

**Toward “a Secure Society Built around Work as its
Core Theme”**

**- A Proposal for the Image of Society Our Country Should Aim to
Realize -**

Japanese Trade Union Confederation (JTUC-RENGO)

Let us realize “a secure society built around work as its core theme”

RENGO will make every effort, and bring all its strength together, to build “a secure society built around work as its core theme” as a base for all working people.

The term ‘all working people’ includes currently employed workers, no matter whether they are regular workers or non-regular workers, or whether they are union members or non-union members. If it also includes retired persons who have left the front line of work, children who are about to enter into the world of work and the family members of workers, it represents an overwhelming majority of the Japanese people.

A secure society is a society where decent work is guaranteed and where a system is established to enable people to respond to all risks at all stages of their lives, such as sickness, unemployment, child care, old age, and others. It is also a society where support is provided for those who wish to play an active part in society and where people are bound closely together in appropriate relations.

RENGO aims to establish “a secure society built around work as its core theme” by further strengthening its activities both qualitatively and quantitatively, while obtaining a consensus of its affiliates and establishing network-type cooperation with many organizations, including NPOs and individuals engaged in welfare services for workers while upholding the same ideals.

December 2, 2010

59th Central Committee Meeting

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Chapter 1: Why do we now propose a new image of the society we should aim to realize?

1. Sustainability of society under threat – Beyond insecure society

In today's Japanese society, many people face various kinds of anxieties in their lives.

A large number of young people are tormented by unforeseeable insecurity over whether or not they will be able to obtain a stable income and form a family. Young mothers are weary from the dual burdens of childcare and work and are at a loss about the worries of child rearing. Parents whose children have reached higher-level schools are at their wit's end over how to manage to pay school fees until their children graduate. Even if they can continue to work until their retirement age, the prospects for managing their lives after retirement are becoming increasingly dark.

Those who work in non-regular employment are facing hardships of how to manage their lives on low wages. They live every day with the fear of having their employment cancelled at any time. On the other hand, those who work in regular employment are burdened with long working hours and mental stress, feeling unease over their health and suffering from poor physical condition. Moreover, they feel mounting dissatisfaction with the fact that they are not obtaining appropriate compensation for their work.

There is a sense that the distance between people is increasing and that society is

disintegrating, and this is amplifying insecurity. Mutual ties or linkages between people are weakening. Common ties to a region or a company or to blood relations have declined and more people feel isolated from or overlooked by other people. It is the ties that people have with one another which support society and the systems through which the security of people is guaranteed. These very ties are weakening.

On the other hand, economic and social disparities are expanding. Everybody naturally considers that a person will receive an income or become well-off in accordance with their efforts and abilities. In this country, however, disparities have expanded so excessively, according to both statistics as well as with actual experience that all efforts to cultivate abilities have come to be felt as futile and in vain.

Together with weakening social ties and linkages, couples who have difficulties making work and family life compatible choose not to have any children for the reason that the childcare system supported by society is inadequate. The poverty issue among the young is accelerating the tendency for the numbers of unmarried men and women to increase and for the birthrate to decline.

Those people who have lost hope and have been thrown into despair choose to take their own lives. A society where more than thirty thousand people commit suicide every year is abnormal.

The social ties and the linkages between people have thus been weakened and, accompanying this, anxiety and distrust have been amplified. In our country now, sustainability in all economic and social aspects is under threat.

When was it that our country became such a society? The “Izanami *Keiki*,” said to have been the longest period of economic prosperity after the Second World War, was smashed apart by the Lehman Shock without leading to any real sense of affluence. Pessimism about the future hangs over the people like a cloud. The unmistakable contrast with past prosperity and the comparison with the remarkable economic growth in other East Asian countries, is causing the view that Japan is in steady decline to be emphasized and an inward-looking attitude toward other countries to be created.

However, our country has overcome great dangers many times up until now, responding flexibly to changes in the world and society to build a stable society. It should be recognized that the current danger will not be solved through an extension of our past success experiences. It is because we are now in such a time that it is necessary to look back upon and confirm once again the goals that the trade union movement has aimed to realize and the fact that the trade union movement has been the mainstay of social ties and linkages. We should start from our own history and experiences, and then breaking through the difficulties, we must change course so as to lead to a more hopeful and secure society. If we advance holding our ideals high, always working out a new and flexible strategy in accordance with the situation, and start working on it hand in hand with one another, we will certainly overcome the problems of this insecure society.

2. The “secure employment society” established in Japan thus far and its life security system in the future

Thus far, Japan has built up a “secure employment society (a society where employment is secured),” which has surpassed almost all other countries in the world. While it cannot be said that social security systems and welfare systems have developed sufficiently, it can be said that instead of these the conditions for finding employment were at least once secured for the majority of people. During the chaotic period after the Second World War, labor and management learned lessons together from long and violent labor disputes and a mechanism which promoted the development of the potential abilities of workers while securing stable employment for them was formed on the basis of mutual trust. The productivity improvement movement initiated in 1955 raised “three basic principles for the productivity improvement movement,” i.e. “maintenance of employment”, “cooperation and consultation between labor and management” and “fair distribution of rewards.” Through the unremitting efforts of labor and management, the strength to push forward economic growth was generated and contributed to the formation of the secure employment society.

Moreover, a mechanism by which the construction industry absorbed employment in the regions in place of shrinking primary industries through government protection measures for small businesses and through public works, sustained the “secure employment society,” keeping unemployment under control.

In short, here in Japan, the life security system has been established with employment as its core. It can be safely said that the security system functioned well as a Japanese-type model until the 1980s. Nobody should underestimate the construction of the mechanism which Japan had achieved. However, together with the intensification of market competition through the advance of globalization, the management placed priority on seeking short-term profits and shareholder interests appeared on the stage, causing the storm of market fundamentalism to rage, leading to large changes in social and economic conditions in Japan, through which numerous weak points of the mechanism have come to be revealed. This is what is now causing this mechanism to lag increasingly behind the times, thus threatening sustainability. The time lag of this mechanism is expanding due to both pressure from abroad and the actualization of problems inside the country.

