

JAPANESE COMPANIES INVESTING IN CANADA AND THEIR INDUSTRIAL RELATIONS

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1. The Trade Relations Between Japan and Canada

Since 1985, the trade balance between Japan and Canada has improved for Japan. The main products exported from Japan to Canada are computers, work machines, automobiles and related goods, while timber, natural gas and other raw materials are imported from Canada. Capital investments in Canada by Japan are also increasing, mostly in the manufacturing industries⁽¹⁾.

As a result of active trade activities by Japan in Canada, the number of companies invested in by either or both Japan and Canada has increased recently. For example, 277 companies of this type were in operation in 1987, 18% of which were established since 1985⁽²⁾. Big automobile factories, such as Suzuki, Honda and Toyota were almost ready to begin operation in 1988, as their plans have been publicized.

The research supporting this paper was carried out before and during 1988, however, the basic research of this paper, which concentrates on Japanese industrial relations, will not have changed significantly by 1991.

2. An Evaluation of Japanese Industrial Relations in Canada

The militant provincial labour movement in Canada⁽³⁾, which has been progressing in an adversary nature, refused to accept the introduction of Japanese industrial relations⁽⁴⁾. For example, the research staff of Telecommunications Canada Workers Union in 1988 denounced a joint consultation scheme at the provincial level proposed by the B.C. Employers' Association⁽⁵⁾. The Canadian Department of Labour believed that Canadian industrial relations could improve if something was done and publicized a report stating that Japanese industrial relations could be a model to Canada⁽⁶⁾. This report was written by a labour law professor, Joseph Weiler, of the University of British Columbia⁽⁷⁾. A model which was mainly intended to be introduced in Canada was joint consultation machineries, both on shop floors and at the government level. These have been successful with corporate trade unions and employers in Japan⁽⁸⁾.

Japanese industrial relations have many facets. They are:

- A. a joint consultation committee;
- B. quality control circle activities on the shop floor;
- C. a decision making process using the bottom up practices (ringi in Japanese);
- D. lifetime employment practices;
- E. on-the-job training;
- F. extended fringe benefits by management, including bonuses.

The features among these that are likely to be accepted by Canadian companies as well as trade unions are discussed in this paper.

3. Features of Japanese Industrial Relations and Japanese Companies Investing in Canada

The industrial relations of any country, in general, are rooted in the historical and cultural background of the country. Few employers of

Canadian companies invested in by Japanese companies in Canada believe the features of Japanese industrial relations, as mentioned above, could be transferred to Canada in their genuine form. However, some companies which have been successful in introducing some features say that a combination of both Japanese and Canadian features of industrial relations has already been introduced and has been partially successful⁽⁹⁾.

A. Joint Consultation Machinery

In Japan, many workers devote themselves to their company as they would to their family or community. Productivity is the first priority in their working life. Both workers and management believe they can increase productivity and maintain cooperative and harmonious relations if employee-management relations are peaceful. This stems from the idea of the corporate family or community. One of the results of this philosophy is that when a trade union is organized and attempts to reach an agreement with management on the terms and conditions of employment, they prefer joint consultation, which encourages cooperative relations, rather than collective bargaining, which creates adversary relations.

Joint consultation differs clearly from collective bargaining. The first difference is that the latter guarantees a trade union or workers the right to bargain with the right to strike while the former does not. In contrast, in the case of joint consultation, a trade union or workers can only resist management by, for example, raising their questions concerning the agenda of joint consultation when no agreement can be reached. Also, the employer can act without the agreement of the union or workers. The true nature of joint consultation is communication which provides the employer opportunities to discuss the trade union matters of importance. Questions can be raised, and management tries to listen to the opinion given by the trade union.

