

Struggles for Reinstatement of “Tenkan Shokutaku” at Nissan Motor Corp. after Massive Dismissals in 1949.

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Abstract : This paper deals with labor struggles for reinstatement of “Tenkan Shokutaku” (short term contract workers converted from regular employees) as “Honko” (regular employees) at Nissan Motor Corp. in chronological manner. Nissan dismissed 1826 employees under conditions of serious recession caused by the “Dodge Line” in 1949. Ninety-eight among them were immediately rehired as “Shokutaku” (short term contract workers) status (so they were called “the converted”). Many of their jobs were related to facilities for the welfare of employees, such as caretakers of its dormitories. The company regarded their jobs as less important for its business than other jobs. So it aimed at reduction of their wage cost, and at making it easier to dismiss them in the case of changes to its welfare policy. The Nissan Branch of All Japan Automobile Workers Union (JAWU) decided “Tenkan Shokutaku” could retain their union membership although it did not organize “Rinjiko” (temporary workers), another type of short-term contract workers. Though their working conditions were worsened after the conversion, the decision could make the union’s negotiations with the company for their working conditions more effective. Firstly, the company tried to cut their wages by 20%, but failed. Secondly the union requested that the company had to give three months’ notice if it intended to refuse renewal of the contract, and succeeded. Moreover, “Tenkan Shokutaku” demanded fringe benefits which were available to regular employees, and was able to secure some of them even though they were very limited in comparison with regular employees. Finally, the union requested the company to reinstate them as regular employees. Although the company strongly refused because of their job natures, the union and the “Tenkan Shokutaku” succeeded after a year of negotiation. We can see in this case that the post-war notion of equality beyond job or trade differences, which had demanded and achieved equal treatment of factory workers and white-collar staff in the aftermath of WWII, managed to survive after this severe downsizing.

Keywords : automobile industry, regular employees, JAWU, labor history in Japan

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