The biggest problem threatening sustainability from outside is the advance of free-for-all economic globalization. Economic globalization has also rushed mercilessly toward countries in which democracy and trade union rights are not established, and has created there a small elite class of rich people on the one hand and a great number of lower class poor people on the other. The income gap between the most affluent fifth of the people and poorest fifth of the people in the world expanded to 75 to 1 in 1999 compared to 30 to 1 in 1960. In order to correct for such negative aspects, the international trade union movement has called for campaigns to establish international fair labor standards together with campaigns for globalizing democracy and trade union rights under the slogan “the economy should be managed for people”.

As companies advanced across borders, causing problems which even governments and trade unions could not control, discussions already began as far back as the 1970s that it might be necessary to set a code of conduct for the behavior of multinational companies and monitor compliance with it. Thereafter, with further advance of globalization, especially after the collapse of the Cold War structure between the East and West in the 1990s, companies have sought locations where costs are lower, and their behavior in neglecting trade union rights and human rights has been evident in various locations.

As for internal Japanese problems, the following four problems can be pointed out:

Firstly, employment security thus far has focused on the employment of male regular workers and it was assumed that the income of these male workers supported their wives and children. The same was true with tax systems and social security systems. Society was marked by gaps between men and women in wages and treatment.

Secondly, once they were employed as new school graduates, most male earners were brought up to be full-fledged company-oriented men, and through various fringe benefits and the wage system based on the life-long employment system, they were expected to view their company as their “lifelong house.” Under this “enclosure-type” mechanism, family lives tended to be sacrificed to an extreme fervor for company growth and it was difficult for each of them to attempt the challenge of a new career.

Thirdly, even though perfect employment may be said to have been realized, there existed a large number of workplaces which harbored problems of wages and treatment. Along with the lag in social security and welfare, there were areas in which poverty was not eliminated.

Fourthly, the mechanism thus far has been “the convoy system” of bureaucrat-led catch-up. However, even after the effect of administrative guidance was lost, the administration still attempted to control the business world. The collusive structure between the administration and the business world was preserved, as seen in the vested rights pursued by special-interest politicians as mediators. This not only damaged economic dynamism, but also swelled into a strong distrust of the administration.

What is now asked of us is to drastically upgrade the strong points of the life security built on the core of employment while removing the weak points of the mechanism which had been formed thus far with the participation of the Japanese trade union movement. Since its early days, RENGO has struggled to construct a vision of the society it wishes to aim for. Now that RENGO is celebrating its 20th anniversary, the prescience of RENGO’s Vision for the 21st Century is becoming clearer day by day.

By the middle of the 1990s, after the collapse of the bubble economy, it was very clear to everyone that the Japanese (life security) mechanisms that had been in place up until that time had reached the end of their useful lives. However, the political sphere and the administration were unable to present a vision for drastic reform. Taking advantage of the situation, a neo-liberalistic tide began to sweep over the economic and political arena with the intention of replacing all the so-called outdated mechanisms with market fundamentalism. People had indeed raised voices of dissatisfaction and frustration with the mechanisms in which the vested interests of the bureaucrats and pork-barrel politicians were rampant and in which free choice was restricted. Therefore, this tide, coupled with the “theatricalization” of politics, gained strong support in elections for some time and led to the promotion of market fundamentalist reforms. However, such reforms only tore down the old mechanisms and could not create new life security mechanisms to replace the old ones.

Against the background of intensifying market competition caused by overwhelming neo-liberalism and advancing globalization, companies inclined towards shareholder-based management or short-term profit-seeking management instead of the employee-sovereignty concept which had hitherto characterized Japanese-type management. The three principles of the productivity improvement movement were openly ignored. By keeping wages low and calling for various different patterns of work, companies reduced the number of regular workers and increased the number of cheap and easy-to-use non-regular workers. Human beings came to be treated as objects classified under supply costs. The government, without bothering to arrange safety nets, promoted these policies to boost the profit-seeking activities of companies. The result was that disparities expanded, poverty increased, ties between people weakened and the sense of insecurity among the people was further aggravated. The politician-bureaucrat-business triangle itself was preserved with little change, and because the issues of disparity and insecurity remained unresolved, the outcome was the historical change of power that took place in the general election of 2009.

3. RENGO’s Vision for the 21st Century and the image of society that RENGO should aim to realize

Immediately prior to the start of the 21st century, at its 29th Central Committee

meeting held on November 17, 1998, RENGO decided to set up “a committee to discuss the challenges of RENGO in the 21st century,” and initiated discussions on the strategies of the trade union movement moving toward the 21st century. The committee finalized a “RENGO Movement to Cave a way for the 21st century – RENGO’s Vision for the 21st Century” (hereafter “Vision for the 21st Century”), the text of which was adopted by the 7th RENGO Congress held in October 2001.

The Vision for the 21st Century was a text which examined the end point and limitations of the Japanese-type life security mechanism in force thus far as well as its connection with the trade union movement. Vision for the 21st Century looked toward a new social vision and new strategies. Out of recognition that the conventional system was shuddering under the impact of globalization, information technology innovation and other factors, the text gave a strong warning to the idea that market fundamentalism might take the place of the conventional system. RENGO thus held up **“a welfare-type society centered on work”** as the image of the new society the trade union movement should aim to realize.

What vision did “a welfare-type society centered on work” entail? It was a concept of **“a society which places the highest value upon work while guaranteeing the opportunity to work and fairness in work for all people, with safety nets set in place to enable everyone to work towards achievement of self-realization in security”**. The concept aims to maintain the firm employment security of the past, while expanding social solidarity and thorough public support to enable every individual, including not only male regular workers but also female non-regular workers, will be able to work and become his or her own master. It was thus emphasized that, through participation in the secure employment society, everybody would have a sufficient margin of time in his or her own work mode that would enable him or her to combine work and family. For that purpose, it was thought that rather than aiming pointlessly for “a small government,” “an effective and efficient government” should be realized.