The second difference is that the matters which management can discuss are not limited, in joint consultation machineries, to the working conditions only, such as policies of placement, transfer, discipline, on-the-job training and discharge. On the other hand, collective bargaining

is restricted to terms and conditions of employment, because workers shall exercise the right to strike when an impasse arises. In the case of joint consultation, workers are regarded as having waived the right to strike under the implicit understanding that workers shall cooperate with their employer to raise productivity and profit of the company. Therefore, managerial matters can also be explained to the trade union, if not the workers, such as financial conditions of the company, future investment projects, the introduction of new technology and hiring or a mass discharge plan.

In Canada, workers are generally more independent of their companies and would feel that they are simply working on a contractual basis with their employer. Therefore, Canadian workers do not necessarily feel they belong to their company as members of a company family. More importantly, the tradition of trade unions has been formed by a history of class struggle under the strong influence of the British and the U.S. trade union movement, which has been adversary against their employers. Employers are also more concerned about making short term profits than taking care of their employees' welfare in comparison to Japan.

Japanese companies investing in Canada have a policy of holding meetings with their employees for the purpose of communicating their companies' policies regarding productivity and other goals to them. If no union is organized, employers set up joint committee types of machineries where representatives of employees can attend.

(a) If No Trade Union Is Organized

Many companies invested in by Japanese companies in Canada where no unions are organized have been successful in keeping industrial relations peaceful by introducing joint consultation machinery⁽¹⁰⁾. One example is Auto Parts Toyota in B.C., which is 100% invested in by Toyota of Japan. The employer organized a committee meeting once a month where seven representatives, elected from approximately 70 Canadian employees, attend. A managerial staff of five Japanese dispatched from Japan and stationed in Vancouver attend the meeting to discuss productivity issues, safety and health issues and others with the

employees' representatives. In this meeting, sub-committees become very active because of differences in race, language and culture. Industrial relations cooperative subcommittees, where productivity targets, etc. are discussed, are arranged too. The managers of the company think that communication regarding their future plans for the company is very important in keeping their industrial relations peaceful⁽¹¹⁾. Though the manager insists that the committees set up by the company are "a type of joint consultation machinery", they are not in a real sense because workers do not stand on the same footing as their employer, when consulting. Their function is that the committees provide the opportunities for the managers to explain what they think is best for the workers.

(b) If A Trade Union Exists

Joint consultation techniques have been used in Canadian companies invested in by Japanese companies even when a union is organized, by holding committees or meetings whose members consist of workers' representatives. The purpose is not to discuss working conditions, but how to effectively handle daily work on the shop floor. The legal ground for setting up the joint consultation committee on the shop floor is also based upon the collective agreement. The reasons for the realization of this are:

- i. collective bargaining takes place once a year or so when the agreement is revised or renewed, and complaints arising out of the agreement are solved through arbitration procedures which are taken care of by an outside third party. Therefore, there are no opportunities for communication between the manager and the workers regarding increases in productivity.
- ii. Workers in Canada, in general, are used to working under the supervision of foremen and do their jobs individually without the cooperation of other workers on the same shop floor. Therefore, they need a collective bargaining agreement to allow their foremen or supervisors to direct them to attend the shop floor meetings and to do their jobs in a cooperative manner with their coworkers.

An example is a collective bargaining agreement reached between the Suzuki Motors Ltd. in Ingersol, Ontario, and the Canadian Auto Workers' Union in 1987, which agreed to introduce a "work team system" where workers could work together as a team and hold occasional meetings on the shop floor to discuss how to improve productivity in the factory.

When no agreement is reached between a trade union and an employer, then joint consultation machinery does not work. The union can call a strike as bargaining power to achieve their demands until a compromise is reached. One example is a strike called by the IBEW (International Brotherhood of Electrical Workers) of the Honda Akarabara factory in Ontario, Canada in 1986. The Union demanded that a Canadian should be hired to replace the position which had been occupied by a Japanese dispatched firm Japan. The employer refused. Another matter at issue was one regarding occupational safety and health which was raised because of language barriers. A strike was called, and finally the employer agreed to change its policy on the matter so that safety signs and other signs related to safety at work were rewritten in various languages as well as English. Therefore, in Canada, though trade unions agreed to hold joint consultation machinery, it did not exclude workers' right to strike because the base of industrial relations was adversary.

