

“November Struggle” and “Overcoming Crisis” Movements at Nissan Heavy Industry

YOSHIDA Makotoⁱ

Abstract : This paper deals with the first labor dispute, “November Struggle” at Nissan Heavy Industry (Nissan) in 1946, and its impact upon union policies and organization. Although it was very conservative, the “October Labor Offensive” which was led by Sanbetsu (All Japan Congress of Industrial Unions) made the Nissan Heavy Industry Employees Union (NEU) slightly more aggressive. It demanded that the management raise wages. After collective bargaining failed, NEU announced a “Struggle Statement.” Although by “Struggle” NEU vaguely meant “a strike,” its executive didn’t intend to go on strike. It preferred the strategy of “Production Struggle,” in which production would be continued under the union’s initiative during the dispute. It was a strategy developed from the participation scheme before “November Struggle.” However, NEU came to be aware that continuing production needed government support due to lack of materials and money.

“November Struggle” had two results. First, NEU’s policy on the government diverged into two opposed strategies: one was cooperative, and the other was aggressive, “political struggle.” The latter subsequently became a mainstream in NEU. The second result was an issue concerning the inner order within NEU. It had expected to utilize the company’s chain of command if a labor dispute occurred. After the “November Struggle,” NEU needed to make its own chain of command due to some problems concerning legitimacy. This made its organization independent from the company.

The aggressive group within the union in 1947 led the “Overcoming Crisis” movement. It succeeded in replacing the president of the company. It declared that “Democratization of Management” was accomplished because the former president had ignored the union’s insistence upon management issues. A new labor relationship at Nissan, although resembling the former cooperative one, changed its character from being based on an undifferentiated body like “Sanpo” (Industrial Patriotic Association) to being based on equality between “labor and capital.”

Keywords : Company-based Labor Union, Democratization of Management, History of Labor Relations in Japan

i Professor, College of Social Sciences, Ritsumeikan University