rengo, there is a smaller confederation called Zenroren (National Confederation of Trade Unions) with a membership of 0.8 million (accounting for 7.3% of all organized workers) in 2003. Although both confederations have suffered from a decline in membership and adopted various policies to increase their members, the paper focuses on the case of Rengo for a reason of limited space.

Rengo was established in 1989 with a membership of about 7.6 million. As a dominant confederation, Rengo mainly focused on activities in the policy-making sphere so that workers' interests would be reflected in government policies. Organizing new members is also regarded as an important policy because an increased membership would give Rengo more clout in the policy-making sphere. Its first organizing plan in 1990 set an ambitious goal of increasing two million members in three years to achieve a membership of 10 million. In the plan, industry-level federations were the main actors in organizing activities, which were expected to increase their membership by 20%. This target was to be achieved by organizing "neutral" enterprise unions unaffiliated to any industry-level federation as well as unorganized workers in their respective industries, especially workers in SMEs and part-time workers (Asami 1992, 119-120, 129-130; SRN October 22, 1990). Behind its ambitious plan is Rengo leaders' optimism in the future of the labor movement. Since Rengo was established as a culmination of efforts to unify the labor movement divided by four confederations into one dominant confederation, it is natural for Rengo's leaders to expect more "neutral" enterprise unions or industry-level federations

to join the Rengo-led labor movement. They also forecasted the moderate economic growth in the 1990s (see Asami 1992, 119) and expected Rengo's activities in the policy-making sphere to contribute to the improvement of workers' working and living conditions, enhancing Rengo's influence not only among organized workers but also working people in general.

Rengo was not able to achieve its target. Its membership somewhat increased from 7.6 million in 1990 to 7.8 million in 1994 but then decreased after 1995. Roughly put, there were two main reasons why Rengo's membership did not grow. First and foremost, many large enterprises, under the severe *Heisei* recession, restructured their operations by shutting down unprofitable plants and by relocating plants overseas and downsized their workforce by such methods as hiring freeze, "voluntary" retirement schemes and replacement of regular workers with non-regular workers. Moreover, many SMEs went bankrupt, and enterprise unions of the bankrupt SMEs were dissolved. The downsizing of workforce and bankruptcies led to shrinkage of the existing membership base of unions. Second, many industry-level federations did not make sufficient efforts to increase their membership, as expected by the Rengo leadership. Organizing efforts of Rengo's industry-level federations were surveyed in 1989 and 2000. Results of the two surveys show that the number of industry-level federations that assigned full-time officials in charge of organizing remained a small minority among the surveyed federations: 6 out of the 48 federations in the 1989 survey and 9 out of the 42 federations in 2000. Moreover, the number of newly organized workers by Rengo as a whole decreased from 91,244 per year in the 1989 survey to 59,668 per year in the 2000 survey (Tsuru 2002, 74-75). Many industry-level federations do not (or cannot) make sufficient organizing efforts, because

industry-level federations are often dominated by their large member unions (i.e., enterprise unions of large enterprises) that are embedded in enterprise-level IR institutions and are not very interested in allocating financial and human resources to organizing unorganized workers outside their enterprises (ibid., 70, 75; JTUC-RIALS 2001, 291, 295-296).

By the mid-1990s, the leadership of Rengo began to have a sense of crisis and drew up another plan in 1996 to newly organize 1.1 million members in three years in order to stop a decline in its membership. In implementing the organizing plan, Rengo played a more active role than before. In the first half of the 1990s, industry-level federations assumed the primary role in organizing activities, with Rengo playing a supporting role by giving guidance and information to industry-level federations. In the new organizing plan, Rengo and its regional organs were for the first time directly involved in organizing unorganized workers in SMEs and part-time workers by establishing region-based unions (*chiiki union*). These unions, unlike enterprise unions, organize workers across the boundary of enterprises, and workers join them individually or in small groups. From 1996 to 1998, 21 regional organs established region-based unions, with a total membership of 4,150 (Takahashi 1999, 55-56; OISR 2002, 6).² Rengo also started to closely monitor affiliates' organizing activities by requiring industry-level federations to report the number of newly organized workers every six months (Tokuda, 1997). Although the deadline of organizing 1.1 million members was extended from 1999 to 2001, Rengo was not able to achieve the target. It newly organized about 294,000 members, only 27% of the goal originally set by the plan (OISR 2002, 45). Moreover, the membership of Rengo declined from 7.6 million

² By 2003, the total membership of region-based unions increased to 9,042, and the number of

in 1996 to 7.0 million in 2001.

