

The Evolution of Enterprise Unionism in Japan: A Socio-Political Perspective

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Abstract

This article proposes an alternative framework for understanding enterprise unionism by emphasizing political dynamics and the role of the state in labour relations. Our framework delineates the strategic behaviour patterns of each of the tripartite IR actors under collective bargaining. It maintains that the initial period of the collective bargaining era constituted a critical juncture for state labour policy that occurred in distinctive ways in different countries and that these differences played a central role in shaping the different union structures in the following decades. Our historical analysis shows that unlike its Western counterparts, the Japanese state was able to eradicate the horizontal union movement at the onset of the collective bargaining era because of its advantages as a late developer and Cold War politics, which resulted in enterprise unionism in Japan.

1. Introduction

In Japan, enterprise unions account for more than 90 per cent of all unions and organized workers (Japan Institute for Labor Policy and Training 2004). Since 1950, when the term, ‘*kigyobetsu kumiai*’ (enterprise union) was coined by the Social Science Research Institute at the University of Tokyo (SSRIUT), a great deal of research has been undertaken to understand why Japanese workers organize themselves by enterprise in contrast to their counterparts in Western countries. However, as Jeong and Lawler (2007) discuss, the two main hypotheses (the cultural and internal labour market hypotheses) rest on weak grounds both conceptually and empirically. The most critical and common errors in these perspectives have been (1) the erroneous assumption that the established union structure is the manifestation of the nature of Japanese workers, and (2) the exclusion of the state from analysis.

In this article, we propose an *alternative* theoretical framework of enterprise unionism from a socio-political perspective against the popular

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hypotheses. We emphasize *political dynamics* and the role of the *state* in labour relations, as in the end the political context has as much influence upon the consciousness and institutions of the working class as the economic context (Thompson 1963). Our framework applies the thesis of ‘critical junctures’ (Collier and Collier 1991; Lipset and Rokkan 1967) to the evolution of union systems in different countries. (‘Critical junctures’ can be thought of as major watersheds in political life, which establish certain directions of change and foreclose others in a way that shapes politics for years to come.) We argue that the initial period of the collective bargaining era constituted a critical juncture for *state labour policy* that occurred in distinctive ways in different countries and that in turn these differences played a central role in shaping the different union structures in the following decades, amid the sharp contrast between the unionist’s desired union structure and that of the employer.

As Johnson (1995) remarks, ‘the most important issue for the [developmental] elites is to depoliticize the labour movement’ (p. 49). In Japan, the depoliticization of the labour movement meant denying horizontal unionism, which was in alignment with management’s interests. Unlike its Western counterparts, the Japanese state was capable of eradicating the horizontal union movement at the onset of the collective bargaining era because of its late-developer advantages as well as Cold War politics, resulting in an enterprise union system in Japan. In other words, enterprise unionism in Japan is mainly the result of labour’s failure to institutionalize horizontal unions.

We believe that our proposed framework is timely because the emergence of enterprise unions in other Asian economies over the past decades has broadened the scope of enterprise union studies while magnifying their significance (Frenkel 1993; Jeong and Lawler 2007). A better understanding of the Japanese case will also aid in studying other similar cases where enterprise unionism has flourished. In addition, our framework will also be helpful in understanding the decentralization of collective bargaining that has been undertaken in many Western countries since the 1980s. We show how our framework can be applied to understand bargaining decentralization in Western countries in this article, although our discussion of this process will be brief because of space constraints.

This article consists of three parts. In the first part, we propose a theoretical framework, which emphasizes political dynamics and the role of the state in labour relations. We first describe strategic behavioural patterns of each of the tripartite actors (unionists, employers, and the state) under collective bargaining. In particular, we discuss the model in which the state seeks to decentralize the union movement, shifting the locus of power towards management in determining union structure. We then suggest factors that significantly alter the capacity and legitimacy of the state to define labour policy and detail the unique conditions found at the critical juncture in postwar Japan.

In the second part, we conduct a historical analysis of the union movement in Japan to test the validity of our proposed framework. Its sections are presented in chronological order. The first section investigates the

characteristics of early industrial workers and their organizations from the late nineteenth century until the first decade of the twentieth century, and point out the significant role of the state in preventing the development of horizontal labour unionism, particularly craft unionism. The second section illustrates the characteristics of the prewar union movement, and examines what 'paternalistic' managerial practices meant to both management and workers in prewar Japan. Despite management opposition and state suppression, we show that prewar Japanese unionists embraced horizontal unionism. In fact, almost all prewar unions were horizontal unions. The third section discusses the implications of state labour policy during the war period for the direction of the postwar union movement, emphasizing the impact of the prohibition of labour unionism and of workers' experience in running workplace units. The fourth section shows that Japanese workers embraced industrial unionism in the postwar period and explains why they formed mixed unions of blue- and white-collar workers at the plant level. The final section examines the critical juncture at which the state and management eradicated industrial unionism and an enterprise union system was institutionalized.

In the last part, based on our framework, we explain why enterprise unionism did not emerge in Western countries and test the validity of our framework with three major Western countries (i.e. the United Kingdom, Germany and the United States). We then go further to apply our framework to account for the decentralization of collective bargaining that has taken place in these countries (to a limited extent in Germany) since the 1980s.

2. A socio-political framework for enterprise unionism

Structural differences between early labour unions were largely due to their varying abilities to impose upon their members the rigorous discipline without which *unilateral* regulation could not succeed (e.g. apprenticeship by craft unions). Collective bargaining, however, suits any union structure, and recognition by employers and the state for the purpose of bargaining stabilizes and legitimizes existing union structures (Clegg 1976). Therefore, under collective bargaining, the claim of the union to represent its members no longer rests on its own strength alone. Rather, the underlying position of the union becomes essentially defensive. Collective bargaining thus brings with it intensified tension, conflict and struggle among the tripartite actors, as each of them attempts to institutionalize a type of union structure that will maximize its own benefit. This is why the locus of power — *politics* — among the tripartite actors at the onset of the collective bargaining era is critical in determining the dominance of a certain type of union structure in the following decades and why we propose a socio-political framework to explain the dominance of enterprise unions in Japan.

In the following pages, we describe the strategic behaviour of each of the tripartite actors under collective bargaining and discuss the model in which the state seeks to decentralize the union movement, which shifts the locus of

power towards the employer in determining union structure. We then suggest factors that significantly alter a state's capacity and legitimacy to define labour policy and describe the unique conditions present at the critical juncture in postwar Japan.

The Unionist

Under collective bargaining, which type of union structure do unionists prefer and attempt to establish? In general, unionists aim for a centralized union structure opposed to local exclusiveness (or monopoly). Importantly, this does *not* mean that Japanese unionists are exceptional in this regard. On the contrary, the Webbs' (1911) and Cole's (1953) research on Western unionism reveals that even in Western countries, horizontal unionism was not a built-in phenomenon, but instead was the result of unionists' endeavours against the strong inherited tradition of local exclusiveness and the natural desire of each branch to preserve its own local monopoly. In England, for example,

many of the earliest Trade Unions began in effect as works clubs or companionships, formal or informal associations of the workers employed by a particular establishment. Even when Trade Unionism became a general movement, many local trade societies and many branches of larger bodies continued to consist of workers drawn either from a single works or factory, or from a group of neighbouring and closely related works (Cole 1953: 5).

According to the Webbs (1911), the invariable tendency towards expansion lies in a union's desire to secure uniform minimum conditions throughout each industry; as such a uniform policy can only be arrived at and maintained by a central body acting for the whole trade. As a result, the universal tendency for a centralized and bureaucratic administration is accepted and even welcomed by staunch defenders of local autonomy in the union world. A union's desire to increase bargaining power and political influence also contributes to this tendency.

For unionists, success in institutionalizing a horizontal union system thus depends on whether they can overcome internal union politics, such as representational factors (Weber 1967) and collective action problems (Olson 1968), which make coercion and sanctions by the employer and the state important elements in the creation and viability of labour unions. As Tilly (1978) points out, people act collectively to maximize their collective gains, but they do so within the constraints set by the costs of collective action. When the costs of establishing a horizontal union system are too large, internal union politics intensifies and union leadership is challenged from below, which may result in cleavages and breakaways. In such cases, the unionists' initial intention may have to be given up, ending up with unintended union structures, such as enterprise unions. In this context, union members are likely to identify their interests in the survival of their firms, and co-operate with management on production issues, which blurs the distinction between unions and management. Once a horizontal union system is

institutionalized, unions can provide a better safeguard against their locals becoming excessively enterprise-oriented.

The Employer

Employers desire to remain as non-union as possible or deal with the most moderate unions because unions inherently interfere with management's prerogatives to the extent that they function (Herman *et al.* 1987). Once collective bargaining becomes an issue, employers take upon themselves a share of the responsibility for enforcing the rules.