Now, however, without the realization of equal and balanced treatment, the number of people working in non-regular employment has rapidly increased, exceeding thirty percent of all employed workers. The social security systems are not functioning appropriately. Poverty is expanding and the distribution of wealth has been distorted, as can be seen in the increase in the number of the working poor.

This situation has become more aggravated even when compared with that of ten years ago.

The general directionality and the indication of problems shown in the vision of “a welfare-type society centered on work” are not at all out of date even today. On the contrary, the prescience and validity of this vision are becoming increasingly clear in the midst of the aggravation of various real difficulties.

Today, as RENGO celebrates its 20th anniversary, we should be proud and confident of the fact that the RENGO movement upheld this forward-looking vision. While steadfastly maintaining the basic course of action shown in the vision, it is necessary, at the same time, to succeed to the image of society that the vision aimed to realize, and to develop it as a more easily understood and a more systematic vision on the basis of changes in the situation in the world and in Japan that have occurred in the meantime..

The Lehman Shock, which occurred in the fall of 2008, has presented us with an important opportunity to urge the world as well as Japan to reflect and to raise very basic questions about “the greedy capitalism” brought about by market fundamentalist and neo-liberalist policies, as well as about the disparities and poverty brought about by the social recklessness and absurdity of global financial capitalism. The tide of the times has changed, and the new tide urges us to reform the economic policies and social policies of the past that neglected the dignity and value of work. “Decent work,” advocated by ILO Director General Mr. Juan Somavia, is a message delivered to the world against such a background.

Furthermore, the issue of global warming and the energy/resources problem, the disparities of poverty and wealth between nations and the peace issue cannot be neglected, since they are issues that threaten the sustainability of the world’s people.

In the midst of this worldwide tidal transformation, changes in Japan will accelerate further in the 21st century; the fluidization of politics will proceed and the paradigm change has already begun. It is now imperative for RENGO to display its independent vision to open up a new social structure by bonding together the interests of all working people and the interests of all those who wish to work.

Therefore, we wish to enrich the “welfare-type society centered on work” which we have upheld thus far so that society may become a society full of hope and security mutually supported by work, namely “a secure society built around work as its core theme”.

Chapter 2: The structure of “a secure society built around work as its core theme”

“A secure society built around work as its core theme” is a society where the highest value is given to working and where everyone is given the opportunity to participate in society through various forms of work and under fair working conditions; a society where everyone can stand on his or her own feet socially and economically, and where everyone’s self-reliance is mutually supported by other people; and a participatory society full of vitality where safety nets are set up in such a way as to make it possible for everyone to work towards the achievement of self-realization. Such a sense of security, where all people are guaranteed the opportunity to work and a place in which they can participate, is definitely at the core of a society which will lead to increasing hopefulness on the part of the people.

1. Why is work a core theme?

We all work in various different ways, and are linked together in various ways as we cooperate with each other to produce goods and provide services. Even if the work is performed by an employed person to earn his or her daily bread, the work itself gives the person an opportunity to achieve self-realization, provided that it is decent work based on established rules. The work leads to a life worth living. The best use of the person’s gifts is to develop his or her abilities through tackling work which contributes toward a further development of society, and at the same time, makes his or her daily life more challenging. If, in the meantime, people can establish enriched relationships in which they recognize each other and are recognized by each other, these relationships will become great assets for the people involved and the relationships themselves will also provide them with support.

The fact that people work, earn incomes to enable them to live healthy and cultural

lives, bear tax burdens and make contributions to social insurance constitutes the basis which supports society. This idea constitutes the centre of our proposal for the society we aim to realize.

To this end, it is necessary to create mechanisms which enable everyone to work and to link up with each other, regardless of age or sex, no matter whether or not he or she is handicapped in one way or another. In short, it is a society where participation is guaranteed. If no one is excluded, and if everyone works in a lively way and is mutually linked with everyone else with no suffering from unreasonable disparities or poverty, society will become more vital and the economy will gain momentum.

Work does not refer only to employed work. This proposal concentrates on employed work, but bringing up children, carrying out housework and participating in cultural activities in everyday life, or tackling such issues as solving problems in the community and improving the living environment on a voluntary basis, or learning various things outside the workplace are also a part of work and of being linked with one another.

Besides this, people become independent economically and socially “through work” and can then strengthen their ties or linkages with each other. It is not merely through the system but also through the mutual ties between people which support the system that people’s security is guaranteed. Social capital means the links between people. Thus, in various ways “work” becomes a core theme when it is supporting or shaping the lives of people or the mechanisms of society.

2. Everyone works, and has mutual ties with other people who support each other

How should “a secure society built around work as its core theme” be created?

First, everyone should be given an opportunity to work humanely and with pride. However, although many people desire to be engaged in worthwhile work, the reality is that various difficulties prevent the vast majority of them from realizing this desire. Therefore, a “secure bridge” (system and policy or mechanism) must be built to eliminate the difficulties and help people to link up with “work.” The bridge should allow people to cross freely in both directions, as long as they desire to do so.

There are many young people who are unable to realize long-cherished dreams due to a lack of knowledge and educational background. Many mothers give up working because they cannot find a nursery nearby or cannot obtain the understanding of their

workplaces. There are workers who are forced to give up working because they are unable to receive adequate nursing services for their parents. Many of the unemployed willing to try new jobs are forced to wait their turn for public vocational training courses due to the insufficient numbers that can be trained at one time. Many of those with disabilities, and older people who find it difficult to work as they have done for many years are hoping for working environments where they can work in more flexible ways, but there are very few workplaces which can make use of their abilities. Many of them would like to participate more in society, but the opportunities for such participation are limited.

The society we are aiming for should not be one that encourages those faced with such difficulties to retire from the world or to give up through providing them with “benefits” or “protection.” If that were the case, the society would be one which eliminates opportunities for self-realization and deprives people of a place to live together. The society we are aiming for is a society which eliminates the difficulties for those who find it difficult to “participate,” is inclusive of as many people as possible and accepts them warmly.

In realizing such a society, it is necessary to reduce educational expenses paid by individuals, provide opportunities for practical lifelong learning and to improve public vocational training. It is also essential to improve childcare services both qualitatively and quantitatively so that every child can acquire basic cognitive abilities and secure educational opportunities even if he or she is from a family facing great economic difficulties. Furthermore, the establishment of support systems to connect older people and the disabled with work is also urgently needed.