In 2001, Rengo further increased its commitment to organizing by adopting a new organizing plan called “Action Plan 21.” The plan set a realistic target of organizing 600,000 workers in two years, based on concrete organizing plans submitted by its affiliates. The plan also strengthened Rengo’s organizing section by increasing the number of full-time officials assigned to the section from 4 to 20, and by allocating about 20% (one billion yen) of its annual budget to organizing. It also called upon its affiliates to assign full-time organizers and to allocate more than 10% of their annual budget to organizing (OISR 2002, 10-11, 46-47; Takahashi 2003, 12). When the two year period covered by the plan was over in 2003, Rengo newly organized about 300,000 workers, or 50% of the target (Rengo 2003a). This number, however, was not large enough to reverse the declining trend of its membership.

In these organizing plans, Rengo did not present a clear vision of organizing strategies for its affiliates to adopt, perhaps taking into consideration a diversity of conditions in which Rengo affiliates engage in organizing activities. Unlike AFL-CIO under the New Voice Leadership, Rengo leadership has not explicitly advocated organizing model by stressing social justice, mobilization and alliance with social movement organizations. Neither has it explicitly advocated partnership model by stressing labor-management cooperation at the enterprise level on productivity improvement. Perhaps Rengo does not have to present this model to its affiliates as a viable organizing strategy, because those unions embedded in enterprise-based IR institutions (i.e., unions of large enterprises) have already established cooperative relationship with management. Implicit in Rengo’s documents, however, is its

regional organs that established region-based unions increased to 37.

assumption that service model is a basic building block of organizing strategies. Its organizing plans and related document treat union members as well as targeted unorganized workers as beneficiaries of services provided by unions and suggest (if implicitly) that unions, by improving services and appealing their benefits to unorganized workers, will be able to increase their membership. One document, titled “Rengo’s Organization Policy” (adopted by the central committee in 1992), presents a clear vision based on service model. It points out that union members in these days regard themselves as beneficiaries of services provided by unions, and argues that unions should improve services by strengthening their functions in industrial relations and by providing services responsive to individualized and diverse interests of workers (Rengo 2003a, 71-72).

4. Organizing Strategies of Industry-Level Federations

This section analyzes organizing strategies of five industry-level federations (*Sangyobetu Soshiki*) affiliated with Rengo, based on interviews with the federations’ leaders, their internal documents and other secondary sources. The federations are JEIU (Japanese Electrical Electronic & Information Union or *Denki Rengo*), JSD (Japan Federation of Service and Distributive Workers Unions or *Sabisu Ryutsu Rengo*), JAM (Japanese Association of Metal, Machinery, and Manufacturing Workers), Zensen Domei (the Japanese Federation of Textile, Garment, Chemical, Mercantile, Food and Allied Industries Workers' Unions) and NUGW (National Union of General Workers or *Zenkoku Ippan*).³ Profiles of these federations are summarized in Table 3. These

³ These interviews were conducted between September 2002 and February 2004 by a research group

industry-level federations represent different types of Rengo affiliates. JEIU is the union federation of export-oriented industries, mainly representing the interests of enterprise unions of large firms. JAM is the union federation of metal-working and machine industries, mainly representing the interests of enterprise unions of SMEs. JSD is the union federation of domestic-oriented retail and wholesale industries. Zensen Domei organizes workers in multiple industries (textile, garment, chemical, retail and other service industries). And NUGW organizes workers of SMEs in various industries (especially small enterprises). It is a federation of relatively autonomous regional organizations: some of them adopt the principle of “general unions,”⁴ while others take the form of federations of enterprise unions.

Industry-level union federations are the main actors in organizing activities of the Japanese union movement. This is because industry-level federations, located in the middle between the national-level confederation and enterprise unions, are in a position close enough for them to reach out workers in their respective industries. They are also in a position distant enough from the tendency toward “plant egotism” of enterprise unions to engage in organizing activities beyond the scope of enterprises. However, there are two related obstacles for industry-level federations to effectively implement organizing strategies. First, because of their federated, rather than unitary, structure, their authority in making and implementing policies is relatively weak (the level of authority varies from federation to federation, though, as shown below), and they find it

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⁴ General unions are region-based unitary organizations with members drawn from a number of firms. Workers join general unions on individual basis. General unions are similar to region-based unions. However, while general unions have relatively well-developed enterprise-level locals that engage in collective bargaining with employers, region-based unions do not have enterprise-level locals. Members of region-based unions are a very small minority (even the only union member) in non-unionized firms.

difficult to take the strong initiative in organizing campaigns. Second, the financial base of industry-level federations is limited, and they cannot allocate enough resources to organizing activities. This is because industry-level federations receive only a small share of union dues collected at the enterprise level (enterprise unions take the lion's share of union dues). For example, an average proportion of per capita monthly union dues that went to industry-level federations was 9.9% in 2003 (512 yen out of 5,177 yen) (Rengo 2003b, 11,32).