Joint consultation machineries have already been set up in Canadian companies under their collective agreements. According to a survey publicized in 1985 by The Economic Council of Canada, 14.6% of collective bargaining agreements surveyed had provisions for joint consultation machinery. This means 22.2% of workers surveyed were covered by these agreements, while 38% of agreements or 38% of workers covered had provisions that trade unions had the right to be consulted by the employer or to be given notice prior to the introduction of new technology onto their shop floor⁽¹²⁾.

In my opinion, joint consultation machineries in Japanese companies in Canada enable communication at both lower levels and higher levels of management to flow more smoothly than with no such machineries set up. They will function to prevent misunderstandings between an em-

ployer and workers to some extent. A cooperative relationship which will be built up by these communications between workers working on the same shop floor will help to promote productivity.

At the shop floor level, occasional meetings for workers to gather and discuss common matters concerning work are helpful for them to understand their own work and to set common targets for their production. The meetings will improve the adversary relationship between foremen or supervisors and workers. The meetings at higher managerial will also function as communication tools through which workers will have opportunities to understand the manager's target for the company to achieve and the company's financial resources to share with the workers. These meetings might successfully implant in the workers consciousness a feeling of belonging to (loyalty to) their company.

Canadians are diverse in terms of ethnicity, race, natural birth, religion, etc. Therefore, if the employer would expect Canadian workers to be unified as one group of workers who would share the same feeling of loyalty to the company, through joint consultation machineries, it will fail. It could be successful as a communication tool to prevent industrial conflict. The danger of introducing the joint consultation idea is that it would give the workers the illusion that there is no economic interest conflict between workers and employers. As a result, workers or trade unions might think twice about using their bargaining power against the employer. The working conditions would deteriorate, as can be seen in some Japanese companies, to the extent that some workers will think that they have to work for their employer until "Karoushi" (they burn out and die on the job)⁽¹³⁾.

B. Quality Control Circle Activities on the Shop Floor

In Japan, QC stands for quality control activities on the shop floor by groups of workers. The purpose of this concept is not confined to only maintaining the quality of products or services, but extends to increasing productivity. QC meetings are generally held to organize workers' group discussions and are held once or twice a week. Proposals can be raised to the employer to promote productivity, such as changing the

location of working tools, repairing working machines, reorganizing working teams and/or the production process, etc. By doing so, workers on the same shop floor will become acquainted with each other and will be motivated to cooperate in that they will think they are contributing to increasing the productivity of their own company. Through QC activities, an employer can expect senior workers to educate junior workers on the tasks in general which may increase loyalty to the company. QC activities have been very common in Japanese companies, including the service sector, i.e., the banking industry. The purpose is to strengthen personnel management which builds up strong cooperative human relations between workers on the shop floor so as to increase productivity. It is important to point out that Japanese workers are apt to think that they are expected by their colleagues to behave in a similar way to other workers on the shop floor, so that they will attend QC meetings regardless of the fact that they are reluctant to do so on some occasions. Most workers would find it difficult to say that they will not join QC activities when requested.

In Japanese companies investing in Canada, the employer's intention in setting up QC activities as routine was accepted by the workers involved, where no trade unions were organized. On the other hand, QC activities are partly successfully introduced into companies even where trade unions are organized. One example is the Mitsubishi Electronics Industries, Canada, located in Ontario, where one of the local unions of Communication Workers of Canada was organized. 430 Canadian workers and 10 Japanese workers were working there in 1985. Since the company's ownership was transferred from the RCA of American conglomerate to a Japanese company, the management had begun holding meetings on shop floors and had asked workers to raise questions concerning the technology and the process of production. If the opinions were helpful for productivity, management was ready to change the production process and production techniques. The purpose of these meetings was to hear opinions from workers and receive explanations from the management side, and to guarantee workers' participation in production; in sum, to exchange information between workers and management on the shop floor. This is a type of QC activity. It was only partially successful for Mitsubishi Electronics Industries, Canada⁽¹⁴⁾.