Employers tend to disfavour centralization in union structure in principle. The rationale of employer opposition to centralization is twofold — economic and political. The structure of the union has a strong influence on decisions concerning the structure of bargaining. As Kochan and Katz (1988) note, centralization in union structure tends to enable the union to achieve centralized bargaining, which in turn increases its ability to impose strike costs on the employers and strengthens its bargaining power, particularly against large and financially strong employers. This may explain why larger employers more strongly oppose centralization in union structure than small and highly competitive employers in localized product and labour markets that may consent to centralized bargaining for fear of being 'whipsawed' (Hendricks and Kahn 1982).

Besides this economic reason, centralization in union structure also relates to unions' political empowerment in that a centralized union can become a powerful interest group with a greater ability, for example, to influence labour legislation. The cause is more political in nature, however, when union centralization is coupled with ideology, as radical and ideology-oriented unions (which must go beyond the enterprise to raise a common struggle on a class basis) can threaten the foundation of management prerogatives.

Therefore, unless they can exclude unions from their own enterprises, employers would attempt to stimulate internal union politics (or 'local egoism') and 'frame' workers' interests in line with the interests of the enterprise in order to scuttle attempts to build horizontal unions and working-class consciousness. They could also try to form 'productivity coalitions' with more co-operative employees and integrate their unions into the decision making of management in a subordinate way. In this context, workers are induced to identify their interests with the survival of the firm, and co-operate with management on production issues as a rational, economic actor. This in turn blurs the distinction between unions and management and weakens class consciousness. The sharp contrast between the unionist's and the employer's desired union structure makes the state a key actor.

The State

The state is referred to as a set of continuous administrative, legal, bureaucratic and coercive systems, headed, and more or less well co-ordinated, by an

executive authority (Evans *et al.* 1985). The overlap between the aims of state policy and the interests of any of the major economic groups is both partial and contingent, because states rarely pursue economic growth and/or welfare for their own sake, but rather as a means to their own political and military ends (Tilly 1985).

The political importance of the labour movement to the state lies in unions' concrete collective power either to bestow political *support* or to mobilize *opposition* (Collier and Collier 1991). Because of this double-edged capacity of a centralized labour movement, the state cannot be assumed to have an inherent preference for either centralization or decentralization in union structure. Rather, the state must make a strategic choice.

The Model

The state might decide to decentralize a centralized labour movement, which is most likely if the state holds the perception that the labour movement is too aggressive (i.e. strike-prone and/or ideology-oriented). Suppose that the state possesses enough autonomy, capacity and legitimacy to adopt any strategic choice and actions. The state would then attempt to eliminate the aggressive centralized labour movement. The successful elimination of the aggressive centralized labour movement paves the way for an enterprise union system. To prevent a resurgence of an aggressive centralized labour movement, the state is likely to use overt and/or covert measures, such as legal enforcement of an enterprise union, prohibition of certain types of horizontal unions, or manipulation and surveillance of workers at the workplace. An enterprise union system then emerges and dominates the labour movement. We label these measures *mechanisms of production* of an enterprise union system.

This legacy may then be reproduced through a continuous, consistent state policy (labour law and/or manipulation and surveillance), management endeavours (human resource management, internal labour markets, welfare programmes, etc.) and 'enterprise consciousness' among workers, which may develop along with the institutionalization of this system. The completeness and stability of enterprise unionism depends on the effectiveness and consistency with which these mechanisms are implemented.

Note, however, that the elimination of aggressive horizontal unions themselves does not necessarily guarantee the emergence of an enterprise union system because the state may also seek to reorganize and manipulate the centralized labour movement for its own ends. If the state seeks centralization in union structure, the emergence of an enterprise union system is highly unlikely because no driving force towards enterprise unionism exists naturally among unionists. In such a case, employers would also welcome centralization in union structure because if the centralized unions were tightly controlled by the state, employers would have the advantage of dealing with more moderate unions, without significant effort on their part.

On the other hand, if an aggressive centralized labour movement is absent, centralization and decentralization policies are equally viable possible

options for the state. Again, depending on the extent to which the state attempts to institutionalize an enterprise union system, and management is able to deal with shop-floor matters, enterprise unionism can dominate the IR system.

Environment and Timing

Because a decentralized union policy runs directly against unionists' preferences, whether or not a state attempts to implement such a policy depends on its capacity and legitimacy. We suggest two factors that significantly alter a state's capacity and legitimacy — the external environment in which the state is embedded and the timing of the policy.

Geopolitics can greatly affect the internal politics of the state. As historians have observed, military and political competition between states is both one of the most conspicuous features of the modern world and historically one of the most important means by which state managers have enhanced their independence from civil society (Tilly 1985; Zeitlin 1985). Such an environment also enables the state to mobilize greater resources and to enhance legitimacy for its policies (if necessary) against the interests of major economic groups. At the same time, the state can also gain support and aid from allied powers, which may in turn help ease possible pressure from international (labour and human rights) organizations.

We know that the state can play a vital role in shaping economic and industrial relations systems, but this is particularly so in the early stages of economic development (Black 2001; Clegg 1976). When the economy is underdeveloped, the availability of intermediaries is limited, firms' capabilities are modest, and even the efficiency of markets is hampered by poor integration and the underdevelopment of property-rights arrangements in the economy. Under these circumstances, the ability of the private sector to solve challenging co-ordination problems is limited, and government policy may play a more significant role in facilitating development (Aoki 1997). Union structure is no exception to this norm. There is a larger window of opportunity for the state to manipulate the union movement at the early stage of the collective bargaining era when, with rapid unionization, a national union system is being formed. As a certain type of union is institutionalized, it becomes increasingly difficult for the state to overturn the prevailing form. This is why we designate state labour policy at the onset of the collective bargaining era as a critical juncture in our framework.

Why in Japan?

In this regard, Japan possessed unique conditions, both internal and external. First, as a late developer, it lacked the Western patterns of industrialization (e.g. those present in England) in which a wealthy entrepreneurial class provided both the capital and the know-how (Gerschenkron 1962). Rather, the state was the prime agent of industrialization. In the absence of strong

regional or landed elites, military groups or exclusionary political parties became Japan's unified elite (Aoki 1997; Deyo 1987). Thus, with little incentive to distribute political rents in favour of any particular economic class, political leaders and bureaucrats in Japan were able to treat the government of their country as if it were the management of a household.

More important, however, is the fact that the collective bargaining era in Japan started during the Cold War. Despite the substantial labour movement and dramatic episodes of worker protest in prewar Japan, the imperialist military powers delayed the emergence of collective bargaining until the end of World War II. The Cold War strengthened the state's autonomy and power, and the legitimacy of its repressive labour policies. As seen from the perspective of the American Cold War strategy, there can be no doubt that the Pacific Rim region, extending from Japan to Indonesia, formed a continuous space for the establishment of hegemony in Asia (Yoshimi 2003). American geopolitical concerns stimulated attacks on vested economic interests and supported economically interventionist states in this region (Evans 1987). These unique conditions created and maintained the powerful state and dictated the nature of industrial relations in Japan during the Cold War.

Our historical analysis in the following sections will test the validity of this framework. In the following section, we start our analysis by investigating the characteristics of early industrial workers and their organizations from a comparative perspective, starting in the late nineteenth century and continuing up to the first decade of the twentieth century. We point out here the significant role of the state played during this period in preventing the development of labour unionism, particularly craft unionism.

3. Early industrial workers and their organizations

The beginning of Japanese industrialization goes back to the 1860s and 1870s when large-scale factories were first built with foreign technical assistance to produce munitions for defence and textiles for foreign exchange (*Nihon Rodo Undo Shiryo (NRUS) I* 1962). Early industrialization had a significant impact on the working lives of traditional artisans. While some of them would become independent self-employed owners of small factories in later life, others drifted into heavy industry to be factory workers (Odaka 1993). Nonetheless, the majority of workers in the large factories of the nineteenth century practised skills with indigenous roots, and a good number of them were retrained artisans (Gordon 1988).

Unlike the popular image of contemporary Japanese workers with 'lifetime employment', early modern Japanese workers frequently moved between factories. Several factors account for this high mobility. First of all, it was customary or obligatory for journeymen to be *watari shokunin* (footloose travellers) to polish their skills, as was the case in Europe (Weber 1927). Second, the network of masters, who had *de facto* authority over employment decisions, facilitated journeymen's moves between factories. Third,

competitive recruitment, spurred by a labour shortage, induced workers to frequently move to higher-paying workplaces. Fourth, workers could move smoothly across firms, large and small, to find jobs because a consistent wage gap between large and small firms had not yet been established (Endo 1946; *NRUS I* 1962). In short, as in Europe, broad horizontal labour markets for craftsmen existed in Japan.