4-1 Organizing Strategies of the Five Federations

Among the five industry-level federations, JEIU and JSD advocate organizing strategies mainly based on partnership model, while NUGW advocate those mainly based on organizing model. Zensen Domei's organize strategies are based on both partnership and organizing models. And JAM's strategies are mainly based on service model.

JEIU, with 665,000 members in 2000, adopted a long-term organizing plan to increase its membership to one million in "the early 21st century" in its 2000 convention. Under this plan, JEIU set a more concrete plan to increase 20,000 members in two years. The main task of JEIU is to organize workers of non-unionized enterprises in electrical, electronic and information industries and by persuading those unions in these industries unaffiliated with JEIU to join the federation. The task of its affiliates (i.e., enterprise unions) is to organize workers of non-unionized enterprises in the same enterprise group (affiliates and subsidiaries of the main enterprise). JEIU spends 20 million yen per annum (0.5% of its total budget) on organizing activities (except personnel expenses). The organizing section in its headquarters has three fulltime officials. In addition,

there are 40 fulltime officials in its 37 regional organs who spend a small portion of their work time on organizing activities (Interview with JEIU, November 29, 2003; JEIU 2000, 42-43).

JEIU's organizing strategies can be characterized as being based on partnership model, because its organizers obtain management's consent to the unionization of their enterprises. JEIU organizers explain to managers that the purpose of organizing unions is not to create labor-management conflicts, but to attain better working conditions and employment security for workers through labor-management cooperation for the development of the enterprise. In addition, JEIU provides its affiliates with "services" to promote union-management cooperation at the enterprise level. It provides enterprise unions with information so that they can propose policies on personnel and other managerial issues to management through the system of labor-management consultation (Interview with JEIU, November 29, 2003).

JSD, with the membership of 180,000 in 2002, also takes organizing strategies based on partnership model. The federation sets a goal of increasing its membership to 200,000. In implementing the plan, the federation is mainly responsible for organizing workers in non-unionized enterprises, while its member unions (enterprise unions) are charged with the task of organizing part-time workers in their respective enterprises as well as workers of non-unionized affiliates and subsidiaries in the same enterprise group. JSD accords much more importance to organizing part-time workers than JEIU, because the proportion of part-time workers in commercial industries is much higher than that in manufacturing industries.⁵ JSD spends about 30 million yen per annum on organizing

⁵ According to a survey of JSD affiliates in 2001, part-time workers accounted for 44% of all workers employed by enterprises where the affiliates were organized, and 30.2% of these part-time workers were organized by JSD affiliates (full-time workers accounted for 47% of the total, and

activities (except personnel expenses). JSD has three full-time officials in charge of organizing at the headquarters level. In addition, heads of nine regional organs spend some of their time on organizing activities in their respective regions (Interview with JSD, February 8, 2003; JSD 2003, 19).

In its organizing activities, JSD listed about 600 non-unionized retail stores, hotels and restaurants as the target of organizing. JSD organizers first contact personnel or HRM sections of the target enterprises, and try to convince managers of the merits of having their enterprises organized by JSD. They promote what they call “participatory management,” by which they mean the achievement of efficient corporate management through close union-management cooperation in the development of human resources (Interview with JSD, February 8, 2003).⁶

In contrast to JEIU and JSD, NUGW (with the membership of 48,000 in 2000) adopts organizing strategies based on organizing model. Since NUGW is a federation of relatively autonomous 38 regional organizations, its headquarters proposes a general framework of organizing strategies but leaves the actual implementation of strategies to each regional organization. NUGW stresses the economic injustice of great differentials in wages and working conditions between workers in large enterprises and SMEs and the necessity to strengthen the voice of workers in the SME sector within the

86.4% of them were organized). Given a large proportion of part-time workers, if enterprise unions limit their membership to full-time employees, there is a fair chance that these unions do not represent a majority of workers. This causes a problem for the unions because Labor Standards Law states that only those unions that represent a majority of workers in a given workplace can sign an agreement with management on overtime working hours.

