

Reduction of Working Hour in Japan

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Reduction of working hour (RWH) is now one of national issues in Japan.

Many researches show not only that wage workers prefer RWH rather than rise of real wage, hoping to enjoy personal life or fearing death by overwork (KAROSHI), but that top managements of private companies think it more profitable in long term to move on RWH, positively to let workers refresh labour capabilities to adapt to restructured management organization with strategic information system which considerable companies have now introduced or are introducing, or passively being criticized by western capitalist countries that extremely long working hour of Japan, e. g. 2044 hours on the average in 1990, is a dumping in international market.

The Ministry of Labour, the Economic Planning Agency and the Ministry of International Trade and Industry of Japanese government have been taking leadership in promoting RWH, publishing many reports on RWH in white papers (HAKUSHO), with statistical data and econometrical simulations of macro-economic possibilities of RWH on condition that it be carried into effect within marginal productivity of labour. These papers have been written in response to so called Maekawa Report which recommends that annual working hours of Japan should be reduced to 1800 hours until about the middle of 1990s, which rather matches to the length of labour time of USA or UK now.

Notably, Sumitomo Metalworking Industry has begun with shortening working hours to 1800 per year by the middle of 1990s, investing 8 billion yen. The Tokyo metropolitan government will give financial support of 0.2 billion yen from 1992 to middle or small scale businesses which have planned to tackle RWH. Those can be called *RWH investment*.

Against the national trend to RWH in Japan, the Supreme Court recently sentenced that Hitachi Manufacturing's dismissal of a worker was legal, because he had refused business order to engage in non-scheduled work.