Why then, despite forming broad horizontal labour markets, did the early modern Japanese craftsmen not reproduce guild organizations to control the labour market like their counterparts in Europe? In Ujihara's (1961) view, it was due to the Japanese artisans' 'inferiority complex' of their lower status in society, caused by the division between *kino* (artisanship practised by craftsmen) and *gizutsu* (technical skill practised by educated technicians) during the period of rapid industrialization. This technical view overlooks the most critical aspect of this phenomenon.

It is important to note that the organizations of traders and artisans in late feudal and early modern Japan were under the arbitrary control of authorities, unlike their counterparts in Europe (Nimura 1997). Although the feudalistic regulations were fetters stipulating their lives and behaviours, they were also the bulwarks that protected artisans' freedom from merchants and commercial capital (Endo 1985). As a popular Tokugawa saying ('the Edoite never slept overnight on his money') implies, they did not have difficulties finding jobs to make their living.

It was the state that brought about what Ujihara (1961: 110) called the 'Japanese craftsmen's tragedy', by completely abolishing the prestigious Tokugawa-era guilds of artisans and granting freedom of occupation by the early 1870s as a part of the Meiji Restoration (Yokoyama [1899] (1950)). The rapid industrialization, led by governmental power, required a mass of labourers for manufacturing factories, and artisans were forced to drift into factories becoming 'those who were most behind the times' (*Tokyo Keizai Zasshi* 1891). In 1894, Takano Fusataro, who would later become the originator of the Japanese labour movement, lamented, 'A quarter of a century ago it was the common expression to arrange the ranking of the people, as: (1) militant [samurai], (2) farmers, (3) mechanics, and (4) merchants; but now the order of the ranks are somewhat changed; namely, (1) militant, (2) farmers, (3) merchants, and (4) mechanics' (*American Federationist* 1894: 165).

With no means of protecting their own status, the sudden changes brought about by the developmental state confused and frustrated early industrial workers. In contrast to their Western counterparts, they became too helpless to regulate apprenticeship and the overall labour market. As Weber (1927) observed, none of the Western states attempted to destroy guilds, although some of them endeavoured to attract factories into their countries by granting them special privileges, which would protect against the guilds in the process of industrialization. It was the unique but ruthless labour policy of the Japanese developmental state that dramatically changed the direction of the Japanese labour movement from the onset of industrialization. From this

point on, craft unionism would no longer be a realistic option for the labour movement in Japan.

Early Labour Organizations

The earliest *bona fide* unions in Japan came into existence in the late nineteenth century. In 1897, a group of progressive intellectuals established the Kiseikai (Labor Union Promotion Society) to disseminate trade unionism and to put pressure on the government to enact factory legislation (Yokoyama [1899] (1950)). In referring to it as a trade union school, Takano, its founder, saw the immediate goal of the Kiseikai as enlightening the 'ignorant' public on the need for healthy labour unions to solve the country's labour problems (*American Federationist* 1897). Takano cried out: 'Why do the large majority of the Japanese working people perform work which is performed by animals in the United States or Europe? What necessity has driven a man to pull a cart on which some human being is seated?' (*American Federationist* 1894: 163).

This is, without doubt, a reflection of Takano's deep admiration of the strong American labour movement gained during his studies in San Francisco from 1886 through 1896. During this period, he came to associate with Samuel Gompers (the originator and then president of the American Federation of Labor (AFL)) whose influence would long remain with Takano (Hyman 1959). Takano returned to Japan as an organizer for the AFL. Takano was not the only Japanese labour leader influenced by the American labour movement at the time. In fact, for the most part, the early Japanese union leaders were theologians and intellectuals, many of whom had been in the United States as students or as workers and had been involved with AFL activities in the San Francisco area (Levine 1958).

Accordingly, the guiding ideology was not revolutionary but pragmatic business unionism. This also explains why the labour leaders saw *craft* unionism as the organizational principle (*NRUS I* 1962). Yet, as discussed earlier, the state's labour policy negated the option of craft unions to Japanese workers. The Kiseikai's attempt notwithstanding, the resulting union structures were unexpected ones, such as an amorphous industrial union (Iron Workers Union) and a craft union of engineers within a company (Japanese Railway Workers' Reform Association) (*NRUS II* 1963).

Even the non-revolutionary unionism of this period was too much for the ruling Japanese elites to tolerate. The state, with the promulgation of the Public Peace Police Act in 1900, severely suppressed labour unions, already weakened by employer opposition and by an economic depression that set in at the turn of the century. When the union leaders turned to political action during the depression, they met similar suppression (Sumiya 1966). The state's suppression of the embryonic labour movement drove the leadership underground and towards left-wing ideologies. Katayama, for example, at first an adherent of Gompersism, later embraced communism and eventually

fled to the United States and then to Soviet Russia. Others who had visited America in the early 1900s, such as Kotoku Shusui, shifted rapidly from socialism to the anarchistic approach of the Industrial Workers of the World. The Socialist Party itself, while it lasted, was rife with factionalism, reflecting its scramble for a guiding ideology. Thus, despite the awakening of class consciousness among workers, it was impossible to develop a healthy trade union movement (Hazama 1963). As Skocpol (1985) remarks, 'The meanings of public life and collective forms through which groups become aware of political goals and work to attain them arise, not from societies alone, but at the meeting points of states and societies' (p. 27).

We have so far discussed why craft unionism was not an option for the Japanese labour movement and how unionists' attempts to build concrete craft unions were unsuccessful in the harsh environment of state suppression and management opposition. However, we should not conclude that this was a direct cause of enterprise unionism in Japan. Other types of horizontal unionism, such as industrial and general unions, remained organizational options for Japanese workers. In the following section, we illustrate the characteristics of the prewar union movement and provide evidence that prewar Japanese unionists still embraced horizontal unionism. Despite continuous management opposition and state suppression, horizontal unions remained the norm during the prewar period.

4. Prewar unionism and authoritarian paternalism

The Yuaikai (Friendly Society), modelled after the British Friendly Societies, came into existence in 1912 under the leadership of Suzuki Bunji. Orientation towards AFL philosophy predominated, after Suzuki visited the United States during the war period, attended AFL conventions, and came to have a personal connection with Gompers. Suzuki made it clear that the Yuaikai, in the spirit of social reformism, sought co-operation and harmony, not conflict, between capital and labour (Large 1972). He strove throughout to persuade the public of the social and economic benefits of labour unions. For example, he asserted in *Rodo oyobi Sangyo* (July 1, 1917), 'A labour movement is for improving the quality of labour so as to increase the value of labour. Naturally, as an increase in earnings simultaneously stimulates consumption, it becomes the ground [for] the prosperity of industry.'

By strongly emphasizing their differences from socialism, Yuaikai leaders adroitly evaded legal repression, and the Yuaikai's moderation impressed a number of employers who permitted the formation of local branches within their enterprises (*NRUS III* 1968). With more favourable conditions for the development of labour unionism, such as the rapid increase in the working class, the formation of the ILO, and Japan's international embarrassment when pseudo delegates to the ILO were discovered, the Yuaikai grew to a membership of 30,000 in 120 unions by 1920 (Shiota 1964). Importantly,

the Yuaikai's growth also owed much to its shift to industrial unionism, beginning in 1918.

However, under wage cuts and discharges following the sudden end of the war boom, the Yuaikai became vulnerable to the influence of more radical intellectuals who entered the Yuaikai and seized effective control of the organization in 1918 and 1919. By 1920, anarcho-syndicalist organizers, who held sway in two smaller printers' unions, made significant inroads into the Sodomei-Yuaikai's local unions in Eastern Japan (Omae and Ikeda 1966).

Company (or yellow) unions were fostered to combat the syndicalist unions, and ultra-rightist organizations such as the Kokusuikai (Nationalist League) were used by management as strong-arm men. Many strikes were also suppressed by the police or the army. The Peace Preservation Law of 1925 tightened censorship over unsound and antisocial liberal and communist thought by adding capital punishment and lifetime imprisonment for such crimes, along with taking leftists into preventive custody (Miyake 1991). Note, however, that while the law succeeded in repressing the labour movement, it also had the effect of pushing the working class in the direction not only of socialism but also of syndicalism, which employed illegal mobilization techniques.

In 1922, the socialists, syndicalists and communists failed to come to agreement over the issue of establishing a single unifying labour centre. By this time, splits developed within the Sodomei (Japan General Federation of Labor) as it swung to the left and supported the Marxist class-struggle ideology, abandoning the Suzuki philosophy. By 1927, the Sodomei split into three competing centres: the Hyogikai on the left, the Nihon Rodo Kumiai Domei (League of Japanese Labor Unions) in the centre, and the Sodomei on the right. Each, moreover, supported a different political party, heightening the ideological differences. In 1929, one faction within the Sodomei withdrew and joined the centrist group to form the Zenkoku Rodo Kumiai Domei (National League of Labor Unions) (Shiota 1964).