⁶ The enterprise union of “A Department Store,” one of the major affiliates of JSD, also adopted organizing strategies based on partnership model when it organized part-time workers (they accounted for about 37% of all employees). The union obtained management’s consent by emphasizing that the unionization of part-time workers would lead to the improvement of labor productivity. According to the union, management agreed on the unionization, expecting the union to “manage” part-time workers on behalf of management (Interview with “A Department Store Union,” September 12, 2003).

labor movement through organizing campaigns. NUGW calls for the mobilization of workers across boundaries of enterprises not only for organizing campaigns and actions to support workers involved in labor disputes, but also for broader social movements for peace and democracy. It accords importance to union organizing not only for increasing the size of its membership, but for revitalizing the existing member unions themselves. Unlike JEIU and JSD, NUGW does not take an approach of obtaining management's consent to organizing non-unionized enterprises. Instead, it takes an approach of grass-roots organizing based on the mobilization of union members. For example, NUGW's report to its 2003 convention presents cases of two regional organizations that achieved an increase in their membership. According to the report, rank-and-file members of the two regional organizations were not mere recipients of services provided by their unions, but actively participated in organizing campaigns, for example, by persuading their friends working in non-unionized enterprises to join NUGW (Interview with NUGW, September 13, 2003; NUGW 2003a,9; NUGW 2003b, 28).

Zensen Domei is one of the few Rengo affiliates that have achieved an increase in its membership (from 600,200 in 1996 to 613,300 in 2002). The federation gives top priority to increasing its membership and has allocated greater resources to organizing activities than other federations. The organizing section of its headquarters has 15 full-time officials. They work closely with heads of its 47 prefectural organizations (full-time officials) in organizing workers in non-unionized enterprises. The federation spends about 135 million yen per annum on organizing activities (except personnel expenses) (Interview with Zensen Domei, September 14, 2002; Koshikawa 2000, 19).⁷

⁷ One of the reasons that Zensen Domei can allocate greater resources to organizing activities than

Organizing strategies of Zensen Domei are basically based on partnership model. As in the case of JEIU and JSD, its organizers meet managers of targeted enterprises to obtain their approval of the unionization of these enterprises. In persuading managers, they stress positive effects of unionization on the economic performance of enterprises, such as higher morale of employees, lower turnover of employees and smoother internal communication within the enterprise. In other cases where it is difficult to obtain the approval of management, Zensen Domei helps pro-union employees to organize a union in secret. When these employees get the support of a majority of employees for unionization, they openly announce the formation of the union to management. If management attempts to crush the union, the federation is prepared to engage in severe labor disputes to force management to recognize the union. In this way, Zensen Domei makes a flexible use of strategies based on partnership and organizing models in response to employers' reactions to union organizing efforts (Interview with Zensen Domei, September 14, 2002; Nakamura et al. 1988, 229-231).

JAM was established in 1999 by the merger of two federations of metal-working and machine industries with the membership of about 500,000. Since then, it has suffered from a rapid decline of its membership due to downsizing, plant closures and bankruptcies that have become widespread among SMEs in these industries, and its members decreased to 431,000 in 2003. The federation sets a goal of "recovering" its original membership at the time of its foundation. The federation's target in organizing activities is "neutral" enterprise unions unaffiliated with any federation, the number of which is said to be between 2,000 and 3,000. The main responsibility of

other federations is that its dues are higher than those of other federations. The amount of dues that Zensen Domei charges member unions is 670 yen (per capita, monthly average in 1999), while the average amount of dues that industry-level federations charge member unions is 487 yen (per capita,

affiliated enterprise unions is to organize workers of non-unionized enterprises that belong to the same enterprise group and workers within the same enterprise who have not joined the union (for those affiliates without union shop agreements). The organizing section of its headquarters has five full-time officials. In addition, there are 142 full-time officials at its 40 regional organizations. These officials, both at the central and regional levels, act as service providers to the current member unions, in addition to acting as organizers. Since many problems arise among the member unions due to the severe economic conditions, these officials find it difficult to spend enough time on organizing activities (Interview with JAM, April 15, 2003).

JAM's organizing strategies are mainly based on service model. Its strategies are not based on partnership model in the sense that its organizers meet officials of targeted "neutral" unions, rather than managers of enterprises where target unions are organized. Its strategies are not based on organizing model, because organizing activities are mainly the responsibility of full-time officials and do not involve the mobilization of rank and file members. In promoting the affiliation of "neutral" unions with JAM, the federation emphasizes the provision of services as a merit of membership. One of the main routes of its organizing activities is the networks of enterprise unions organized along specific product lines (*Gyoshu Betsu Kyoto*), the main function of which is to exchange information on wages and working conditions among unions in the same product markets. Since they include not only JAM affiliates, but also "neutral" unions and unions affiliated with other federations, JAM take advantage of these networks to call on "neutral" unions to join the federation. Moreover, JAM dissolved those networks where its affiliates were dominant (4 out of about 30 networks) and

reorganized them into its internal organizations. JAM asked those “neutral” unions of the dissolved networks to join the federation if they wanted to continue to receive information that was now provided by JAM’s internal organizations. As a result, most of “neutral” unions of the dissolved networks joined JAM. JAM’s regional organizations also accord importance to the provision of services as a “selling point” of organizing activities. For example, one of its regional organizations plans to improve the quality of services (wage surveys, seminars, activities for youths and women and mutual aid) to make JAM more attractive to “neutral” unions in the region (Interview with JAM, April 15, 2003).

