



Labour Update

労組周辺動向 No. 237



2026 - 02 - 13

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) LDP Wins Postwar Record 316 Seats; Centrist 49, Nippon Ishin 36, DPP 28 - All Seats Finalized in House of Representatives Election

All 465 seats in the 51st House of Representatives election were finalized on the morning of February 9. The Liberal Democratic Party (LDP) secured 316 seats, surpassing two-thirds of the total on its own. This was the most seats won by a single party in the post-war era. The Centrist Reform Coalition, formed by the Constitutional Democratic Party and Komeito, suffered a crushing defeat, reduced to just 49 seats.

The election contested a total of 465 seats comprising 289 single-member districts and 176 proportional representation seats (across 11 nationwide blocs). Before the official announcement, the ruling coalition of the LDP with 198 seats and Nippon Ishin no Kai (Japan Innovation Party) with 34 seats held a combined 232 seats.

The LDP gave additional official endorsement to independent candidate Takeshi Saiki (Fukui 2nd District) and, including this seat, swept all single-member district seats in one

metropolitan area and 30 prefectures.

The party won 67 proportional representation seats, compared to 59 in the previous 2024 House of Representatives election.

This marks the first time in the postwar era that a single party has won two-thirds of House seats. The result surpassed the 308 seats and 64.2% seat share won by the Democratic Party of Japan (DPJ) in the 2009 election when it wrested power from the LDP. The LDP's previous record was 304 seats (including additional endorsements) in 1986.

Nippon Ishin no Kai, the LDP's coalition partner, won 36 seats. While winning 18 of all 19 single-member districts in its home base of Osaka, the party failed to expand its support in other regions.

On the opposition side, the Centrist Reform Coalition dropped sharply from its pre-announcement 167 seats, winning only 7 single-member district seats and 42 proportional representation seats.

The Democratic Party for the People (DPP) won a total of 28 seats - 8 in single-member districts and 20 in proportional representation. This was an increase of 1 seat from its pre-announcement 27, but fell short of its target of 51 seats.

Sanseito (the Party to Protect the People) won 15 proportional representation seats. Team Mirai secured its first-ever seats, with 11 members winning in proportional representation. The Japanese Communist Party secured 4 seats, Reiwa Shinsengumi 1, and Tax Cuts Japan & Yukoku Coalition 1 seat. The Japan Conservative Party and the Social Democratic Party failed to win any seats.

2. Legal Violations/Disputes

(1) Dismissal for Developmental Disability Ruled "Illegal" - Yokohama District Court Orders Care Facility to Pay 800,000 Yen in Damages

On January 29, the Yokohama District Court handed down a ruling in a lawsuit in which an employee sought 3 million yen in damages, claiming that a care facility's termination notice based on the employee's developmental disability was unjust. Presiding Judge Katsumi Takagi ruled that "the dismissal was discriminatory based on the developmental disability and therefore illegal," and ordered the facility to pay 800,000 yen.

The plaintiff, who is in their 40s, has autism spectrum disorder. According to the ruling, the plaintiff was hired by the facility in 2018 and did not disclose the disability at the time of employment. In 2021, during a meeting with the facility's director to request extended working hours, the plaintiff disclosed the disability. The following day, the director revealed the plaintiff's disability to other staff members and stated that the plaintiff should be "immediately dismissed for making a false declaration." Eight days later, the facility issued a termination notice citing "false reporting" as a violation of workplace regulations.

The court found that the director's disclosure of the plaintiff's disability to others "violated the plaintiff's personal rights and was illegal." Regarding the reason for the dismissal decision, the court noted that the facility had not raised any issues about the plaintiff's work performance during the three years before learning of the disability, concluding that "the only reason for the dismissal was that the plaintiff is a person with a developmental disability."

(2) Kanagawa Summary Court Orders Restaurant to Pay Spot Worker After Last-Minute Cancellation

On January 30, in a lawsuit filed by a male university student residing in Kanagawa Prefecture who sought payment of unpaid wages after being unilaterally cancelled on by a restaurant just before a "spot work" (short-term, one-off part-time) shift, the Kanagawa Summary Court (Judge Takahiro Koizumi) recognized that an employment contract was established at the point of matching and ordered payment of 2,905 yen.

According to the ruling, the student had applied in June 2025 through the spot work matching app "Timee" for a job at a restaurant in Kohoku Ward, Yokohama, and was successfully matched. However, the restaurant cancelled the shift the day before, and the student was unable to receive wages.