Canadian workers were not eager to understand and participate in the Japanese type of QC activities. The first reason was that Canadian workers were accustomed to engaging in the American type of quality control activities which confined them to checking the quality of products under the strict supervision of their foremen. They have been accustomed to working under the direction given by their supervisors. In other words, they have not been trained and educated to participate in job related discussions on a voluntary basis on the shop floor. They believe such matters should be decided by their employer, not by the workers themselves. The second reason was the Japanese type of QC activities required workers to raise questions about their methods of work with their co-workers on the same shop floor, which included criticism about their coworkers on some occasions. Canadian workers generally do not want to say anything about their coworkers because they are independent of each other. Opinions concerning how to work raised by coworkers at QC meetings would mean for Canadians that they are criticizing each other. The third reason concerned the result of the QC activities. Many times they were summarized as proposals purporting to change the production process and production organization. Canadian workers thought that these proposals should be raised by the employer under managerial prerogatives, not by the workers, because they feared they might be asked to be responsible for the results of the proposals. The fourth reason was related to overtime payment. QC activities were often held during lunch time or after working hours for a short time, usually about 10 minutes. For these activities they were not usually paid. Canadian workers thought that QC activities were not voluntary activities unpaid, but necessary ones. Therefore, QC activities at Mitsubishi Electronics Industries, Canada were evaluated as not 100% successful. However, in comparison with QC activities directed by the former American employer, RCA, they were partly successful because the Japanese type of QC activities gave opportunities to participate in the partial reform of production processes and gradually stimulated Canadian workers to have higher working morale and as a result, a stronger sense of responsibility for their products⁽¹⁵⁾.

Where no trade union is organized, many Japanese employers have considered introducing the Japanese type of QC activities. Some Japanese

owned companies in Canada were successful. One of the examples was Canada Auto Parts Toyota Company, which employed 65 Canadian workers besides five Japanese who were dispatched from the parent company located in Japan. In this company the employer adopted a personnel policy that consisted of organizing eight working teams of eight workers each, and letting them compete to have discussions for submitting concrete proposals for raising the productivity of the company. Once in two weeks, a presentation assembly was held where each team presented its proposal before all the workers. An award for the best proposal selected by the employer throughout the year was that one of the members of the selected team was privileged to be sent to the international QC proposal presentation meeting of all Toyota held in Tokyo, Japan once a year.

The other sort of award was a barbecue party funded by the employer. This award was given to the team, each member of which had made at least one proposal accumulating to a team total of more than thirteen in a year. This personnel policy was targeted for individual workers as well as teams for the purpose of stimulating the workers to think about how to raise productivity at all times. In my opinion, QC activities can be applicable to Japanese companies investing in Canada. QC activities could promote much more cooperative relationships in the production process and as a result, productivity would be raised.

This method can be called "team production activity" based upon individualism in which workers as a team will consider the way they have worked and try to find new ways they could increase productivity. This will change the workers' conventional way of thinking that they work within the limitation of the foreman or supervisor's direction, and that they do not say anything about their co-workers' doings on the shop floor.

One of the research studies shows that 13% of Canadian companies investigated answered that a sort of Japanese type of QC activities had already been introduced by 1985⁽¹⁶⁾, indicating that there is a possibility of developing this sort of method in Japanese companies investing in Canada. The important thing is that employers should not use QC activi-

ties as a personnel policy tool to replace union activities or oppress union activities. It is certain that overtime payment should be made for these activities. The workers' sense of loyalty to their company would not be expected to be as great as Japanese workers because the concept of the company family-like community would not be accepted in Canada.