4-2 Explanations for the Variation of Organizing Strategies

What factors shape these industry-level federations’ various organizing strategies? As discussed above, previous studies show that institutional environments, especially the extent to which enterprise unions are embedded in IR institutions, form a broad background for union strategies, and, in the case of Japan, the extent to which labor unions are embedded in IR institutions at the enterprise level differs between the large enterprise and SME sectors. This institution-based explanation can be applied to different organizing strategies between JEIU and JSD, on one hand, and NUGW, on the other. JEIU is the federation dominated by the enterprise unions of large firms, as reflected in the high proportion of members who belong to enterprise unions with 5,000 or more members (70%, see Table 3). JSD is less dominated by enterprise unions of large firms than JEIU, but still can be categorized as the union federation of the large enterprise sector, because the size of enterprises in retail and wholesale industries is

smaller than that of enterprises in manufacturing industries.⁸ These enterprise unions, being embedded in enterprise-based IR institutions (i.e., the system of labor-management consultation and union shop agreements), either have weak commitment to organizing activities or prefer organizing strategies based on partnership model.⁹ And it can be argued that JEIU and JSD, reflecting the interests of these enterprise unions, adopted organizing strategies based on partnership model. NUGW, on the other hand, is the federation whose members unions are predominantly in the SME sector, as reflected in a high proportion (83%) of those who belong to unions with the membership less than 300 (see Table 3). Since its member unions are less embedded in the enterprise-based IR institutions¹⁰ and are free from institutional constraints, it can be argued that NUGW is committed to organizing activities and support organizing strategies based on organizing model.

The explanation based on the difference in IR institutions, however, does not fully explain the variation of organizing strategies of the five federations. For example, although JAM mainly represents the interests of enterprise unions of SMEs, it takes organizing strategies based on service model rather than organizing model. And since Zensen Domei organizes workers of both large enterprises and SMEs, it is rather difficult to apply the institution-based explanation to its organizing strategies. To

⁸ The proportion of those who belong to enterprise unions from 1,000 to 4,999 (still regarded as relatively large unions) among the membership of JSD is about 53% (JTUC-RIALS 2001, 201).

⁹ See the footnote 6 for the case of “A Department Store” union as an example of enterprise unions that prefer organizing strategies based on partnership model. The enterprise union of “B Electronics,” one of the major unions of JEIU, is an example of enterprise unions with weak commitment to organizing activities. Although JEIU expects its affiliates to organize workers of non-unionized affiliates and subsidiaries in the same enterprise group, the “B Electronics” Union does not adopt such an organizing policy (Interview with “B Electronics” Union, February 17, 2004).

¹⁰ The fifth row of Table 3 shows only 20 to 30% of NUGW’s member unions are covered by union shop agreements. Compare this with much higher proportions of union covered by union shop agreements in JEIU, JSD and Zensen Domei.

further explain the difference in organizing strategies, the paper posits that two related factors mediate between IR institutions and organizing strategies of the federations: (1) the relationship between the industry-level federations and their member unions, as reflected in the federations' authority over their member unions and the types of officials in their leadership, and (2) the "framing" by the federations' leaders of the issues of industrial relations and union organizing.

Although most industry-level federations in Japan do not have the centralized authority as in the case of industrial unions of European countries, some federations have stronger control over their member unions than others. And whether policy-orientations of enterprise unions on the issue of union organizing (which in turn are shaped by how they are embedded in enterprise-level IR institutions) are reflected in federations' organizing strategies in a straightforward way or not depends on the degree to which federations exercise authority over their member unions.

Among the five federations, the authority of JEIU and JSD over enterprise unions is limited, and their structures of policy-making and policy-implementation are decentralized (see Table 3). Thus, their organizing strategies largely reflect the policy-orientation of their member unions (i.e., partnership model). In implementing their organizing plans, the federations leave actual organizing activities (i.e., organizing workers in non-unionized affiliates and subsidiaries in the same enterprise group in the case of JEIU and organizing part-time workers in the same enterprise in the case of JSD) to enterprise unions.¹¹ They do not have the authority to enforce their organizing plans at the enterprise level, even though these plans are formally

¹¹ Although JSD adopted an organizing plan for part-time workers in its 1994 convention, there is variation in the degree to which the plan has been implemented by its member unions (Interview with JSD, February 8, 2003).

approved by member unions at conventions. The authority of NUGW is also weak because it is a federation of relatively autonomous regional organizations.