(3) Fair Trade Commission Investigates Japan Post for Freelance Act Violations - Potentially the Largest Case

The Fair Trade Commission (FTC) has launched an investigation into Japan Post on suspicion of violating the Freelance Act for failing to clearly specify transaction terms to freelancers to whom it had outsourced work. The investigation was revealed through interviews with sources. The FTC will examine transactions at the head office, branch offices, and post offices nationwide, making this potentially the largest violation case since the law took effect in 2024.

The suspected violations were first reported by the Asahi Shimbun in December of last year. Japan Post conducted an internal review of its compliance with the Freelance Act at its head office and all 13 branch offices between September and October of last year. It found that in a total of 380 outsourcing contracts with 223 freelancers working independently, transaction terms had not been specified in writing. The law requires such written disclosure.

The FTC is believed to have launched the investigation due to the large scale of the violations and the fact that the cases span locations nationwide. If violations are confirmed, the FTC is expected to consider issuing a recommendation requiring improvements and measures to prevent recurrence.

(4) Non-Regular Workers' Shunto Executive Committee Launches Campaign Demanding Wage Increases of 10% or More

The 2026 Shunto (spring labor offensive) of the Non-Regular Workers' Shunto Executive Committee, a coalition of labor unions with non-regular worker members that collaborate on spring wage negotiations, kicked off on February 2 with petition activities directed at Keidanren (Japan Business Federation, Chiyoda Ward, Tokyo) and others. Approximately 100 union members gathered in front of Keidanren, calling for "wage increases of 10% or more" and "protect workers' dignity." Keidanren did not accept the executive committee's petition for the Shunto.

This is the fourth year of the executive committee's cross-organizational efforts to secure wage increases for non-regular workers, who typically find it difficult to demand raises,

spanning labor organizations including Rengo (JTUC) and Zenroren (National Confederation of Trade Unions). The executive committee includes 35 unions (an increase of 7 from last year) and plans to negotiate wages with 160 companies (up 16) and 10 municipalities (unchanged from the previous year). The non-regular workers at the negotiating counterparts number approximately 300,000, of whom approximately 40,000 are union members.

3. Situation/Statistics

(1) Foreign Workers Increase for 13th Consecutive Year, Reaching Record 2.57 Million in 2025 as Companies Actively Recruit Amid Labor Shortages

On January 30, the Ministry of Health, Labour and Welfare (MHLW) announced that the number of foreign workers employed in Japan as of the end of October of last year reached a record 2,571,037, an increase of 268,450 from the same period the previous year. The record-breaking figure is attributed to companies actively recruiting foreign workers amid labor shortages, marking the 13th consecutive year of record highs.

By nationality, Vietnamese workers were the most numerous at 605,906, accounting for 23.6% of the total. They were followed by Chinese workers at 431,949 (16.8%) and Filipino workers at 260,869 (10.1%).

The number of establishments employing foreign workers also reached a record 371,215. By size, small establishments with fewer than 30 employees accounted for approximately 60%, and the average number of foreign workers per establishment was 6.9.

"Summary of 'Foreign Employment Status' Notifications (As of the End of October, Fiscal Year 2025)" January 30, 2026, Ministry of Health, Labour and Welfare

<https://www.mhlw.go.jp/content/11655000/001646130.pdf>

(2) Labor Force Population Exceeds 70 Million for the First Time - 2025 Average; Unemployment Rate Remains Flat

On January 30, the Ministry of Internal Affairs and Communications (MIC) announced that the "labor force population," which represents people with the will and ability to work, averaged 70.04 million in 2025. This marked the first time the figure exceeded 70 million since comparable data became available in 1953. The increase was driven by growing labor participation among elderly people and women. The unemployment rate remained flat from the previous year at 2.5%. The effective job-to-applicant ratio for 2025, announced the same day by the MHLW, was 1.22, down 0.03 points from the previous year, declining for the second consecutive year.

The labor force population is the sum of employed and unemployed persons. The average number of fully unemployed persons in 2025 was 1.76 million, the same as the previous year. The number of employed persons increased by 470,000 to a record 68.28 million.

A MIC official explained, "The number of employed women and elderly people is increasing. The employment situation remains not unfavorable. We will closely monitor future

trends."

The effective job-to-applicant ratio indicates how many job openings are available per job seeker at public employment offices (Hello Work). According to the MHLW, job openings declined from the previous year across all industries.

The seasonally adjusted effective job-to-applicant ratio for December 2025 was 1.19, up 0.01 points from the previous month, rising for the first time in nine months. The seasonally adjusted unemployment rate for December was 2.6%, unchanged from the previous month.