At the same time, it is also indispensable to sustain life during a period of participation in education or training by reforming the unemployment insurance system or by providing and improving the so-called second safety net to allow vocational training accompanied by benefits which would link the period between unemployment insurance and social assistance. In other words, by connecting support-type public services with income security, people are linked to work and are helped to stand on their own feet economically and socially, which will strengthen the ties of the whole society and contribute to creating a basis for strong social security and a strong economy.

Such support-type public services are provided not only by the public authorities. In order to promote and expand the participation of people, it is necessary to strengthen

the kind of support that corresponds more closely to the needs of each individual. To that end, the power of the private sector, called “new public services,” including non-profit organizations (NPOs), cooperatives and social businesses, should be utilized. The “new public services” should not be mobilized in order to realize cheap services. It is the mission of “new public services” to provide a higher quality of services through cooperation with the administration while clarifying the roles and responsibilities that the administration should perform to provide safe and high quality public services reliably, efficiently and fairly in accordance with the principles of the Basic Law on Public Services, while securing adequate working conditions for new actors such as NPOs.

Government expenditures are naturally needed in order to continue to provide public services and income security. The expenditures which support people in work, to be linked with each other and to cultivate their abilities, are investments for the future. Such investments will result in creating a great return, for example, by minimizing the costs allocated to assistance allowances for the needy. The society we aim to realize is a society where social justice and economic vitality are synergistically developed.

If a worker does not have to work for excessively long hours and works in a more humane and comfortable way, he or she will have a greater amount of leeway to spend more time with his or her family as well as to enrich his or her life. If, in cooperation with public services, family care ceases to be an excessive burden, more people, especially women, will be able to engage in paid work. If time is secured for everybody to engage in learning regardless of age, and if these opportunities are expanded, peoples’ abilities will be enhanced and society will be able to find good work for them. In this context, securing the participation of people in society will guarantee not only the self-realization of individuals but also a society of high quality and sustainability.

3. Realizing decent work

At the same time that people are tied to employment, the employment should be humane and respectable. There are three conditions essential to that end; 1) income that corresponds to the value of the work, 2) establishment of a workplace community supported by work rules and 3) work-life balance.

Income that corresponds to the value of the work

Work is a basis for being economically and socially self-reliant; therefore, an income

that corresponds to the value of the work should be secured. Cases in which people fall into the working poor as a result of finding work after receiving various kinds of support should not happen. The impact of the mechanism which has existed thus far, where the concept has centered strongly on male regular workers in tax and in social security, has kept the level of the minimum wage in Japan as low as that of part-time workers such as housewives and students, who usually work to complement the income of male regular workers. Therefore, the level of the minimum wage compared to that of average wages in Japan is lower than in other advanced countries. In view of the reality that the number of non-regular workers who are main family breadwinners is increasing, such a disparity should be corrected as soon as possible.

The old-fashioned focus on male regular workers should be reformed, the same level of wage should be paid for the same level in the value of work, inclusive of women and non-regular workers, on the basis of a strengthening of the regulation regarding the minimum wage through laws or collective agreements to realize equality and balance in treatments as a whole.

What is also important is to raise disposable income through the tax system and social security system in linkage with employment. For households with low earned incomes, social allowances such as the children's allowance, in the place of tax deductions with benefits, tax exemption for dependents and marital tax deductions, are important means to that end. In this case, it is important that the tax system and social security system should be neutral when people choose, for example, the type of work they do so that the systems do not restrain employment behavior or favor specific ways of working.

The workplace community and the establishment of work rules to support it

In the secure society, where people support each other and which is built around work as its core theme, should steadfastly maintain the long-term employment practice which has been one of the merits of the Japanese-type life security thus far, constituting the basis of a secure life. In workplaces where arbitrary dismissals are rampant, it is impossible to realize decent work. It is only in workplaces where work rules are firmly established, where objective and fair evaluations are made and where everybody can devote themselves to work which enables them to feel a sense of accomplishment, or in workplaces where the principle of equal treatment is established on the basis of flexible and diverse ways of work are available for workers,

or in workplaces where competition is not stirred up between workers, but where companions work together to attain goals can innovation arise and productivity improve.

Decent work is not guaranteed by income alone. It is important that knowledge and ability grow through doing work that is challenging and worthwhile, and that work is linked to the development of a person's career. Building a workplace mechanism equipped with such conditions will eventually lead to the growth and development of a business or company. Improving the environment to secure both physical and mental health is also indispensable. To that end, while succeeding to the positive aspects of Japanese-type corporate governance, it is necessary to open manifold channels, focused on the trade union, which link the voices in the workplace to the management, to develop various systems of employee representation, and to create a climate in which labor and management share ideas together.

In short, workplaces in Japan should still continue to be communities, as they have been in the past. These, however, can no longer be closed communities. Many people may enter workplaces halfway through a year, or the number of people leaving workplaces for other careers after only a short period may increase. That would be an open community which vitalizes the coming and going out of people through support-type public services and income security. It is essential to establish work rules which make this possible.

Realizing a work-life balance

When we consider future work rules, one of the important tasks is how to shorten working hours and how to create conditions which will enable compatibility between work and family life. Both men and women should be able to concern themselves not only with the workplace community, but also with the family and the local community. The effect of the work-life balance is incalculable in the development of "a secure society built around work as its core theme."

If men can also have more time to be active in the life of the family and the community, coupled with the expansion of childcare and other services, this will prepare an environment that enables women to work. In effect, the demand for services will be promoted and employment in the fields of nursing care, childcare and medical care will increase, which will in itself strengthen the social foundation. The burden of childcare

will not be concentrated on women and equality between men and women will be strongly promoted in the workplaces, thereby enhancing social sustainability and applying the brakes to the trend toward declining birthrates.

