



# Labour Update

## 労組周辺動向 No. 212



2025 - 02 - 28

*This bulletin contains information on law changes that have either passed, or are being discussed, in parliament, court decisions, and other labor issues in Japan that are of interest to activists.*

### 1. Law/Policy

(1) "Survey Report on Employment Status of Researchers and Faculty Members" January 22, 2025, AT Global Co., Ltd. (commissioned by the Ministry of Education, Culture, Sports, Science and Technology)

[https://www.mext.go.jp/content/20250120-mxt\\_t\\_kiban03-000039795\\_1.pdf](https://www.mext.go.jp/content/20250120-mxt_t_kiban03-000039795_1.pdf)

(2) Pension Reform Bill Likely to be Postponed, Possibly Submitted After Upper House Election to Avoid Criticism

It was learned on the 25th that within the government and ruling party, there is a proposal to postpone the submission of pension system reform bills to the current Diet session until after the summer Upper House election. The government had aimed to increase the basic pension (National Pension) received by all citizens and expand the enrollment of part-time workers in the Employees' Pension Insurance, but there were objections from the ruling party and business circles due to the increased burden on the working genera-

tion and companies. The decision appears to have been influenced by considerations of electoral impact and the desire to avoid public criticism and pursuit by opposition parties.

The government and ruling party plan to make a final decision by mid-March, which is the general deadline for bill submissions. If the bill submission is postponed, it may force a re-consideration of the system design.

Pension system reforms are implemented approximately once every five years. With the declining birthrate and aging population, the working generation paying insurance premiums is decreasing while the elderly receiving pensions are increasing, causing a significant decrease in future pension levels. To improve this situation, the Ministry of Health, Labour and Welfare had been coordinating with the ruling party to submit a bill.

### (3) Part-time Workers' Pension Insurance Premiums to be Fully Refunded if Paid by Employers... For Companies with 50 or Fewer Employees

The Ministry of Health, Labour and Welfare has begun adjusting plans to fully refund companies for pension insurance premiums they pay on behalf of part-time workers. This will be included in the pension reform bill to be submitted to the current Diet session. While the ministry had been considering an 80% refund, they increased it to 100% in consideration of Komeito party's request for reducing the burden.

Insurance premiums are normally split equally between workers and companies, but the related bill will establish a special exception allowing increased company contribution rates for companies with 50 or fewer employees and individual businesses with 5 or more employees. The system is expected to target employees with annual incomes of 1.51 million yen or less, to be introduced from October 2026 as a temporary measure for three years.

If the bill passes, the company size and income requirements for mandatory enrollment in the Employees' Pension Insurance will be eliminated, increasing the number of enrollees, mitigating the reduction in take-home pay that could lead to "work control," and reducing the burden on companies.

## **2. Legal Violations/Disputes**

### (1) Court Orders Private High School to Pay Wage Differences to Former Non-Regular Lecturer Regarding Transfer After Conversion to Indefinite Employment, Kyoto District Court Ruling

On February 13, the Kyoto District Court issued a ruling in a lawsuit where a male lecturer in his 40s, who was a fixed-term full-time lecturer at Kyoto Seisho High School (Nishikyo Ward, Kyoto City), sought confirmation of his position and approximately 14.9 million yen in damages from the school operator, Meitoku Gakuen Educational Corporation, claiming that his transfer to an administrative position immediately after his conversion to indefinite employment was unjust. Presiding Judge Satoshi Saito recognized that it was illegal for

him to receive lower wages despite performing the same duties as full-time teachers, and ordered the payment of approximately 4.5 million yen. The claim for confirmation of position was dismissed.

According to the ruling, the man was hired as a full-time lecturer with a one-year contract period in April 2010. In February 2022, he applied for conversion to indefinite employment and became an indefinite contract employee in April, but was ordered to transfer to an administrative staff position.