C. Bottom-up Decision Making Practices

Bottom-up decision making practices are very common among Japanese companies. In this practice, when top managerial personnel conceive roughly the introduction of a new production process, for example, they ask supervisors or foremen concerned to discuss it in more detail from a supervisory point of view. There these people ask workers who will be involved in the production to discuss the process from the shop floor point of view. After these discussions have taken place on various levels, suggestions and opinions from the shop floor will be reported to the supervisory level where these opinions will be taken into consideration. Then the modified opinion will be crystallized into a concrete plan which is finally sent to the top managerial personnel who finally decide whether a new production process shall be introduced into the factories and how. These bottom-up procedures are effective in making top level management's ideas known not only to the supervisory people, but also to the workers at the shop floor. Workers and supervisors would then think that the introduction of the new process is supported by the consensus of all the people concerned.

A kind of company wide community for the introduction of a new process could be built up. But when a trade union takes a different stance on it, then joint consultation will start reaching for consensus. Some of the Japanese companies investing in Canada had tried to introduce these practices but were not successful because Canadian workers are used to thinking that management decisions shall be carried out by "top-down" practices. These trials are called "open-communication systems" or "one room policy"⁽¹⁷⁾ which simply means that top managerial people try to communicate with workers on certain managerial matters or to open the company president's door to welcome the workers and their ideas.

In my opinion, it will not be easy for these bottom-up decision making practices to become rooted in Canada. One reason is that these practices will dilute the responsibility of top managerial personnel. Not only that, they will blur the demarcation of managerial persons and workers. These practices will not become familiar soon, with the present managerial ideas based on the concept of the hierarchy: top-bottom practices. However, a slight margin of possibility can be seen where some Canadian workers in some companies have accepted it in a modified way as they have been trained to work in teams in a modified version of QC activities.

The important thing to consider is that the workers involved in these processes should not be responsible for the result of adopting the workers' opinions or ideas raised in the course of the process because the final responsibility of the decision making in companies should be on the management.

D. Lifetime Employment Practices

As a model, lifetime employment practices in Japan are defined as such that workers who are hired by a certain company are guaranteed their jobs in the same company until they will reach their retirement age. However, in reality, the average length of employment by the same company is, roughly speaking, around ten years⁽¹⁸⁾ for varied reasons⁽¹⁹⁾. Japanese employers tend to think that the longer length of employment, along with other personnel schemes, will guarantee enough time to educate workers so as to instil loyalty to the company in their minds. This becomes the basis of the workers' consciousness to compete with other companies in their business. Through the on-the-job training schemes, the cost of workers' skills, which in many cases are specialized to the company, can be more effective if workers stay longer in the same company. Human relations as well as business relations with certain customers whom certain workers have dealt with are also better maintained by longer employment. Japanese employers investing in Canada also think in the same way but recognize the differences between Japan and Canada in that the labour market is more open and the worker's consciousness is more individualistic in Canada than in Japan. However, some

Canadian workers also seek job security with the same company.

One Japanese company operating in Canada, Toyohta Bearing Company, has a policy of reducing hours across the workforce rather than laying off workers. The average length of service is seven years and ten months in the case of white-collar workers, while five years and two months is the average for blue-collar workers. The non-layoff policy was adopted by thirty-six out of forty Japanese companies investing in Canada, according to research conducted in 1984⁽²⁰⁾.

In my opinion, Canadian companies have a system that yields a similar result to Japanese lifetime employment practices: that is, the seniority system and, in unionized settings, the requirement that the employer must have just cause to terminate the employment relationship⁽²¹⁾. The statistics show that 38% of workers have more than eleven years of employment at the same companies⁽²²⁾. This figure suggests to us that so called "lifetime employment" practices are not necessarily unique to Japan, judging from the length of employment at the same company. However, Canadian employers tend to close their companies quicker, or to lay off their employees more easily and more often according to their companies' deficit in short term speculation than Japanese companies. Therefore Canadian workers feel more uneasiness in their job security. If Japanese companies investing in Canada take the non-layoff personnel policy under which they train workers on the job, with a special bonus system awarded according to the length of employment, the employers could attract workers from the labour market, and keep those same workers with specialized skills in their companies.