Moreover, the work-life balance means the sharing of employment by more people. A high percentage of regular workers continue to work more than sixty hours a week, and the number of workers who work less than thirty hours a week are increasing, especially among non-regular workers, thus promoting polarization. The solution to such a situation will lead to the creation of an environment where more workers can work more comfortably.

Moreover, in the future, it will become important to take leave of absence from a workplace to undergo further education or training or for the purposes of family care. The creation of an environment where paid leave and childcare leave can be acquired is an urgent task.

There is no contradiction at all between the idea that a new society should be a secure society built around mutually supported work as its core theme and the idea that a work-life balance should be sought. It is the work-life balance that will heighten the quality of employment and make it possible for more people to find employment. It will also make it possible to realize a society where men and women participate as equals. The quality of the labor force will then be enhanced and labor productivity improved, leading to the realization of happiness and a more affluent life. At the same time, it will lead to the expansion of worthwhile and satisfying work and in its turn to productivity improvements, which will eventually bring about a virtuous cycle for both management and workers.

4. Qualitative strengthening of employment and the creation of employment opportunities

In order to bring “a secure society built around work as its core theme” into existence, opportunities for decent work have to be expanded. While maintaining and strengthening our prominent technological and developmental competence, which has been nurtured by the internationally higher quality of our labor force in the economic development that has occurred thus far, it is necessary to advance actively on this basis toward industrial fields which are expected to grow and create opportunities for

employment. Not only the high-tech industries, such as the information and telecommunication industries, but also other various industries, should promote conversion to employment which generates high value added goods and services. Industrial human resources qualitatively different from the current ones will therefore be necessary. It is because we exist in a global market economy that we should expand production and services supported by high skills and high technology in order to eliminate low cost competition. When “a secure society built around work as its core theme” enriches positive labor market policies including vocational training, expands life-long education and helps the work-life balance take root, a growth strategy based on a high quality labor force, i.e. a *high road approach*, will become possible.

It is also important to create employment opportunities in new fields. In the midst of a situation where it is necessary to apply the brakes on global warming by promoting the conversion to a low-carbon society, green jobs related to such fields and industries as environment-related technologies, the renewable energy field, improvement of the energy efficiency of houses and facilities, recycling industries, and the expansion of public transportation are expected to be the employment areas where new growth will occur. It is also expected that reduction of CO₂ emissions through information and communication technologies will create employment opportunities.

Naturally, such green jobs can be developed in Japan by taking advantage of this country's prominent standing in manufacturing skills and technologies. Therefore, qualitative improvement of our labor force through education and training in such fields, and the realization of decent work, will become preconditions for maintaining this advantage.

Furthermore, it is expected that the number of workers in the welfare and medical fields will increase enormously in the future. As a matter of fact, the number of these workers increased from 4.74 million in 2002 to 6.24 million in 2009, 75% of these workers being women. The form of the family and local community has changed, and this change has brought about a necessity for the whole of society to take on the burdens of supporting and nurturing life. In response to this necessity, activities making use of biotechnology, known as life innovation, and information and communication technologies have begun to appear in such fields as medical and nursing care.

On the contrary, the construction industry and primary industries such as agriculture, forestry and fishing, which have in the past supported regional economies, are showing a statistically shrinking trend. However, new possibilities are also appearing here. In addition to the repair and maintenance work on existing facilities, strong needs are becoming evident in the public works field in enhancing environmental preservation and safety, as seen in energy conservation and the earthquake-proofing of buildings. In primary industries such as agriculture and forestry, there are also examples of expanding employment in the newly created sixth industry through linkages with commerce and the manufacturing industries, through the use of domestically produced timber, and examples of the revitalization of regions are increasing.

Moreover, it is necessary to make continuing efforts to constantly enhance Japan's scientific and technological competence and our development capabilities in order to cultivate and expand the industrial sphere in such fields as materials and commerce.

Whether in conventional or new industries, while bringing out new possibilities for businesses and employment opportunities, it is necessary to take initiatives to prepare public vocational training programs that focus on the fields in which growth is expected, and at the same time, to ensure that humane and dignified employment is created in these fields in terms of wage level and career formation.

5. Seamless security leading to hopefulness

“A secure society built around work as its core theme” is a society in which people have a sense of security that safety nets are so well arranged that everybody is able to work toward his or her own self-realization. The security referred to here is not a passive security which merely gives assistance when it becomes difficult to continue to work. It is a positive security, the security leading to hopefulness, which enables the difficulties which prevent people from social participation, such as the lack of knowledge or skills, the necessity to engage in family care such as childcare and nursing care, and the gap between the workplace environment and physical conditions to be eliminated and enables people to maintain their links with society.

This security is a seamless security that is present throughout one's lifetime, and therefore expands the options available in the lives of people. However, in the

mechanism existing in our country thus far, the life course has been decided on the basis of sex or whether or not people are handicapped. Moreover, the life course has been a single one-way track which does not provide opportunities to return and do something over again. As a matter of fact, the ages when people learn, when people work and when people become pensioners have all been predetermined.

Under the mechanism of the blanket recruitment of new graduates, young people have been required to decide the work they will do for their lifetime at a fixed age, for example, in the case of high school graduates at around eighteen years of age, and in the case of university graduates at around twenty-two years of age. Young people not able to find work due to an economic recession at the time of finding employment lose the chance to be recruited as regular staff, and this failure may result in lifelong disadvantages. Of course, many young people have discovered their suitability or unsuitability for a certain kind of work after becoming employed, but it has been difficult for them to change direction. If it is made possible for young people to renew their attempt to find the work or the workplace community which will truly bring out the best in themselves, their sense of accomplishments will be deepened and their motivation to work will be enhanced.

Furthermore, there is no reason at all why people have to stop working at the age of sixty. While there is talk of a lifetime of active service to society, it cannot be said that the abilities of older people are being put to full use, on one hand, and on the other there exists a situation at present where, in particular, the will to work of highly skilled and knowledgeable people is draining overseas. The working rate of older people in Japan is high, but there are few among them who consider that they are employed in satisfying work. While guaranteeing broader options for and easier access to social contributions and cultural activities through community activities, NPOs and other activities, if older people can make use of the knowledge, skills and experience they have accumulated through more flexible workplace environments and employment support, the gloomily-portrayed image of the aging society will be completely dispelled. Society will be transformed into a vital society where links with society and hope are not cut off with aging.