In contrast, the authority of Zensen Domei and JAM over their member unions is relatively strong. Zensen Domei's flexible organizing strategies based on partnership and organizing models seem to reflect the strong initiative that the federation takes in organizing activities, rather than policy orientations of its member unions. The strong initiative of the federation in union organizing is indicated not only by the greater resources allocated to organizing activities than those of other federations, but also by the authority of the federation over its member unions in organizing activities. For example, in organizing part-time workers, Zensen Domei had first left organizing activities to its member unions, but changed its policy in 2000 because the number of newly organized part-time workers had not increased as expected. In its new organizing policy, the federation directly organizes part-time workers if member unions cannot organize these workers by themselves. Zensen Domei's authority over its member unions becomes most apparent in the issue related to wage negotiations (the policy area where industry-level federations can exercise relatively strong authority over their member unions). While each member union engages in collective bargaining with management, the federation has the rights to give directions on how to conduct wage negotiations, to call strikes and to decide when to reach settlements with management (Interview with Zensen Domei, September 14, 2002).

JAM does not have the authority over its member unions as strong as that of Zensen Domei. For example, it does not directly intervene in the organizing activities assigned to its member unions, such as organizing workers of non-unionized enterprises in the same enterprise group. However, JAM takes the initiative in its

main pillar of organizing activities, i.e., organizing numerous “neutral” unions in metal-working and machine industries, and its organizing strategies based on service model seem to be decided at the federation level in relative autonomy from the influence of its member unions (Interview with JAM, April 15, 2003).

The mix of different types of fulltime officials in the headquarters of federations is another indicator of the relationship between industry-level federations and their member unions. Full-time officials of industry-level federations consist of three types: (1) those who are “dispatched” by enterprise unions and maintain the status as employees of the enterprise where they were originally hired, (2) those who have become professional union officials by giving up the status as employees of the enterprise, and (3) those who were directly hired by federations and have been professional officials from the beginning. If federations’ officials consist mainly of the first and second types, especially the first type, their policies tend to be influenced by the interests of enterprise unions. If federations have a certain number of the third type of officials, on the other hand, their policies tend to be decided in relative autonomy from the influence of enterprise unions. Both Zensen Domei and JAM have an equal mix of three types of officials in their headquarters (Interview with Zensen Domei, September 14, 2002; Interview with JAM, April 15, 2003). In JEIU and JSD, on the other hand, the first and second types of officials form the overwhelming majority in their headquarters (see JTUC-RIALS 2001, 251).

Another factor that mediates between IR institutions and organizing strategies of the federations is how leaders of industry-level federations “frame” the issues of industrial relations and union organizing. As the author argued elsewhere, union leaders’ visions or worldviews can have a strong effect on union policies in relative

independence from external economic and institutional contexts (Suzuki 2000, 79-80). Based on interviews with union leaders of the five federations, the paper presents rough descriptions of what they think are ideal forms of industrial relations and union activities including union organizing (see the seventh row of Table 3).¹²

The visions of five federations' leaders on ideal forms of industrial relations and union activities are divided between those who advocate cooperative industrial relations and enterprise unionism (JEIU and JSD) and arm's length relations between unions and management (JAM and NUGW). Zensen Domei's leader also advocates cooperative industrial relations, but under the strengthened authority of industry-level federations. The visions held by the leaders of JEIU and JSD can be seen as relatively unmediated expressions of the standpoint of enterprise unions. The vision held by NUGW's leaders can also be seen as relatively unmediated expressions of the standpoint of its regional organizations, some of which take the form of general unions. The relatively unmediated expressions, in turn, can be seen as reflecting these federations' decentralized decision-making structures. Organizing strategies of Zensen Domei, on the other hand, seem to reflect the "framing" by its leaders of the issue of union organizing. As indicated above, its authority over its member unions is stronger than other federations, and this relatively centralized decision-making structure makes it possible for the federation to develop its own programs of recruiting and training organizers (professional organizers whose interests are detached from those of enterprise unions) based on the vision of the federation's leaders about what

¹² These descriptions are not direct quotations of interviewees, but summaries of interviewees' statements. In the process of summarizing, the author's "interpretation" may be involved. It should be cautioned that leaders' statements may reflect their personal views and do not necessarily represent formal policies of the federations.

union organizing should be like.¹³ It may be possible to explain the effect of the “framing” of JAM’s leaders on the federation’s organizing strategies in a similar way to the case of Zensen Domei, because of its decision-making structure relatively independent from its member unions’ influence. However, since the data on JAM’s leaders’ visions of industrial relations and union organizing are limited, a further research is required to shed light on the effect of the “framing” process of leaders on the federation’s organizing strategies.