As Beyme (1980: 56) observed in his comparative study, too strong a political engagement of intellectuals' associations hinders rather than helps efforts to integrate various factions into unions. In the 1920s, the Japanese labour movement was principally a battleground for competing ideologies imported from abroad, retaining little room for any organic philosophy to grow as the main theme of Japanese trade unionism. But, it is important to note that these battles were to a great extent driven by state policy and that enterprise unionism was never one of the competing principles for the Japanese unionists.

The Manchurian Incident of 1931, the ascent of the militarists to power and the Great Depression deeply influenced the Japanese labour movement. The splits deepened as leftists moved further left and rightists further right. Nationalist appeals strengthened the hand of the right-wing groups who endorsed Japan's militaristic course, winning public sympathy with demonstrations of patriotism. Following the prohibition of the May Day celebration in 1936 and of the Hyogikai a year later, the union movement

in Japan went into a rapid decline. When the Shanghai Incident occurred in 1937, labour unions were forced to dissolve. Independent trade unionism lapsed into silence in the late 1930s (*NRUS VII* 1964).

Authoritarian Paternalism

Starting in the 1900s, management began to assert direct control in the workplace, dismantling the *oyakata* (boss) system. It attempted to articulate a coherent ideology of paternalism both to counter government pressure for a factory law and to justify its new institutional framework of labour cultivation and control. Organized labour in large factories, however, rejected the newly articulated ideology of industrial paternalism, showing scant enthusiasm for mutual-aid or educational programmes designed to put this ideology into practice (Gordon 1988). The workers were footloose travellers, and Japan's wage system closely resembled the Western model, as described by Okochi *et al.* (1973: 487–88): 'Wage rates were determined by the ranking of an occupation or by the grade of skill within an occupation, without relationship to years of service in the same firm and without a necessary relationship to age. With mobility encouraging their spirit of independence and pride, workers believed that, wherever they might go, the sun and rice were waiting for them.'

In the 1920s, management launched a reinforcement of the institutional framework for stronger control over the workplace, evidenced by increases in the ratio of foremen to rank-and-file workers. In response to the labour movement pressure, management also made some efforts to institute amenities and to improve wages and working conditions. Employment in the 1920s and 1930s became considerably more stable than in earlier years (Taira 1970). This stability is the building block of the internal labour market argument. We should not overplay the impact of these managerial practices, however. Despite their rhetoric of 'familism', managers did not rely on the paternal provision of care to secure efficient labour. As Gordon (1988) remarks, if the enterprise was a family, then workers were servants; if a community, workers were misfits liable to steal or cause trouble. Managers did not eliminate practices that separated workers from white-collar employees and humiliated them: separate entrances, toilets and dining halls; body checks, punitive work rules, incentive wages and job insecurity. As Taira (1970) also notes, there were no well-established recruiting programmes for blue-collar workers. The inconsistency of company welfare did not generate long-term commitment among workers. Consequently, a high degree of voluntary turnover coexisted with occasional mass discharges, which in turn resulted in unsuccessful training programmes.

The decline in labour mobility (albeit still to a high degree) was due to the generally stagnant state of employment in the depression of 1929–1931 rather than to enterprise consciousness. Faced with an increasing wage gap between regular workers and daily workers from the late 1920s through the 1930s, regular workers in large firms were reluctant to leave the firm. However, labour mobility increased again in the late 1930s, with the rapid expansion of

employment under the impetus of war requirements and a reduction in the wage gap between regular workers and daily workers (Ohkawa and Rosovsky 1973; Taira 1970). The re-emergence of such mobility in the late 1930s indicates the limited impact of the managerial practices on workers' behaviour, and raises strong doubts about the causal argument linking enterprise consciousness to the decline of labour mobility, which lies at the core of the internal labour market hypothesis.

The disguised gesture of paternalistic behaviour only went as far as necessary to oust horizontal unions, like the Hyogikai, from factories. Management's desire was manifested in a number of policies: the establishment of company unions; closed shop agreements with enterprise unions; setting up works councils (which were in most cases little more than sounding boards exhorting the workers to serve the company); and signing oaths of loyalty to the firm (which were powerful constraints on the workers because they could lead to dismissal if broken) (Kimoto 1964; Okochi 1962). At the same time, rather than compromise, employers were more frequently inclined to reject workers' demands when unions were involved in the disputes. In opposing trade unions, employers were acting on principle rather than on the basis of costs (Taira 1970).

It was large companies that used these anti-union tactics. Along with the formation of *Zaibatsu* (semi-monopoly conglomerates), large firms in heavy industry were able to develop and maintain strong levels of solidarity against the horizontal unions. Again, the story might have been different had the developmental state not been present. The formation of *Zaibatsu* was supported by the Major Industry Regulation Law of 1931. The 1900 Police Law and the 1925 Peace Preservation Law targeted horizontal unions as an outside agitating force and as a radicalist movement, respectively. Not surprisingly, while encouraging the establishment of works councils since 1918, the government itself regarded enterprise unions as healthy and relatively benign (Hashimoto 1984).

In this context, despite the expansion of union membership (see Table 1), the horizontal unions were not successful in 'climbing over the iron walls' of the large enterprises and getting inside them. The effectiveness of union power was limited even in establishments where unions were present. Seventy-one per cent of the workers in unionized public enterprises were union members, while only a quarter of the workers in private firms where unions had footholds were union members (Taira 1970). Yet, this was by no means unique to Japan. In the United States, for example, AFL unions found safer harbour in smaller business and other sectors outside corporate America. In a hostile age, AFL unions were unsuccessful in industries dominated by large firms determined not to recognize them (Raurie 1989).

Paternalism as a response to the prewar labour movement was the Japanese counterpart to the 'American Plan' which also demoralized the AFL during the 1920s. With these management practices, large Japanese employers succeeded in bringing some master craftsmen to their side. Despite

TABLE 1
Number of Unions and Their Members in Japan (1918–1945)

<i>Year</i>	<i>No. of unions</i>	<i>Membership</i>	<i>Year</i>	<i>No. of unions</i>	<i>Membership</i>
1918	107		1932	932	377,625
1919	187		1933	942	384,613
1920	273		1934	965	387,964
1921	300	103,412	1935	993	408,662
1922	389	137,381	1936	973	420,589
1923	432	125,551	1937	837	395,290
1924	469	228,278	1938	731	375,191
1925	457	254,262	1939	517	365,804
1926	488	284,739	1940	49	6,455
1927	505	309,493	1941	11	895
1928	501	308,900	1942	3	111
1929	630	330,985	1943	3	155
1930	712	354,312	1944	—	—
1931	818	368,975	1945	509	380,677

Source: Ministry of Labor (1954), *Yearbook of Labor Statistics*.

their early initiatives in labour movement activities, many craftsmen abstained from strikes in this period (*NRUS IX* 1965). Importantly, this suggests that, with substantial effort, employers could draw these men successfully into the lower ranks of a hierarchy of supervision. We will witness this tendency again in the emergence of the ‘second’ (or breakaway) unions in postwar Japan.

Important to note here is that most prewar Japanese unions were composed of highly mobile workers, and accordingly, they were horizontally organized. During the 1930s, more than 30 per cent of the trade union membership belonged to industrial unions. Craft unions and general unions shared the rest. The industrial unions had more than 900 members per union while the other unions claimed considerably less than 200 per union (Komatsu 1971; Taira 1970). In short, the prewar union movement, reflecting ideological conflicts, was composed of a few types of horizontal unions in form and a few types of horizontal unionism in content. Prewar Japanese unionists never thought in terms of enterprise unionism.

We now move to a discussion of how state policy during the war period affected the postwar union movement, where we emphasize the impact of the prohibition of labour unionism and of workers’ experience in running workplace units.

5. Sanpo units under military powers

Modelled after the Nazi Labour Front, various Sanpo (Japan Association for Service to the State through Industry) organizations, with all employees as members, were established ‘from above’ by the factory and the enterprise

from 1938 onward. Sanpo's emphasis lay in industrial patriotism and co-operative labour-management relations, as indicated by the rhetoric of 'one organic body of capital, management and labour' to serve the 'prosperity of the Empire' in its platform (*NRUS IX* 1965: 602). Far from the rhetoric was the reality at the workplace. A labour manager later recalled, 'There was discrimination on every level. It didn't shrink a bit, despite Sanpo' (Gordon 1988: 312).