The issue of the declining birthrate is a national crisis. The number of older people is increasing in inverse proportion to the decrease in the numbers of people in the working and active generations who are supporting older people, and there is a danger

that society will plunge into an insecure situation where the standard of living will continue to decline. It is said that our country became a society with a declining birthrate from 1997. The birthrate continued to decline, and in 2005 the total population began to decline for the first time since the Second World War. It has not proved possible to apply the brakes to this declining trend. The tendency to remain unmarried or to marry late in life is having a marked impact in lowering the birthrate. At the same time, it is said that childbirth is avoided due to the heavy burden of child-rearing costs and educational expenses. As a result of the increase in the number of people living on low incomes, child-rearing costs cannot be secured, and the increase in the proportion of insecure employment is causing anxieties for the future. Moreover, there are many cases of dismissal for the reason of taking leave for childbirth or child rearing. Even if childcare leave can be taken, it is impossible to return to the former workplace, or it is difficult to find a nursery school or kindergarten. There are many reasons behind the declining birthrate trend and it is necessary to take comprehensive measures. Removing the various obstacles facing women such that having children does not lead to an economic burden, provision of free-of-charge or low-cost nurseries and the creation of environments that do not result in adverse workplace treatment for people engaged in child rearing are also forms of security that lead to hopefulness, sustain women's social participation and at the same time support social sustainability.

Chapter 3: The base supporting “a secure society built around work as its core theme”

1. A government that is effective, decentralized and reliable

In order to consolidate the kind of security which leads to hopefulness, it is indeed necessary to expand government expenditures. However, looking from the viewpoint of social expenditures and the tax burden rate, present-day Japan has a strikingly smaller government compared with other industrially advanced countries. Generally speaking, as aging advances, social expenditures increase, but seen from

the high aging rate of Japan, this country still maintains an exceptionally small government.

We are not demanding big government for trivial reasons. When we look at our financial situation, there are difficulties associated with a big government. However, if we were asked which way we should proceed to change the financial situation for the better, maintaining an exceptionally small government or aiming for an even smaller government, our answer would be that neither of these will be effective. It is necessary to examine the reasons why financial failure has occurred in Japan even though this country already has a small government.

The reasons why neither of these methods will be effective are due to inefficient administrative systems that have been left untouched, on the one hand, and due to the fact that the inability to satisfy people's needs to work and participate in society have led to a loss of vitality in society, on the other. While tax bases are shrinking and the rate of payment of the social insurance premium is declining, and moreover, financial revenues are insufficient, no effective policies can be taken and, therefore domestic demand remains depressed to such an extent that is preventing young people from developing their abilities.

Viewing the experiences of the industrialized Nordic countries, the government effectively supports people's work, and in that they are functional governments that have realized high growth and financial security even though the scale of the government is large. The issue is no longer whether the government is big or small, but whether or not the government is effective and reliable. In order to enhance the reliability of government, democratic politics and administrative systems worthy of the sovereignty of the people should be established, and decision-making and implementation processes should be made transparent in order to realize accountability.

Furthermore, for "a society built around work as its core theme," it is essential to promote decentralization to enhance the functions of local governments. This is because public services such as childcare, nursing care and training, which promote the social participation of people, should be designed near the people, gathering their needs and then provided to the local people. In order to provide good quality public services, it is necessary for the regional governments to collaborate closely

with NPOs, social businesses and other organizations which have their roots in the regions.

On the other hand, the role and responsibility of the central government should not be denied in the name of decentralization. As a result of decentralization, if childcare fees increase and support for the employment of the young diminishes in the regional governments which lack financial resources, the disparities between regional governments with weaker economic bases and those with abundant financial resources will further expand. That is quite contrary to the spirit of decentralization. A minimal target level should be set for public services which support the people in the regions and for that purpose a financial adjustment function should be built in for the purpose of promoting decentralization.

We should not forget that it is the robustness of the ties between people (social capital or socially-related capital) that support effective, decentralization-oriented and reliable government.

2. A society with fair burden-sharing

In order to break through the financial crisis and realize an effective government, it is essential to secure financial sources. We are prepared to accept the burdens based on the three ideas of “fairness,” “assent” and “solidarity,” if efficient and reliable government promotes measures which respond to needs. In examining a concrete program for securing financial sources, the following points should be noted:

Firstly, it is only through being shown the form of a fair society to which everybody can assent that consensus formation, including a consensus on burdens, can be moved forward. “A secure society built around work as its core theme” takes the form of a financially sustainable society. Expenditures for society to promote and enhance people’s active participation in society, their employment and their abilities are investments for the future and will expand tax bases to sustain finances.

Secondly, in order to arouse confidence in the government, it is necessary to realize policies and systems which reach the needs of people in essential fields, while eliminating waste in the government. If people can feel assured that the taxes and insurance premiums they have paid are serving useful purposes, confidence in the

government will increase of itself. A system that will make it easy to see the relationships between revenues and expenditures in social security accounts, child or childcare funds and other funds is also needed. Moreover, the significance of decentralization must be emphasized. It is because it is extremely useful for enhancing confidence in the government that the regional governments and assemblies, which are nearer to the people, should decide how to use tax money and execute policies together with people. With the introduction of a “common identification number system for tax and social security,” it is also essential to improve the transparency of taxation in efforts to arouse confidence.

Thirdly, while advancing discussions about the nature of fair burdens, a fair and easily-understood tax system, which shows a balance between assets, income and consumption, should be realized. When such a balance is considered, it is essential to strengthen the redistribution function of taxation. At the same time, it is also important to reorganize the various kinds of tax deductions and other deductions which have been introduced thus far on the premise of a single-income family, and to switch to a tax system that is suitable for a situation where both men and women work.