5. Conclusions

This paper examined organizing strategies of the Japanese labor movement at the national level (Rengo) and at the industry level (JEIU, JSD, JAM, Zensen Domei and NUGW). Its analytic framework is an application of previous “union revitalization” studies to the case of Japanese labor unions, that is an explanation of organizing strategies by the different extent to which enterprise unions are embedded in enterprise-level IR institutions between the large enterprise sector and the SME sector. Two mediating factors, the relationship between industry-level federations and their member unions and the “framing” by union leaders of the issues of industrial relations and union organizing, are also included in the analytic framework to provide a more elaborate explanation of the formation of the federations’ organizing strategies.

The examination of Rengo’s organizing strategies shows that its leadership started to have more aggressive policies on union organizing from the mid-1990s, such as its

¹³ What factors, then, explain the “framing” process of leaders of Zensen Domei? It can be argued that leaders’ “vision” of union organizing has been shaped by the federation’s organizational history and “union culture.” The examination of these latter factors is beyond the scope of this paper.

direct involvement in organizing unorganized workers and greater allocation of resources to organizing activities. The main actors of union organizing, however, remained industry-level federations. The examination of organizing strategies of the five federations shows that the union federations of the large enterprise sector (JEIU and JSD) take organizing strategies based on partnership model, while the union federation of the SME sector (NUGW) takes those based on organizing model, thus supporting the institution-based explanation for organizing strategies. However, organizing strategies of Zensen Domei (a flexible use of partnership and organizing models) and JAM (service model) do not fit well in this explanation. To explain organizing strategies of the latter two federations, the two mediating factors are considered. When the authority of industry-level federations over their member unions is relatively strong, the federations' leadership can make organizing strategies in relative independence from the policy-orientations of member unions, and the vision of their leaders can have an independent effect on these strategies.

What are implications of this paper's findings for organizing strategies of the Japanese labor movement as a whole? The paper's findings suggest that partnership model is the prevalent organizing strategy of the Japanese labor movement, because influential federations among Rengo affiliates, such as JEIU, JAW (Confederation of Japan Automobile Workers' Unions) and JBU (Japan Federation of Basic Industry Workers' Unions), are federations dominated by enterprise unions embedded in enterprise-based IR institutions (i.e., unions in the large enterprise sector). Although only JAM among the five federations examined by the paper mainly adopted service model in its organizing strategies, it can be argued that this model is also widespread among organizing strategies of industry-level union federations and enterprise unions.

This is not only because the provision of services is one of the basic functions of labor unions, but also because service model can be used in combination with partnership model. The paper's findings also suggest that organizing model is adopted by only a minority of industry-level federations such as NUGW, given the low union density in the SME sector.¹⁴ This model, however, has a potential to be more widespread in the future, because region-based unions, whose membership is gradually increasing under the auspices of Rengo, are more likely to adopt organizing model than other models in their organizing strategies.

The paper's findings also suggest that the allocation of authority and resources is one of the serious problems of union organizing in Japan. Organizing activities, regardless of models of organizing strategies, require strong leadership as well as the allocation of monetary and human resources. Although industry-level federations are main actors of union organizing, they often find it difficult to take the strong initiative in organizing campaigns and to allocate sufficient resources to their organizing activities. This is because authority and resources are concentrated at the level of enterprise unions, the basic units of the Japanese labor movement. Since it seems unrealistic to expect that a majority of enterprise unions become committed to organizing part-time and other non-regular workers in the same enterprise or workers in non-unionized enterprises in the same enterprise group in the foreseeable future¹⁵,

¹⁴ Other industry-level federations that adopt this model in their organizing strategies include JMIU (All Japan Metal and Information Machinery Workers' Union, with the membership of 9,500 in 2002) which is affiliated with the smaller confederation, Zenroren. This federation, as in the case of NUGW, organizes workers in SMEs and emphasizes the mobilization of union members for organizing activities across the boundary of enterprises (Interview with JMIU, October 10, 2003).