The bureaucratic and discriminatory treatment against blue-collar workers paralleled a decline in morale among lower ranking white-collar workers. Indeed, the 'alienation' among lower ranking white-collar workers had already begun along with the formation of Zaibatsu in the 1920s. As large firms grew dramatically in size and the number of white-collar workers rapidly increased, a majority of lower white-collar workers became discontented with the relatively few chances for promotion, which is one of the major factors that predispose white-collar workers (including technicians) to accept unions and to become militant (Mills 1951). The degradation of the lower white-collar workers was manifested by the increasing demands of physical labour in the wartime, which significantly reduced the wage gap between blue- and white-collar workers (SSRIUT 1959). Despite continuing discriminatory treatment against blue-collar workers, the social distance between blue-collar workers and lower ranking white-collar workers diminished.

The failure of the Sanpo movement and the discontent of workers were evidenced in their morale problems, such as indifference to the activities of the local Sanpo units, soaring absenteeism, sabotage and complaints about the progressively lengthening working hours (Okochi 1958). Worse still, managers illegally sold production materials on the black market for their own benefit and embezzled special rations supplied for workers (Hazama 1963). With such deprivation, workers' dissatisfaction with the government and management would fuel the explosive postwar labour movement amid a growing spirit of egalitarianism.

The wartime period had at least three significant implications for the direction of the postwar labour movement. First, it meant time lost for the labour movement and horizontal unionism. The time lost was not an intermission but a blackout for the embryonic horizontal unions whose leaders and members had to develop their own path, digesting the ideologies imported from abroad. Second, the Sanpo units provided workers with experience in running vertical organizations confined to a company. As Hazama (1963) points out, some labour unions in the immediate postwar days also inherited the property of the Sanpo units under the instruction of the General Headquarters. Third, given the inevitability of labour unions' increasing influence, management must have considered this vertical model tolerable, for they had attempted to implement similar schemes in their factories in the previous two decades.

We discuss these points again in the following section in which we explain why Japanese workers formed their organizations at the workshop (plant) level. We also discuss the unique conditions that led Japanese unionists to

organize both blue- and white-collar workers in the same organization in the early postwar years.

6. Postwar union movements under industrial unionism

The Supreme Commander for the Allied Powers (SCAP) adopted three fundamental labour laws in the 1945–1947 period, which gave workers the rights to organize, to collectively bargain and to strike. This in turn spurred the stormy development of the Japanese labour unions in the early postwar years. The great bulk of the growth occurred during 1946, when nearly 5 million workers joined unions and more than 17,000 unions were established. Between the time of the surrender and early 1949 the number of Japanese union members grew from zero to about 6.7 million, accounting for 55.8 per cent of the industrial labour force (see Table 2). It was in this period that collective bargaining in Japan developed.

The stormy growth of the labour unions was accompanied by a number of organizational peculiarities. First, these unions were for the most part *plant* unions (Nomura 1993). Second, membership tended to be comprised of all eligible blue- and white-collar *regular* employees, excluding temporary employees, subcontract labour, casuals and others (58.9 per cent of all unions with 62.6 per cent of total membership included both blue- and white-collar workers). Finally, unionization took place almost exclusively in the modern sectors, leaving the great mass of workers in the small and medium enterprises unorganized — two-thirds of total union membership was concentrated in fewer than 5 per cent of the basic union units, each with 1,000 or more members (Ministry of Labor 1960). We should understand why this was the case.

Up to that time, difficulties had been increasing, with acute shortages of food and clothing, and a wave of inflation and mounting prices. It can be seen

TABLE 2
Growth of Japanese Trade Unions between 1945 and 1953

<i>Year</i>	<i>No. of unions</i>	<i>Membership</i>	<i>Union Density (%)</i>
1944	0	0	0
1945	509	380,677	—
1946	12,006	3,679,971	40.0
1947	23,323	5,594,699	45.3
1948	33,926	6,677,427	53.0
1949	34,688	6,655,483	55.8
1950	29,144	5,773,908	46.2
1951	27,644	5,686,774	42.6
1952	27,851	5,719,560	40.3
1953	30,129	5,842,678	40.4

Source: Ministry of Labor (1946–1953), *Rodo Kumiai Kihon Chosa*.

TABLE 3
 Statistics of Real Family Budgets in the Immediate Postwar Years
 (Based on Statistics in 1934)

<i>Year</i>	<i>Average</i>	<i>Food</i>	<i>Clothing</i>	<i>Light/Heat</i>	<i>Housing</i>	<i>Miscellaneous</i>
1934 (Nov.)	100	100	100	100	100	100
1947 (Nov.)	55.4	58.6	22.4	110.6	35.3	100.9
1948 (Nov.)	61.2	68.6	25.4	99.1	36.8	87.5
1949 (Nov.)	65.0	74.8	24.6	106.9	46.3	87.1
1950 (Nov.)	69.8	79.4	35.7	103.8	44.8	85.8
1951 (Nov.)	68.9	73.3	39.9	104.3	44.4	91.7
1952 (Nov.)	80.2	79.3	64.4	111.4	54.2	104.3
1953 (Nov.)	94.0	100.5	82.5	121.1	71.0	106.2
1954 (Nov.)	100.0	105.5	82.5	128.7	74.1	120.0
1955 (Jan–May)	96.5	104.8	69.8	137.1	62.7	115.8

Source: Ministry of Labor (1955), *Rodo Tokei Chosa Geppo*.

from this trend that whereas the percentage increase in rice prices during the war was 89 per cent, the end of the war precipitated a rise of 224 per cent. The repatriation of more than 6 million civilians, soldiers and sailors added to the impact of wartime destruction. Agricultural households could not absorb the labour surplus in the urban areas. The daily sky-rocketing prices made starvation an immediate fear even for a skilled worker. Leading bureaucrats were predicting a total collapse of economic activity by March 1947, and by 1949, prices were 150 times higher than they had been four years earlier (Central Labor Committee 1966; Cohen 1987). The most decisive factor affecting living conditions in the immediate postwar years was the lag of wages behind inflation (see Table 3). Major employers and the government (the biggest employer with a total of a million and half employees) had no fixed or workable wage policy to address the paralysing situation. Given the rampant inflation, employers were unable to even consider the relationship between wage rates and the quality/quantity of labour until at least 1951 (SSRIUT, 1959).

Fuelled by the deprivation and anger of masses of workers, union activists were militant in their tactics and often radical in their goals. They locked out managers and ran factories, railroads or mines on their own with demands such as employment security and democratization. This ‘production control’ movement (started by the workers at the Yomiuri Newspaper Company) reached its peak in June 1946. Centred in large companies, it spread throughout society during this period (Matsuyama 1976). Links between farmers and workers developed for union-controlled circuits of production and exchange, involving workers at chemical plants, coal miners and farmer associations. Workers at all major steel mills produced salt for bartering with farmers for food (Yamamoto 1977).

In these circumstances, it was certainly natural for workers to form their organizations at the plant level. In the face of management’s failures, the plant union became crucial to carrying out production control for survival. Organizers felt that it was too time-consuming to distribute handbills to

individuals at the factory gate to encourage each individual to join the union, as they had done in the prewar years. Instead, they organized the employees all together at once in the factory yard where they opened an organizational meeting. Unionization took place in large companies first because large firms had more critical crises in production because of their organizational inflexibility in the collapse of the wartime economy (Central Labor Committee 1966).

Blue- and white-collar workers, whose social distance had narrowed in the past decades, now had strong reasons for co-operating with one another under the rhetoric of 'democracy in industry'. They had to act as a unit to survive in the severe economic crisis. Blue-collar workers, suddenly given the right to organize, needed the skills and organizational knowledge of white-collar workers in order to achieve better working conditions through union organizing. As Ayusawa (1953) observed, the heavy air raids during the war destroyed reading materials on the subject for workers who had been 'colour-blinded' in respect to social and labour problems by the prewar militarists' suppression of reading, writing and teaching about these problems. From the perspective of white-collar workers, the co-operation of blue-collar workers was necessary to carry out demands and strikes.

As a result, the rhetoric of democracy and the need to act together worked dialectically, making possible the formation of mixed unions of blue- and white-collar workers. They also had experience in running such vertical organizations through the Sanpo units. Industrial federations came later. The result was plant unions that included all employees regardless of their status, excluding only those who represented the company's interests (managers above a certain level) and temporary workers, most of whom were prisoners of war, Koreans and conscript labourers (SSRIUT, 1956). A new totalitarian labour movement was promoted, and the unions fostered the collapse of status discrimination.