3. Corporate social responsibility (CSR) and a sound labor-management relationship

The market economy is an important and essential tool for “a secure society built around work as its core theme.” It brings wealth to people and the country by bringing about high value added through the activities of enterprises. It is in the true nature of enterprises to seek to maximize profits, but this should not be transformed into their sole goal. Enterprises must fulfill grave responsibilities in bearing the burden of the development of society and the regional communities in which they locate their activity bases. Not only should CSR compliance be established but also social fairness, social ethics, contributions to regional communities, consideration for the environment and other social considerations should be accepted and incorporated into the daily activities of enterprises. It goes without saying that the three principles concerning productivity should be reconfirmed so that proper distribution can be carried out. Corporate social responsibility should not be a means for gaining profits. Moreover, while the enterprise activities are undergoing globalization, their activities toward the

observance of basic human rights, environmental preservation, and sustainability in any particular country are required far more than in the past.

Enterprises bear responsibility for the maintenance and expansion of employment and decent work. In addition, a sound labor and management relationship, which makes “maintenance and expansion of employment,” “labor and management cooperation and consultation” and “the fair distribution of rewards” possible is essential infrastructure for both the construction of a democratic society and a sustainable economic society. A labor market where trade unions do not function will run out of control. In that sense, the responsibilities of enterprises, managements and trade unions, which should play the role of a check on enterprise activities, are grave.

4. Global environmental preservation and the creation of green jobs as preconditions for sustainability

A society can exist only when the global environment is sustainable. It is the duty of mankind to preserve the global environment, and there is a strong need to switch to a low-carbon society in order to control emissions of greenhouse gases.

A switch to a low-carbon society and the preservation of the natural environment are not in contradiction with economic growth. It is necessary to switch to a balanced energy composition while considering the benefits that accrue from the costs.

Fortunately, Japan’s environmental and energy-saving technologies lead the world in several aspects. We now have a rare opportunity to make use of these excellent technologies, knowledge and human resources. We should make efforts to link these with the nurturing of industries and the creation of employment opportunities.

It will be important to improve energy efficiency throughout the whole of society in such fields as facilities, housing, transportation and agriculture. There is a great potential for the expansion of business fields related to the improvement of energy efficiency. As pointed out in the report of the United Nations Environmental Program (UNEP) and in the 2008 Report of the International Labor Organization (ILO) on “green jobs,” the switch to a low-carbon society and the preservation of the

natural environment to secure sustainability of the global environment have the potential to generate a massive number of “green jobs” which will take on the relevant undertakings in every field.

Furthermore, it is sometimes pointed out that many green jobs are accessible through short- to medium-term training, and that most of them do not easily transfer overseas. While making use of economic methods such as incentive-type public assistance, including the tax system, we should stimulate the creation of undertakings toward a low-carbon society, and while strengthening the competitiveness that Japan has, we should clarify rules that ensure that the green jobs created will become decent work. Furthermore, we should open the way to green jobs in public vocational training and in other ways.

Chapter 4: The role and responsibilities required of the trade union movement

1. The role required of the trade union movement as a focal point of the social movement

“A secure society built around work as its core theme” is a society where basic human rights are respected and decent work is guaranteed. For that purpose, it is essential that the collective labor-management relationship is implanted throughout the whole of society, which agrees that it will function as an indispensable infrastructure for building and maintaining a sound society. Collective agreements concluded by labor and management also have an influence on unorganized workers. It is necessary that the trade union movement continues to secure the strength to influence the whole labor market in a robust manner.

RENGO will steadfastly maintain the following ideas and will make every effort to realize them.

First of all, in order to protect the dignity of work, it is the basic role of the trade union movement, first and foremost, to secure appropriate working conditions,

including wage and working hours, as the most important security of life, and to establish these standards as social working standards, that is to say, to form the social standards which have major consequences. It is the duty of trade unions and the trade union movement, of course, to make efforts to set work rules, determine minimum wages and realize the work-life balance. It is also its primary duty to carry out the function of settling labor disputes, making the best use of the labor commission or the labor tribunal system, in which citizen judges participate.

Moreover, the trade union movement, being the organization that bears the load of policy determination for the working people, has heightened their influence and has promoted social dialogue in order to be actively involved in national consensus formation. Furthermore, as seen in the establishment of fair labor standards, the trade union movement has also been actively involved in forming the international order related to work in solidarity with the international trade union movement. These roles of the trade union movement are extremely important in realizing “a secure society built around work as its core theme.”

The trade union movement is not merely presenting a new social vision and calling for its realization, but also bears the responsibility for its realization in practice. Japanese trade unions have thus far struggled hard to protect and promote the wages and working conditions of working people. However, it cannot be denied that the framework within which working people show their solidarity in being united has tended to be limited to male regular workers or trade union members inside enterprises. The time has now come, however, when even the interests of the membership itself cannot be protected, however hard the trade unions try to secure the interests of the membership (trade union members), in a self-sufficient manner; that is to say, however hard they try to protect the interests of their members for themselves only.

It is necessary to further deepen the trade union movement, which “stands against social irrationality” and “makes it possible for all working people to unite”, as proposed in the “Final Report of the RENGO Evaluation Committee,” and to make efforts to realize such a movement for all working people.

In order to realize “a secure society built around work as its core theme”, the trade union movement has to bear the central role of national consensus formation and

the role of coordinator for extensive network formation. While promoting dialogue not only with workers' welfare business organizations and employers' organizations but also with the broader citizenry, it is necessary to develop a vision and to own it jointly as a national or regional vision.

It is then necessary that the trade union movement builds a broad solidarity and demonstrates its role as the focus of the social movement in order to realize policies in cooperation with various bodies, organizations or networks which own jointly common purposes.

Women's and young people's participation is essential for vitalizing the trade union movement. The trade union movement has to tackle, as a matter of urgency, such activities as promoting participation and preparation for urging participation.

The activities carried out with a focus on securing social participation are activities that bind the ties of people to each other. The trade union movement is destined to play a part in reviving these ties.

It should not be forgotten that it is only through the independent and voluntary participation of each worker and his or her actions that the power of the trade union movement can demonstrate its true worth.