Judge Saito determined that during the period when the man was a full-time lecturer, there was no clear difference in job content between him and regularly employed full-time teachers. Ruling that this violated the Labor Contract Act and other laws prohibiting unreasonable wage disparities, he ordered payment of wage differences from 2019 onward, for which the statute of limitations had not expired.

The court concluded that the transfer was valid, stating that there was no agreement limiting job type at the time of employment.

## (2) Teacher Testifies "Principal and Others Deleted Weekend Work Records" - Petition Submitted to Tochigi Prefectural Board of Education

On February 25, a union comprised of teachers and staff held a press conference at the Tochigi Prefectural Office, revealing that records of weekend work by a male teacher at an elementary school in Mibu Town had been deleted by the principal and other administrators.

The press conference was held by a representative of "IRIS Tochigi," a union of educational staff, and a male teacher in his 50s who teaches special needs classes at an elementary school in Mibu Town. According to IRIS Tochigi, records of 45 instances of weekend work performed by the male teacher from April 2023 to September 2024, spanning approximately a year and a half, were deleted by administrators without consultation.

The male teacher had been working on weekends to prepare for classes and create instructional materials for colleague teachers. According to the teacher, he noticed the deletions around April 2024 when checking his arrival and departure times in the school affairs support system. He subsequently consulted with IRIS Tochigi, which he had joined, and when he confronted the principal on February 12, the principal admitted to instructing the vice principal to delete the records.

In response, IRIS Tochigi requested the Mibu Town Board of Education to conduct an investigation into the actual situation, and the town has stated that it intends to report the investigation results to the Prefectural Board of Education within the fiscal year.

Additionally, in response to an inquiry from Tochigi TV, the principal explained, "There was no intention to falsify records. Since April 2023, I had instructed the vice principal to modify the arrival and departure times for weekends and holidays based on my understanding

that working hours on Saturdays, Sundays, and holidays are not included in overtime hours, but this was due to my lack of understanding," and "Since confirming the national guidelines, I have not made any modifications since October of last year."

According to Mibu Town, incorrect handling of overtime hours has not been confirmed at other elementary and junior high schools in the town.

After the press conference, IRIS Tochigi submitted a petition to the Prefectural Board of Education demanding strict disciplinary action against the principal and others and calling for an investigation across all schools in the prefecture.

### (3) 7.07% Wage Increase for 70,000 Part-time Workers at AEON Retail

UA Zensen, a union composed of workers from textile, distribution, and food service industries, announced on February 25 that AEON Retail, a core subsidiary of the major retail group AEON, has agreed to increase hourly wages for part-time employees by 7.07% (81 yen in actual amount). The raise will apply to approximately 70,000 workers, marking the third consecutive year of wage increases exceeding 7%. The response was reportedly in full compliance with the union's demands.

For regular employees, the total wage increase combining the base-up (which raises the wage structure) and regular raises averaged 5.34% (17,319 yen). The base-up and other increases amounted to 4.01% (12,989 yen).

According to UA Zensen, three other AEON Group companies, including those operating small supermarkets like "My Basket," also reached agreements on the same day with full responses to union demands.

### (4) Not Guilty Verdict for Kansai Ready-Mixed Concrete Union Officials on Extortion Charges, Kyoto District Court Ruling

On February 26, the Kyoto District Court (Presiding Judge Hiroshi Kawakami) delivered a not guilty verdict for Ken'ichi Take (83), former executive chairman of the Kansai Ready-Mixed Concrete Branch of the All Japan Construction and Transport Solidarity Labor Union, and Yuji Yukawa (52), the current chairman, who were charged with extortion against a cooperative association of ready-mixed concrete manufacturing companies. The prosecution had sought 10-year prison sentences for both defendants.

The defense had argued for acquittal and also demanded dismissal of the case, claiming that the indictment exceeded the scope of prosecutorial discretion.