On the first day after defeat (August 16, 1945) the All Japan Seamen's Union issued its call for industrial unionism. Thereafter, leaders of the national federations stressed the importance of industry-wide agreements as the first step in going beyond the plant to build powerful industrial unions. By summer 1946, industry-wide agreements became a priority, especially for the Sanbetsu (Takahashi 1965). The Communist-dominated Sanbetsu, the leading national federation in numbers, had almost complete control over such unions as the Metal Workers and Miners. Their opposition was divided, and, with a few exceptions, weak. Top Sodomei leaders (who preferred general unions) were mostly from an older generation, and lacked the type of dynamism necessary to compete with the vigorous young leftist elements. The prewar leaders of the moderate unions were also discredited after the war (Price 1997).

Some resistance to Communist tactics of 'politics first' and hence to Communist leadership was felt at the local level, where unions were deeply involved in the struggle to survive. Yet this by no means negates the fact that Communist gains up to the spring of 1947 were continuous and substantial

(Scalapino 1965). Workers and unions were clearly predisposed to working-class solidarity that transcended the enterprise, and the collective bargaining structure was increasingly moving away from the enterprise and becoming centralized (Price 1997; SSRIUT 1950). The plant unions were being turned into local units of industrial unions under the organizational principles of 'one union at one shop' and 'one union in one industry'.

In short, the postwar Japanese union movement was composed of plant unions in form and industrial unionism in content. In the following section, we demonstrate the process in which the plant unions were transformed into enterprise unions through the fatal defeat of their industrial unionism by the state and management. We analyse here the significant role the state played in this process, which is the critical juncture in our framework.

7. From industrial unionism to enterprise unionism

Opposed to the 'dynamic rebellious masses' of the labour movement were the forces not only of capital but also of the state, which was determined to make Japan the 'fortress against Communism in Asia' (Okochi and Matsuo 1969: 217). Determined to isolate militant groups from the rest of the labour movement, the state proceeded to weaken many of the protections guaranteed by the 1945 Trade Union Law. In 1948, the conservative Yoshida cabinet took on the left-wing public employees' unions by sponsoring legislation that prevented workers in public enterprises from striking. An accompanying law denied civil servants the rights to strike and to bargain collectively and restricted union membership to employees of each public enterprise (Yamaguchi 1983). The Yoshida cabinet completed the overhaul of labour organization in 1949, with revisions of the original Trade Union Law and the 1946 Labor Relations Adjustment Law. Both SCAP and the Labor Ministry regarded the revised legislation as an important instrument for denying trade union rights to Communist-backed organizations (Ayusawa 1962). With these developments, management engaged in disputes at Toho Motion Pictures in 1948 (Ito 1999), Toshiba in 1949 (Yamamoto 1983), and the National Railways in 1949 (Suzuki 1999), and labour suffered clear defeats.

US and Japanese officials, together with the Sodomei, assisted in the formation of the internal 'Democratization Leagues' (Mindō) by some Sanbetsu organizers (primarily lower-level office workers) who had come to resent Communist Party interference. Both sets of authorities lectured workers on the need for free, responsible and autonomous unions (Okochi and Matsuo 1969). With the breakout of the Korean War in 1950, the Yoshida cabinet together with SCAP carried out the sweeping 'red purges', which entailed the dismissal of more than 12,000 activists, many of whom filled key leadership posts in all of the major industrial federations (Okochi 1955). Given the inevitability of unions, managers decided what type of unions they would work with, and vigorously supported the formation of

more co-operative, anti-Communist second unions within enterprises (Cusumano 1985; Fujita 1955). Consequently, the influence of the Sanbetsu was seriously undermined.

Now came the critical moment to destroy the 'illusion of a power balance' between capital and labour (Fox 1974: 279). The targets were the industrial federations, a major source of the postwar labour movement. The government, SCAP and Nikkeiren (Japan Federation of Employers' Associations) plotted to assassinate the 'prince of industrial unionism', Densan (Conference of Electricity Unions). The Densan was the major driving force not only in promoting solidarity and an industrial orientation among workers, but also in turning the orientation of the Sohyo (General Council of Trade Unions of Japan) to the left. At the macro-level, any move to 'socialize the supply of electricity' was also seen by conservatives as not only a threat to control over a strategic industry but also the first step towards changing the entire social system and introducing some form of socialism (Kawanish 1992).

The plan was cleverly designed to divide the national electricity supply company (Nippatsu) into nine regional enterprises. By merging the generation and power supply operations, both the rationalization of the industry advocated by the Densan and the dismantling of the Densan could be simultaneously achieved. If the enterprise consciousness of the workers could then be heightened, the Densan would eventually become nothing more than a loose federation of independent enterprise unions. The plan was hastily carried out on May 1, 1951. The 1952 Densan dispute ended in a huge defeat for the unions after an 86-day strike. Industry-wide negotiations for all practical purposes had come to an end. The Densan was quietly dissolved some years later in 1956 (Kawanish 1992). The state's successful attack on and elimination of the 'prince of industrial unionism' certainly shook the foundation of industrial unionism in Japan.

The times were changing, and the era of industrial unionism was giving way to the era of enterprise unionism. But solidarity among workers beyond the enterprise was by no means dead. As Fujibayashi (1963) observed, tension still existed between the two forces in the late 1950s: appealing to union members' loyalty as employees within the enterprise versus appealing to their broader class consciousness as workers. During this period, many unions continued to maintain broader affiliations, whether at the regional or industrial level, and to play an important role in labour relations. For example, the strike at the Muroran plant of the Nihon Steel Corporation had the support of the Hokkaido Regional Council of Trade Unions and the Sohyo, and, to a lesser degree, of the Japanese Federation of Iron and Steel Workers' Unions. The strike at the Oji Paper Company was supported primarily by the National Federation of Paper and Pulp Industry Workers' Unions, and, to a lesser degree, by the Hokkaido Regional Council and the Sohyo. The key supporting union organization in the Miike strike was clearly the Japan Coal Miners' Union, backed by the Sohyo. At the same time, there tended to be an increase in strike assistance in terms of both strike fund contributions and the dispatch of officers from supporting unions

(Fujita 1959; Kamada and Kamada 1993). The final 'confrontation between capital and labour' was carried out.

These disputes saw the formation of second unions and brutal clashes occurred between the original union and the second union. While the dual unions resulted from cleavages within a segmented workforce to some extent, the driving force behind the contradictions was the attempt by management to regain entrepreneurial prerogatives at the workplace. Management conspired to create second unions and provided them with financial resources (Fujita 1959; Kamii 1994). It successfully captured the 'political opportunism' of white-collar and supervisory workers (Mills 1959), who became the major members of the second unions. They could sense the impending changes in labour-management relations brought about through the powerful reassertion of managerial authority (in particular, with the establishment of Nikkeiren in 1949), the intervention of the military and the police, and market conditions unfavourable to the labour movement. An increasing number of workers followed suit under coercive conditions, including the arrest of union leaders, lockouts and the resulting monetary hardship, threats of job loss and the intervention of the state. Accordingly, the defeat of the original unions came as little surprise.

With the bitter defeat of the Miike union in 1960, management's ascendancy in labour relations was fully achieved in the private sector. By contrast, in the public sector, the leftists were still a very strong force up until the mid-1970s when they lost an important strike (Hanami 1989). As a whole, however, Japanese labour lost the hope and energy needed to keep up the struggle to institutionalize a system of horizontal unions beyond the enterprise by the early 1960s. Under the co-operative union leaders (who had initiated the second unions), unions moved towards enterprise unionism both functionally and organizationally, with plant unions merging into single enterprise unions. Large enterprise unions, formed via mergers of enterprises, withdrew from the Sohyo and the Churitsu Roren (Federation of Independent Unions of Japan) one after another to establish a loose federation of private sector enterprise unions, the International Metalworkers Federation-Japan Council (IMF-JC), in 1964. This trend pushed the entire Japanese labour movement towards a more co-operative set of policies and philosophy (Watanabe 1990). Enterprise unionism now took over the union movement, with little prospect for a resurgence of horizontal unionism.

Elastic buffers of auxiliary workers were clearly necessary not only for stability-minded management but also for the security-minded enterprise union. The enterprise union therefore limited its membership to regular employees, acquiescing to management's arbitrary practices of both 'functional' and 'numerical' flexibility (Atkinson 1984) to adjust to market fluctuations. The state played a critical role in making this 'deal' possible by legalizing 'healthy' subcontract business (Takaki 1982).

As a result, intra-firm dualism of the workforce was reconstituted, with the gradual institutionalization of long-term employment for the core workforce in the tight labour market of the late 1950s onward. Managers endeavoured

to eliminate dissidents from the workplace and to develop enterprise consciousness among the remaining employees, using techniques such as performance-appraisal systems and new foremen systems (which were recommended as part of the productivity movement by the Japan Productivity Center). In this context, the number of union members who demanded wage increases but worked as 'employees' at the daily workplace increased (Gordon 1998; Kumazawa 1989).