2. A trade union movement visible in the regions

In order to solve the problems of living and those related to employment confronting people who work and lead their lives in the regions, it has been necessary to build a trade union movement that is visible in the regions. For the last several years, RENGO has aimed at strengthening the structure of regional councils and their functions as bases to bear such regional activities.

At the regional level, the regional trade union councils have built up activities for realizing policies promoted by RENGO headquarters or RENGO's prefectural level organizations. They have, at the same time, promoted the organization of workers without distinction between regular workers and non-regular workers. They have also provided labor advice services, made efforts to solve labor disputes and have extended support to trade unions in the regions.

In addition to these activities, the trade union movement in the regions is expected to provide employment support, including vocational training and employment placement, and to undertake the coordination or mediation of support work such as counseling for the purpose of connecting people to employment. While showing initiatives in creating employment opportunities and in forming local communities, the trade unions in the regions also play such roles as support for various employment creation programs and employment creation efforts by NPOs and other organizations.

In “the new public sphere,” various organizations, including the administration, volunteer organizations, NPOs and workers welfare programs should be organically organized in order to provide services suitable for the needs of the people in the regions. The trade union movement in the region should be its focal point. It is necessary for the trade union movement in the regions to further strengthen cooperation with worker-managed welfare works such as legal advice services, advice services for multiple debt problems, nursing care and childcare, advice on municipal administration in general and life support services. While building networks with NPOs, volunteer organizations and other organizations, it is necessary to enrich the functions of advice services for people. Moreover, the trade union movement in the regions can also be a base for retired people and can function as a place to link these people with daily life advice services, and community and cultural activities. Thus, the expectations for the role of regional trade union councils, which stand nearest to the members and the people in the regions, are increasingly strong and their functions should be further reinforced.

Only through such initiatives will it be possible to create “the new public sphere.” The role and significance of the trade union movement in the regions is great.

3. Succession to and development of the values which the trade union movement has carefully preserved and the raising of the next generation

Labor is not a commodity. For the working people, trade unions are their first and closest safety net and a basic and indispensable social tool aiding them to be independent and to support each other. It is the role of trade union’s daily activities

in the workplaces and in the regions to rework frayed social ties. Such ties (linkages) will make the full independence of individuals possible. Trade unions and the trade union movement have thus far played the role of linking workers together inside and outside workplaces. Over many years in the past, they have improved workplace environments and living conditions, answered the will and the desire of countless people to work, and have become the basis for various social movements. The sense of values and the spiritual climate of what may be called the “labor culture” in Japan, which has been cultivated through these movements and activities, must be carefully preserved, and we must strengthen it and succeed to it in the future as an important infrastructure for the sound development of society.

In “a secure society built around work as its core theme,” value is set not on indifference to working people nor on heartlessness toward them, but on the way of life or the lifestyle which regards mutual supporting in work situations as important. While being incorporated into the structure of society, the trade union movement must be involved in various decision-making processes. A spiritual culture must be fermented that expresses anger at social irrationality and gives rise to concrete actions to correct it in solidarity and in unity.

The source of the power of trade unions exists in each member, and it can be said that it is the power of action based on the empathy which exists in the hearts of many working colleagues.

In order to cultivate the soil for this empathy, it is necessary to start by introducing and implementing labor education from primary education through to higher education. Education to develop an outlook toward work or ideas about work, education on worker’s rights and learning about work rules should be installed in the curricula in junior high schools and high schools. It is also necessary to give working adults opportunities for labor education. Such education would be an effective antidote to problems such as the increase of dropouts from higher education and the tendency of young people to leave their jobs prematurely.

On the other hand, knowledge about work rules and compliance with work rules are essential for those who are in management or in managerial positions. While ranking them as essential component elements for management know-how or essential knowledge for management, the consideration of setting up qualification

requirements in training systems and when starting businesses is thought to be appropriate.

The social establishment of a system to raise the future bearers of the trade union movement is also a matter of urgency. The system for developing management personnel has a socially recognized existence, but the system to raise its counterpart, trade union leaders or bearers of the trade union movement, has not yet been developed. Not only on-the-job training but also a full comprehensive education or training system should be established. Educational curricula to provide knowledge, know-how and other abilities to be acquired as future bearers of the trade union movement or social movement are needed together with opportunities for comprehensive professional education. The trade union movement should also urgently examine the building of third sector-type research and educational bases, besides workers welfare businesses and cooperatives.

4. Necessity for a trade union movement linked to the world

It would be impossible for Japan to turn her back on the world and enjoy security leading to hopefulness inside Japan alone. In the midst of globalization, the problems which the governments and trade union movements all over the world are confronted with are becoming more closely interconnected. Only in coexistence with the world, especially with Asia, can “a secure society built around work as its core theme” be developed.

The international trade union movement has an important duty to accomplish, through mutual understanding and solidarity, the decent work which would satisfy core labor standards in any country, a fair distribution of resources, and an alleviation of tension and the realization of peace between nations. Among others, the elimination of poverty leads to the maintenance of peace or its recovery.

The trade union movement in our country should display its initiative, especially in Asia, for the development of sound democracy, the elimination of poverty, and for social and economic development. Especially in the midst of globalization, in which human beings, goods and money move freely around the world, international solidarity is indeed important.

The international trade union movement should be borne not only by national trade union centers. Corporate activities and operations are globalized, and if we worry too much only about problems inside the country, it will no longer be possible to solve the domestic problems themselves. This is also true of the Japanese trade union movement. Our international trade union movement should be promoted along with the participation and cooperation of both RENGO and its affiliates and unit unions.

Meanwhile, looking inside our country, we have foreign workers issues which are referred to as inner international issues. Japan restricts immigration, and even though foreign workers are accepted in special cases, the system for Japanese language training for such people is not satisfactory, and their weak position means that they will be dismissed first when the economic situation deteriorates. A trade union movement for all working people should tackle the problems which foreign workers face as the problems of colleagues who are working together in Japan.

In “a society built around work as its core theme,” an isolated island of “foreign workers” should not be created. The realization of an inner international solidarity as one of its efforts for realizing a fair society without poverty by thorough promotion of the principle of equal pay for equal work is strongly required of the Japanese trade union movement.

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