According to the indictment, the two had allegedly demanded settlement money for the dissolution of a company where seven union members were employed in 2013-2014, intimidating a cooperative association by blocking concrete shipments and other means, thereby extorting 150 million yen.

### 3. Situation/Statistics

#### (1) January Consumer Prices Rise 3.2%, Rice Prices Up 70% - Largest Increase on Record

The Consumer Price Index (CPI, 2020=100) announced by the Ministry of Internal Affairs and Communications on February 21 was 109.8 for the comprehensive index excluding fresh food with large fluctuations, showing a 3.2% increase compared to the same month of the previous year. The growth rate expanded for the third consecutive month. The comprehensive index including fresh food, which is closer to the actual cost of living, rose by 4.0%, reaching the 4% range for the first time in two years.

Fresh foods with high purchase frequency rose by 21.9%, the highest level since November 2004. Fresh vegetables increased by 36.0%. Cabbage, with reduced shipments due to poor growth, cost about three times more, and Chinese cabbage doubled. Mandarin oranges, whose production decreased due to last year's intense heat, rose by 37.0%.

Food excluding fresh food increased by 5.1%. Rice products, which have seen noticeable price increases since around summer 2024, rose by 70.9% in January 2025, the largest increase since January 1971, when comparable data became available. Domestic pork increased by 6.6%.

Dining out increased by 3.1% due to rising raw material prices and labor costs. Influenced by soaring rice prices, sushi at restaurants increased by 4.5% and rice balls by 9.2%. Coffee beans rose by 23.7% as shipments decreased due to adverse weather conditions in Brazil, a major producing country.

Among energy sources, gasoline prices increased by 3.9%, a notable expansion compared to the previous month's 0.7% increase. This was due to the reduction in subsidies under the government's measures to suppress surge in gasoline prices. The subsidy benchmark was raised from 175 yen to about 180 yen in December 2024, and to about 185 yen in January 2025.

Electricity costs rose by 18.0% and city gas by 9.6%. Overall energy increased by 10.8%.

Dividing the overall index into goods and services such as travel and dining out, services increased by 1.4%, a 0.2 percentage point decrease from December 2024. This was influenced by foreign package tours showing only a 1.9% increase (compared to 74.7% in December 2024), with the growth rate significantly narrowing.

Foreign package tour expenses had temporarily suspended surveys due to difficulties caused by COVID-19. Therefore, in 2024, the index was calculated by essentially comparing with the same month in 2020. From January 2025, such temporary measures due to COVID-19 were eliminated, pushing down the index.

Meanwhile, accommodation fees increased by 6.8%, with the growth rate expanding from

the previous month due to the expansion of inbound tourism demand. General service-related household services also expanded to a 3.1% increase.

Goods rose by 6.3%, with the increase expanding from the previous month. Durable household goods increased by 3.9%. Room air conditioners saw expanded demand, leading to increased sales.

"2020 Base National Consumer Price Index, January 2025" February 21, 2025, Cabinet Office

<https://www.stat.go.jp/data/cpi/sokuhou/tsuki/pdf/zenkoku.pdf>

(2) Births Hit Record Low for 9th Consecutive Year at 720,988... Natural Population Decline in 2024 Reaches Record High of 897,696

On February 27, the Ministry of Health, Labour and Welfare announced preliminary figures for vital statistics in 2024, reporting that the number of births in Japan was a record low of 720,988. This represents a 5.0% decrease from the previous year, marking the 9th consecutive year of record lows. The preliminary figures include foreigners born in Japan.

Deaths increased by 1.8% from the previous year to 1,618,684, increasing for the 4th consecutive year and reaching an all-time high. The natural population decline (births minus deaths) was 897,696, marking the 18th consecutive year of decline and the largest decrease on record.

"Vital Statistics Quick Report (December 2024)" February 27, 2025, Ministry of Health, Labour and Welfare

<https://www.mhlw.go.jp/toukei/saikin/hw/jinkou/geppo/s2024/dl/202412.pdf>