E. On The Job Training

Most of the companies in Japan train their workers on their jobs because they hire young workers just after they graduate from schools which educate them in general terms, and also hire skilled workers from the labour market. Companies start new training for both of them according to the specific needs of the company. The training method is called "on-the-job" training and is aimed at two objectives:

1. training of skills necessary for specific types of jobs for some period of time, approximately two or three years, because they are to be moved to another type of job for certain periods of time. This is because there are "internal markets inside the same company" in Japan, in other words, workers are directed by their employer to move from one type of job to another within the same company. Through these moves within the company they are trained for many types of jobs, resulting in them becoming acquainted with the different sections of the company so that they become the part of the company-wide community.
2. The second objective of on-the-job training is to establish human relations between newcomers to shop floors and their forepersons or supervisors who teach skills on the job. This on-the-job training will contribute not only to the acquisition of skills, but also to the formation of the "company family-like community".

Many Japanese companies investing in Canada have introduced a reformed type of the job training practice. One of them is found, for example, in the YKK Canada company who set up a series of lectures on micro-electronics and other areas for their workers and gave diplomas to those who finished it. A more similar type to the Japanese style is to send workers, who are selected by the employer, to the parent companies located in Japan for on-the-job training for a few months. As the concept of the on-the-job training is not familiar to Canadians, these workers will learn the concept of it, their needed skills, top management organization, the activities of the company as a whole and a bit of Japanese culture. In my opinion, though they say that the on-the-job training in the Canadian context has not been popular among Canadian companies in the past, the statistics show that there are 33% of the researched companies in 1985⁽²³⁾ who had tried on-the-job training. This is not a negligible figure. On-the-job training will contribute to the workers as well as the company which introduces it because rapid high tech development at shop floor level will require new training to be flexible, and the workers' demands for job security which require different types of skills to adapt themselves. Employers could maintain the same labour

force within their companies so that labour costs will be saved.

3. Conclusion

The above-mentioned Japanese practices of industrial relations will be different from the Canadians so far as adversary relations which appear on the scene when collective bargaining agreements are negotiated. However, if Canadian workers extend their thought to daily life relations between themselves and their forepersons or supervisors at shop floor level as making them cooperative for productivity in team works, then the conditions which enable them to accept the reformed types of Japanese industrial relations designs could be introduced into Japanese companies investing in Canada to some extent. Canadian workers also want the profits of their company increased. The underlying idea of the Japanese industrial relation is based on the concept of groupism and loyalty to the company which workers belong to: a working team or a company is a family-like community⁽²⁴⁾. But the problem is whether Canadian workers working in Japanese companies investing in Canada could be well trained to accept it. They are educated to be individualistic enough not to criticize their colleagues' attitudes to work, and they are use to working under and with the limitation of their forperson's or supervisor's direction. Therefore, the QC activities and bottom-up decision making process of the Japanese model can not help but the modified when introduced in Canada. To such an extent as Canadian workers feel comfortable with them, these modified models will be accommodated in Canada. Job security with their company as well as the profit gained by the company are important to Canadian workers as with workers in Japan. Therefore, on-the-job training which guarantees workers will to maintain their jobs by being directed by their employer to move from one job to another could possibly be introduced to Japanese companies investing in Canada.

The words such as job security, cooperative relations, team work and the like sound nice however, these should not lead workers into a working environment where workers can not get out of poor working conditions such as longer working hours, unsafe working environments

and weaker trade union activities. Some workers of Japanese companies located inside and outside of Japan are suffering from them because of Japanese industrial relations⁽²⁵⁾.

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FOOT NOTES

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 - (18) The average years of employment at the same company is 12.4 years for male workers, while 7.1 for female workers in 1989. Women's Bureau, Dept. of Labour, Fujinrohdoh No Jitsu Joh (The Reality of Women's Workforce) 1990 Issue, p. Appendix 35, Statistic No. 24.
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 - (20) Makabe, supra, note 9, p. 19.
 - (21) This opinion is raised by Ms. Sheila Greckol at the discussion on this paper on April 9, 1991, and the author agrees with it.
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