The reinforcement of enterprise unionism and industry adjustment after the mid-1970s, amid recurring unfavourable economic conditions, also led the unions themselves to legitimize enterprise unionism. The Rengo (Japanese Trade Union Confederation), the largest national centre, endorsed the principles of enterprise unionism. The legitimization of enterprise unionism brought with it a total reorganization of the national union, a phenomenon unparalleled in Western countries (Watanabe 1990). Today, one can safely assert that the Japanese union movement is composed of enterprise unions in form and enterprise unionism in content.

Note that since the critical juncture (from the late 1940s through the 1950s), the state's role in labour relations, including reproducing the enterprise union system, has been relatively indirect (albeit very important) in Japan (Johnson 1995), compared to its counterparts in 'later-late developers' (Dore 1979) such as Korea, where the state directly implemented an enterprise union system by force and reinforced it by law. Japanese management, which successfully recovered its capacity to manage shop-floor matters with the recovery of Japanese economy following the Korean War, has been able to 'fight with one hand behind its back and still achieve in most situations a verdict that it finds tolerable' (Fox 1974: 279). Simply, it is not in the interests of the state to be directly involved in labour relations when the direction of labour relations clearly points to the ends it desires.

To shed more light into the Japanese case, we provide a brief comparative discussion of the evolution of union structure in three major Western countries (the United Kingdom, Germany and the United States) in the following section. We also briefly touch upon the decentralization of collective bargaining that has taken place in many Western countries since the 1980s.

8. Comparative assessment

Unlike in Japan, the history of the collective bargaining era in the Western world goes back to the early twentieth century, and industrial relations systems as we know them today had acquired their essential characteristics by the 1950s (Clarke 1993). Thus, the socio-political environment in which the actors were immersed was clearly different from that in Japan. No Western state either could or did attempt to implement enterprise unionism at the onset of the collective bargaining era, which in turn resulted in one type of horizontal unionism or another, as predicted in our framework.

In Britain, collective bargaining had become a well-established practice by the end of the nineteenth century (Webbs 1911). A major source of

authority was 'custom and practice' and legal regulation was never a serious alternative. The state, whose own power had been forged in opposition to royal absolutism, rejected an authoritarian response to challenges from below, for fear of provoking even stronger challenges (Fox 1985). A reluctance to use the full weight of the state's powers allowed space for workers' organizations to build a tenacious, if shadowy, existence (Edwards *et al.* 1998). As the role of the state became increasingly defined as that of maintaining the rule of law, the state was not available to employers in helping them to resolve their labour problems, although it would certainly act to provide consistent support for a long-term policy of rationalizing control of the workplace.

In this early developer (Gerschenkron 1962), employers, unions and the state were all strong enough to maintain defensive positions while too weak to organize radical departures from the tradition of compromise and muddling through. The structure of contemporary British trade unions reflects their slow historical evolution and displays a complex pattern with no underlying organizational logic. Today, most significant unions are to some extent general unions: multi-occupational and often multi-industrial (Adams 1995).

By 1914 Germany had the largest and best-organized working-class movement in Europe, which inspired fear among other classes and increased social tensions. In response, the government, which feared the worst-case scenario of becoming involved both in a civil war and World War I, avoided an authoritarian response to labour challenges. During World War I, the working class was given a more important place in society and politics through its sacrifice, and trade unions and collective bargaining were legitimized (Berghahn and Karsten 1988). After World War I, the socialist government convened a meeting of employer and union representatives, which resulted in the Stinnes-Legien Agreement. The hope was to find, through consultations, a joint solution to the problems of demobilization and of restarting peacetime production in a defeated country. Through the Agreement, the employers recognized the right of the unions to represent workers' interests and to negotiate collective agreements at a multi-employer level, and works councils elected by all employees at the plant and enterprise level were established as a compromise (Jacobi *et al.* 1998).

After 1945, Germany brought back the works councils and worker's participation on the boards of directors that it had initially introduced shortly after World War I. Union leaders established a single national federation composed of a small number of industrial unions under the influence of Congress of Industrial Organizations (CIO) representatives who had come with the American armed forces to Germany (Lösche 1973). Since then, the main German unions have faced little organizational competition (Jacobi *et al.* 1998).

During World War I and its aftermath, the US government launched a 'relentless campaign of suppression' against socialists, anarchists and after the Russian revolution, Communists (Taft 1964). The recession of the early

1920s and the conservative dominance of politics during that time further undermined the power of the socialist labour movement which declined propitiously (Laslett and Lipset 1974). However, the AFL stood firm with business unionism and adroitly escaped harsh repression by the state throughout this period of unrest. Even though union membership and militancy increased significantly in the United States, just as it did in Europe, American workers did not pose a serious and credible threat to the capitalist system (Dulles and Dubofsky 1993).

In 1932, F. D. Roosevelt supported both the unions and the practice of collective bargaining to revitalize the depressed economy. In the National Labor Relations Act, passed in 1935, many of the tactics still used by employers to thwart unionization and company unions were made illegal (Pencavel 2003). In this new policy environment, there was a rapid unionization of workers and a dramatic increase in the practice of collective bargaining. Certifying unions on a plant-by-plant basis, however, also made the possibility of multi-employer bargaining very difficult (Adams 1995).

In the postwar period, unionists emerged as heroes for their activities during the war, and the labour movement re-emerged strong and vigorous. The postwar militancy of labour then spread across industries and aroused the public. With the Labor Management Relations Act of 1947 (Taft-Hartley Act) the state revised the basic labour law to restrict labour's power, and the Act seriously harmed several strong unions (Burt 1979). However, the state never attempted to eliminate horizontal labour unionism nor did it attempt to implement enterprise unionism.

On the part of labour, 'pure and simple' unionism continued to dominate the labour movement. In 1949–1950, the CIO expelled eleven national unions that were considered to be Communist-led and dropped its affiliation with the World Federation of Trade Unions (which the AFL had long opposed as an instrument of Soviet policy). In 1953 the AFL expelled the International Longshoremen's Association on grounds of racketeering, following investigations by the New York State Crime Commission into criminal activities on the New York docks (Burt 1979). Since the merger of the two union federations into the AFL-CIO in 1955, the 'amorphous' industrial union structure, along with the relatively decentralized bargaining structure, has largely remained intact.

We have so far explained how one form of horizontal unionism or another was institutionalized in the three major Western countries contrary to enterprise unionism in Japan. As Streeck (1996) remarks, however, 'all industrial relations systems, even the most centralized ones, have at least some local components and some enterprise consciousness of workers' (p. 89). Internal union politics, which unionists overcame in the institutionalization of horizontal unionism, could become structurally active again if the power balance between the employer and the union shifts to a great extent under severe external challenges and sharp changes in governmental policy.

Indeed, bargaining decentralization has taken place in many Western countries including the United Kingdom, the United States and Germany

since the 1980s. Many studies have tried to account for this phenomenon, and the list of factors that might explain it is long and varied depending on the researcher's perspective and the level of analysis (Alaluf and Prieto 2001; Eaton and Kriesky 1998; Iversen 1996; Jackson *et al.* 1993; Katz 1993; Traxler *et al.* 2001; Voss 1994; Zagelmeyer 2005). However, there is a clear consensus among scholars that employers, taking advantage of the shift in their balance of power with unions in increasing global competition, have sought to dismantle the centralized bargaining structures and that the unions have been forced into a defensive stand under the decline in union coverage of product markets, diversification in corporate structures and widespread work reorganization (from Taylorist towards flexible work organization). As Locke (1995) observes, unions are thus experiencing increasing internal strains because of their inflexible adaptation to the new contexts.

Yet the external challenges have not necessarily led to identical outcomes. In the United States and the United Kingdom, the decentralization of collective bargaining took place substantially and in a rather uncoordinated and uncontrolled way. Some frustrated local unions made a tactical error in believing that decentralization would work in their favour and co-operated with management to decentralize when they realized that the institutionalized patterns of labour relations were in decline. Recognizing that management used bargaining decentralization to communicate more directly with employees, unions often belatedly became involved in local bargaining to preserve their jurisdiction and role, only to fail in many cases. Accordingly, decentralization is associated with the decline in union bargaining power, deteriorating outcomes for unions and their members, and even the decline of collective bargaining as a mechanism of employment regulation in these countries (Eaton and Kriesky 1998; Hyman 2001; Jackson *et al.* 1993; Voss 1994).

Unlike in the United Kingdom and the United States, decentralization in Germany took place in a different way and to a much lesser degree. In Germany, only certain aspects of collective bargaining are delegated to the company level, while the practice of concluding overarching framework agreements at the sectoral level continues, giving social partners a degree of control over collective bargaining at the company level. Decentralization is being used to adapt pay and working time to the specific conditions of the company through collective negotiations, and a decreasing coverage of employees by multi-employer agreements is accompanied by an increasing coverage of single-employer agreements (Dombois 2001; Katz 1993; Streeck 1984; Thelen 1991). As Streeck (1996) remarks, 'local regulation is nothing new in Germany as long as it remains itself regulated by central regulation' (p. 196).