¹⁵ According to a survey of private-sector enterprise unions conducted by Rengo Osaka in 2001, 58% of surveyed private-sector enterprise unions answered that they had no plan to organize part-time workers, and 54% of them answered that they had no plan to organize workers dispatched by "temp agencies" (*haken shain*). Concerning organizing unorganized workers of affiliates and subsidiaries of the same enterprise group, 29% of them answered that they had no plan to organize

unless authority and resources are shifted from enterprise unions to industry-level federations and to the national confederation, the chance that the Japanese labor movement will reverse the steady decline of union density is slim.

these workers (21% of them answered that they had already organized at least a part of these workers, and 46% of them answered that their enterprise did not have subsidiaries or affiliates) (Rengo Osaka 2001).

Table 1: Enterprise Unions with or without Union Shop Provision by the Size of Enterprises (%)

Size of Enterprises	Total	With Union Shop Provision	Without Union Shop Provision
5,000 or more	100.0	78.8	21.2
1,000-4,999	100.0	84.9	15.1
500-999	100.0	69.9	30.1
300-499	100.0	67.4	32.6
100-299	100.0	71.8	28.2

(MHLW 2000, 31)

Table 2: Enterprise Unions with or without Union Shop Provision by the Number of Members (%)

Size of Enterprises	Total	With Union Shop Provision	Without Union Shop Provision
5,000 or more	100.0	93.3	6.7
1,000-4,999	100.0	90.0	10.0
500-999	100.0	84.1	15.9
300-499	100.0	79.2	20.8
100-299	100.0	71.1	27.9

(MHLW 2000, 31)

Table 3: Profiles of Five Industry-Level Federations (in 2000)

	JEIU	JSD*	JAM
(1) Membership	665,000	156,000	466,000
(2) Members who belong to unions with 5,000 or more members	69.7%	28%	20.5%
(3) Members who belong to unions with less than 300 members	1.1%	7%	21.5%
(4) Industries Covered by Federation	Electrical, Electronic, and Information Industries (e.g., Hitachi, Toshiba, Panasonic, Sharp, NEC, Fujitsu)	Retail, Wholesale, Food-Related Industries (e.g., Department Stores, Supermarkets, Restaurants)	Metal-Working and Machine Industries (e.g., parts suppliers for autos, electronics and machine manufacturers)
(5) An approximate proportion of member unions that have signed union shop agreements	80-90%	More than 90% (for full-time employees)	About 70% -about 84% among unions of enterprises with 1,000 or more employees -about about 45% among unions of enterprises with 100 or fewer employees
(6) Federations' authority over member unions (the relationship between Federation and its member unions)	Weak (federation of enterprise unions)	Weak (federation of enterprise unions)	Relatively strong (weaker than Zensen Domei)
(7) How officials "frame" the issues of industrial relations and union activities	-The enterprise is the focal point of industrial relations, and enterprise unions should have a "voice" in management of enterprise. -Workers' interests are diverse rather than uniform. -Unions should try	-Unions should interact with management on an equal footing, and industrial relations should be based on mutual trust between the two sides. -Industry-level federations should give top priority to union organizing.	-Labor unions should act independently from "the logic of corporate management."

		hard to make it possible for workers to choose multiple options of life and working styles.		
(8)	Main Model of Union Strategies	Partnership model	Partnership model	Service model

*JSD was established in 2001 by the merger of three federations. JSD's data are rough estimates based on its predecessors' data.

Source: Data of (1),(2) and (3) are based on JTUC-RIALS (2001, 201). Data of (5), (6), (7) and (8) are based on interviews with the five federations.

Table 3 (Continued)

	Zensen Domei	NUGW
(1) Membership	602,000	48,000
(2) Members who belong to unions with 5,000 or more members	32.2%	0.0%
(3) Members who belong to unions with less than 300 members	12.7%	83.3%
(4) Industries Covered by Federation	Textile, Garment, Chemical, Food, Commercial, Service Industries	Various industries
(5) An approximate proportion of member unions that have signed union shop agreements	Almost 100% (for full-time employees)	20-30%
(6) Federations' authority over member unions (the relationship between Federation and its member unions)	Relatively strong (stronger than other four federations)	Weak (in the sense that NUGU is a federation of regional organizations)
(7) How officials "frame" the issues of industrial relations and union activities	-Industry-level federations should have more control over their member unions. -Union organizers should develop a sense of professionalism and divest themselves of enterprise consciousness. -Unions should develop cooperative relations with employers as long as they recognize labor unions.	-Unions should strengthen their power vis-à-vis employers based on the unity of workers. -Union movements are a part of broad social movements for peace and democracy. -Organizing is important for the revitalization of unions themselves.
(8) Main Model of Union Strategies	Partnership model Organizing model	Organizing model

Source: Data of (1),(2) and (3) are based on JTUC-RIALS (2001, 201). Data of (5), (6), (7) and (8) are based on interviews with the five federations.

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