

Brief History of Japan Workers' Co-operative Union (JWCU)



Historical Background:

In Japan just after World War II, there were more than ten million unemployed people. The government thus created “Relief Measures for the Unemployed” (RMU) in 1949 in order to provide daily employment for the jobless as a certain public assistance, and also as a sort of security measures to prevent the unemployed from raising riots. In 1953, Japan Free Workers' Union (*Zen Nihon Jiyū Rōdō Kumiai / Zen Nichi Jirō*) was established as a nationwide labor union into which “free workers”, i.e. day laborers who worked through the RMU, were organized.

Under high economic growth (1955 ~), however, the government was gradually scaling down the RMU, and finally decided to completely close the door to the new jobless in 1971. Japan Free Workers' Union thereafter established their own business enterprises called “*Jigyōdan*” throughout Japan in order to create stable jobs for their union members, i.e. the jobless, most of whom were middle-aged and elderly.

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- 1971 A “*Jigyodan*” was first established in Nishinomiya City (Hyogo Prefecture). Many “*Jigyodans*” were successively launched all over the country throughout 1970s.
- 1979 36 “*Jigyodans*” formed the National Council, i.e. the predecessor of JWCU.
- 1982 Upon the termination of the RMU, the National Council launched “direct-control businesses” mainly in hospital maintenance: the businesses rapidly developed throughout the country.
- 1983 Members of the National Council visited Italy to learn about Italian worker cooperatives, which had over 100 years of history, and started discussing its structural reorganization.
- 1986 “*Jigyodans*” decided to transform themselves into organizations managed by worker-members, i.e. worker cooperatives, in parallel with developing the National Council into the National Federation.
- 1987 “CENTER *Jigyodan*”—“the Central Worker Cooperative” that was directly controlled by the National Federation—was set up as a model case of worker cooperatives.



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- 1991 Japan Institute of Co-operative Research (JICR) was established as the only research institute on worker cooperative movements in Japan.
- 1992 The National Federation's membership to International Co-operative Alliance (ICA) was approved at the ICA General Assembly held in Tokyo.
The National Federation adopted its own seven principles.
- 1993 The National Federation was renamed Japan Workers' Co-operative Union (JWCU).
- 1995 JWCU established the first older persons' cooperative as a cooperative of, by and for senior citizens and beyond. This movement has spread throughout the country since then.
- 1998 JWCU established a head office to lobby for a law on worker cooperatives.
- 1999 Preceding a launch of the governmental "Long-Term Care Insurance System" (April 2000), JWCU members started to provide training courses for care workers to obtain an introductory caregiver's certificate throughout the country.



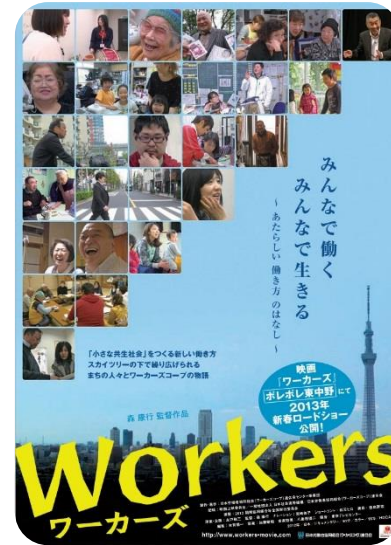
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- 2000 Worker Co-operative Legislation Civic Council was founded.
- 2001 Japan Older Persons' Consumer Co-operative Union (JOCCU) was set up to unite older persons' consumer cooperatives in Japan.
- 2002 JWCU adopted the new principles of "Co-operatives of Associated Work"
- 2004 JWCU celebrated its 25th anniversary, and held an international symposium at United Nations University (Tokyo) with ILO's special cooperation.
Japan Social Solidarity Organization (JSSO) was established to spread "social solidarity movements" throughout the country.
- 2007- More than 10,000 groups and organizations signed the letters to support a law on "co-operatives of associated work". As of October 2016, 868 municipality assemblies have also sent the Diet letters recommending the immediate approval of the law.
- 2008- A non-partisan, all-party parliamentary group was founded to promote the legislation. As of 2016, the group has 109 members.



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- 2011 In the wake of Great East Japan Earthquake, JWCU set up Tohoku Reconstruction Head Office in Sendai City (Miyagi Prefecture). JWCU published a book entitled *The Creation of Jobs through Cooperation (Kyōdō de Shigoto wo Okosu)*. The Bio Diesel Fuel (BDF) project was launched for the first time in Chiba Prefecture; JWCU has thereafter established the BDF plants in several places.
- 2012 The United Nations declared this year as the “International Year of Cooperatives”; JWCU actively participated in various inter-coop initiatives to celebrate the year. JWCU hosted the “National Gathering of Cooperation” in Morioka City and Saitama Prefecture; nearly 5,000 people participated in it. JWCU produced a film entitled *Workers*; the film has been screened throughout the country since then.
- 2013 JWCU started model projects of the governmental “System of Independence Support for the Needy” in the sixteen cities. The forestry project named “Next Green Tajima” was launched in Hyogo Prefecture; JWCU has thereafter developed various projects on forestry and agriculture throughout the country for the purpose of creating sustainable communities.



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2014 “Associated Work Platform Project”—a local government policy that for the first time adopted “associated work”—was launched in Hiroshima City. JWCU hosted the “National Gathering of Cooperation” in Fukuoka City; nearly 3,000 people participated in it. JWCU also concluded a cooperation agreement with Korea Association of Self-Sufficiency Promotion Center at the gathering.

2015 JWCU was invited by the ILO Country Office for the Philippines to the conference entitled “Strengthening Partnerships: Livelihood at the Forefront of Recovery Following Haiyan” that was held in Manilla. JWCU adopted new principles of “Co-operatives of Associated Work”.

2016 JWCU played a leading role in organizing the nationwide festival for celebrating the International Day of Co-operatives on the theme of the UN “Sustainable Development Goals”.

JWCU was invited by the Division for Social Policy and Development (DSPD) of the UN Department of Economic and Social Affairs (DESA) to the expert group meeting entitled “Ensuring That No One Is Left Behind: The Cooperative Sector as a Partner in the Implementation of the United Nations 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development” that will be held at the UN Headquarters in New York.