These sharp differences in the content of decentralization stem to a great extent from the different state labour policies at the onset of the collective bargaining era (the critical juncture) and in the period of transformation of the 1980s. In the United Kingdom and the United States, the compromises (multi-employer bargaining and the guarantee of managerial prerogatives in

controlling work rules) between the social actors at the critical junctures were *voluntary* without substantial backing by the state, and this voluntarism left room for internal union politics to be reactivated in the future. On the other hand, in Germany the compromise between the social actors was bound through the Stinnes-Legien Agreement backed by the state and reinforced in the postwar period. These institutional arrangements could regulate the degree to which union members identified their interests with those of management when they were integrated into the decision making of management (Turner 1991). Furthermore, in the United Kingdom and the United States, decentralization was prompted by the conservative Thatcher and Reagan governments, while the government was not involved in Germany, where the process was negotiated to a large degree between the social partners (Dombois 2001).

Informed observers now remark on the resemblance between Japanese enterprise unions and North American local industrial unions; that is, a majority of North American union members work under contracts negotiated by their union with a single employer or for a single plant, while in Japan enterprise unions are affiliated with industrial federations in many cases and industry-wide bargaining is conducted in certain areas (Price 1997).

It is true that, like their counterparts in other countries, Japanese workers join various types of unions and federations at the micro, meso and macro levels. At the macro level, the Rengo attempts to exert its influence on national labour policies. At this level, the Zenroren (National Confederation of Trade Unions) and the Zenrokyo (National Trade Union Council) coexist with the Rengo, although their numbers are small. At the meso level, various types of labour organizations, such as industrial union federations, craft unions and general unions, coexist with one another.

However, enterprise unions in Japan are not mere 'locals' of larger unions, but basic unit unions. They maintain a high level of control over personnel and financial matters without interference from the federations. Conversely, industrial federations are often affected by the activities of enterprise unions within large enterprises, as most board members of industrial federations and national centres are representatives sent by the enterprise unions who are employees of specific companies. Union dues of major enterprise unions often exceed those of their affiliated industrial federations. That collective bargaining in major large enterprises takes the form of enterprise bargaining also explains its importance in part. Enterprise unions also participate in the policy decision-making process by submitting demands relating to policies and systems and sending representatives to governmental committee meetings. Thus, the industrial federations and the national centres are loosely affiliated organizations of powerful enterprise unions. Most significant union activities are carried out by large enterprise unions with autonomous authorities (Hanami 1989; Kawada 1973; Kawanish 1992). The industrial federations in Japan 'are not therefore proper analogues of the industrial unions of other nations, such as America's United Auto Workers' (UAW) Union, United Mineworkers'

Unions or Steelworkers' Union. The only large industrial union in Japan is the Seamen's Union' (Flath 1998: 4–5).

On the other hand, the decentralized bargaining structure in North America does not negate the organizational principle of industrial unionism that 'allow[s] complete autonomy for the various branches, crafts, and grades to discuss and promote the advance of their particular interests, consistent with the general policy and effectiveness of the whole organization' (Postage 1923: 403). In short, the unions at the workplace in North America are still *locals* of industrial unions, whereas the enterprise unions in Japan are *unit unions* with autonomous functions broader than contract negotiations with a single employer.

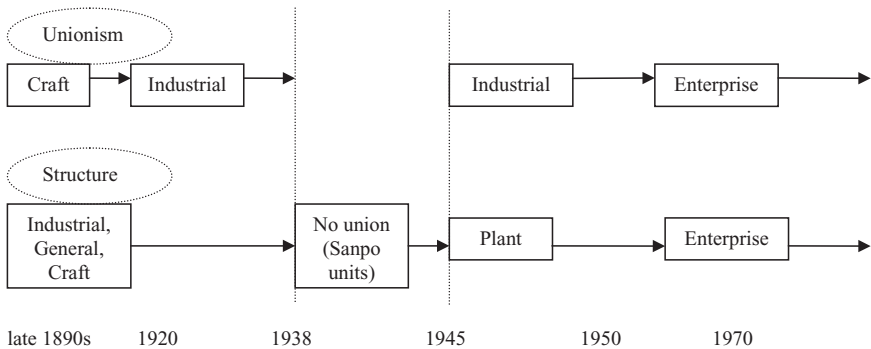
In fact, the similarities and differences stem from the ways labour unionism and collective bargaining have evolved both in Japan and in North America. Japanese unionists failed to institutionalize a system of industrial unions and thus had to find the next best option to 'take wages out of competition' at least to some extent (which was the establishment of loose industrial federations and of Shunto), whereas their counterparts in North America could institutionalize a system of 'amorphous' industrial unions under the National Labor Relations Act. However, the very law that helped the institutionalization of industrial unionism in North America made the possibility of multi-employer bargaining very difficult by certifying unions on a plant-by-plant basis, as discussed above. Note, for example, that the law recognized the election unit as the relevant unit for negotiations when the major automakers objected to voluntary multi-plant arrangements with the UAW in the 1980s. The recent decentralization of collective bargaining indeed indicates the relative vulnerability of the 'voluntarist' nature of centralized bargaining in comparison with the institutionalized system of horizontal unions.

9. Conclusion

In this article, we proposed an alternative framework to account for the phenomenon of enterprise unionism against the popular (cultural and internal labour market) hypotheses. From a socio-political perspective, we placed an emphasis on *political dynamics* and the role of the *state* in labour relations and delineated the strategic behaviour patterns of each of the tripartite actors under collective bargaining. Building upon the thesis of 'critical junctures', we argue that the initial period of the collective bargaining era constituted a critical juncture for *state labour policy* that occurred in distinctive ways in different countries and that these differences in turn played a central role in shaping the different union structures in the following decades, amid a sharp contrast between the unionist's desired union structure and that of the employer.

To test the validity of our framework, we conducted an in-depth historical analysis of the evolution of trade unionism in Japan since the late nineteenth century (see Figure 1 for a summary). Our analysis showed that Japanese unionists embraced horizontal unionism and almost all unions were

FIGURE 1
The Evolution of Dominant Unionism and of Dominant Union Structure in Japan.



horizontal unions in prewar Japan despite continuous state suppression and management opposition. That is, like their counterparts in Western countries, prewar Japanese unionists never thought in terms of enterprise unionism. Our analysis also showed how state labour policy during the war affected the postwar union movement: that is, through the prohibition of labour unionism, providing workers with experience in running vertical organizations confined to a company, and offering management a model of a tolerable labour union given the inevitability of the upcoming unionization.

We pointed out why in the postwar years, Japanese workers formed mixed unions of blue- and white-collar workers at the plant level. Importantly, these postwar *plant* unions were clearly predisposed to working-class solidarity that transcended the enterprise and were successfully moving towards institutionalizing *industrial* unions. However, mainly because of its late-developer advantages and Cold War politics, the Japanese state was capable of eradicating the horizontal union movement at this critical juncture, paving the way for the development of enterprise unions. Through the fatal defeat of their industrial unionism by the state and management, labour lost the hope and energy to maintain the struggle to institutionalize a system of horizontal unions beyond the enterprise, while functional and organizational units moved towards the enterprise union, with plant unions having merged into single enterprise unions. Enterprise unionism took over the union movement, with little prospect for a resurgence of horizontal unionism under the reinforcement of enterprise unionism by management and the state.

We disagree with the common assumption that the union structure established in Japan is a manifestation of the nature of Japanese workers. On the contrary, enterprise unionism in Japan is the result of labour's failure in institutionalizing horizontal unions. Despite serious attempts to determine their own fate, unions and labour leaders were 'dependent variables' in the national context.

Our comparative analysis of the evolution of union structure in the three major Western countries further confirms the validity of our framework. The

socio-political environment in which the Western actors were immersed was clearly different from that in Japan. None of the Western states either could or did attempt to implement enterprise unionism at the onset of the collective bargaining era, which in turn resulted in one type of horizontal unionism or another, as predicted in our framework. Our application of the proposed framework to the recent bargaining decentralization in these Western countries also indicates the usefulness of our socio-political framework. The content and extent of the changes in bargaining structure in these countries are to a great extent explained by the different state labour policies at the critical juncture and in the period of transformation of the 1980s.

We believe that our framework significantly enhances our understanding of enterprise unionism in Japan and we hope that it also aids in studying other national cases in Asia and Latin America, where enterprise unions have also been observed. Future research should explore the validity of our proposed framework through systematic comparative studies.

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