"Labour Force Survey (Basic Tabulation) - Summary of 2025 Average Results" January 30, 2026, Ministry of Internal Affairs and Communications

<https://www.stat.go.jp/data/roudou/sokuhou/nen/ft/pdf/youyaku.pdf>

(3) Real Consumption Expenditure Down 2.6% in December - 2025 Engel's Coefficient at Highest Level in 44 Years

According to the Family Income and Expenditure Survey released by the MIC on February 6, consumption expenditure by households of two or more persons was 351,522 yen in December 2025. In real terms, excluding the effects of price fluctuations, this was a 2.6% decrease year-on-year, the first decline in two months. Food items including confectionery dragged down the overall figure. The Engel's coefficient, which represents the share of food spending in total consumption expenditure, reached its highest level in 44 years for 2025.

The first decline in two months was driven by a decrease in confectionery items such as chocolate, which continues to see price surges, falling 5.3% year-on-year. Rice decreased 9.6%, declining for the second consecutive month. Overall food spending fell 2.4%.

Clothing and footwear declined 8.9%, the first decrease in three months. Automobile purchase costs fell 9.0%, the first decline in two months. A MIC official indicated that "the decrease in the proportion of purchasing households compared to the previous year was the cause."

Actual income for worker households, including bonuses, was 1,207,545 yen, a nominal increase of 2.4%. In real terms, excluding imputed rent for owner-occupied housing, income was unchanged from the same month of the previous year.

For the full year of 2025, monthly average consumption expenditure was 314,001 yen, a real increase of 0.9% from the previous year. Automobile purchases and culture/recreation spending pushed up the overall figure, making it the first increase in three years.

The Engel's coefficient for households of two or more persons was 28.6%, the highest level in 44 years since 1981.

"Family Income and Expenditure Survey Report - December 2025 and 2025 Average" February 6, 2026, Ministry of Internal Affairs and Communications

https://www.stat.go.jp/data/kakei/sokuhou/tsuki/pdf/fies_mr.pdf

(4) Real Wages Negative for Fourth Consecutive Year - Down 1.3% Year-on-Year in 2025; Wage Gains Offset by Rising Prices

Real wages per worker, which reflect price changes, were negative for the fourth consecutive year.

According to the MHLW, total cash earnings per worker in the previous year, combining base pay, overtime pay, and other components, averaged 355,919 yen per month in preliminary figures. This was a 2.3% increase from the previous year, rising for the fifth consecutive year.

Hourly wages for part-time workers reached 1,394 yen, the highest since 2011, partly due to minimum wage increases.

However, real wages, which reflect price changes, fell 1.3% from the previous year, marking the fourth consecutive year of decline. The margin of decline widened from the previous year's 0.3% decrease.

Real wages for December of last year, also released at the same time, fell 0.1% compared to the same month of the previous year, marking 12 consecutive months of decline.

"Monthly Labour Survey - Preliminary Results for 2025" February 9, 2026, Ministry of Health, Labour and Welfare

<https://www.mhlw.go.jp/toukei/itiran/roudou/monthly/r07/25cp/dl/pdf25cp.pdf>

"Monthly Labour Survey - Preliminary Results for December 2025" February 9, 2026, Ministry of Health, Labour and Welfare

<https://www.mhlw.go.jp/toukei/itiran/roudou/monthly/r07/2512p/dl/pdf2512p.pdf>

(5) Lawyers Issue Emergency Statement Opposing Stricter Public Assistance Rules for Foreign Nationals Ahead of Election

The National Conference on Public Assistance Issues, a group of lawyers, issued an emergency statement on January 29 opposing stricter rules, in response to the government's "Comprehensive Response Plan" on foreign national policy, which indicated a plan to review eligibility for public assistance (livelihood protection) benefits.

Regarding the false claim that "30% of recipients are foreign nationals," the statement pointed out that the actual figure is less than 3%, which is significantly lower compared to the proportion of foreign recipients in other countries (France 12.4%, UK 19.6%, Germany 37.8%, Sweden 59.4%, etc.). The statement also noted that, to begin with, in Japan, public assistance for foreign nationals is not legally guaranteed; it is provided as an administrative measure from a humanitarian perspective. Those eligible are limited to permanent residents, spouses of Japanese nationals, recognized refugees, and similar categories, and even when subjected to unfair treatment, they have virtually no legal recourse to challenge it.

The statement went on to reference the lowering of public assistance eligibility standards under the second Abe administration, expressing concern that "Prime Minister Takaichi, who is regarded as the successor to former Prime Minister Abe, is using a similar approach

of baselessly problematizing public assistance for foreign nationals for electoral purposes."