

# Chapter 2

## Work

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### **Transportation is a crucial lifeline**

**By Taeko Inada, 30s, Kobe**

I wonder how many people are always prepared for an earthquake. Most, including me, are living our lives irrespective of the worse. If the big one did happen, it would be impossible for us to stop our routine.

People go on with their lives without expecting an earthquake or adequate preparedness for it every day. I, as well as others, naturally had some place to go that day.

Amid continual fear, most of my neighbors were evacuated to the parking lot of a nearby supermarket. We felt aftershocks one after another. Many of the city's public schools turned into evacuation centers. But I heard that my daughter's school wasn't one of them because its pool had cracked and its ceiling fell to the ground. Her school couldn't resume regular classes for a while and the students were indefinitely suspended. My husband had been to his office until the day right before the disaster. Luckily, he was allowed to work at home after that.

Now it's about me. I teach at two Osaka elementary schools and a research institute, all on a part-time basis. Having taught at one school for 15 years, at the other for 1 year and at the institute for six years, I had my responsibilities, a sense of mission and some interest in each of my jobs as a source of income. The morning of the quake, I managed to inform my in-laws in Kobe and my parents in Saitama Prefecture that we were safe.

Because the earthquake was so devastating, I assumed I would have a few days off from work. But in Osaka, everything was back to normal the day after the disaster. It was not until three days later, when the phone lines to Osaka were re-connected, that I found that my absence from work was unexcused

In an attempt to make it to work on Monday, my daughter and I tried to get out of Kobe City on Sunday, six days after the quake. After a five-hour struggle, we finally got to Takarazuka Station, the eastern-most station of Kobe. We were somewhat amazed to find that water was running to flush toilets at the station. At our half-destroyed house, we never wasted the bathtub water and reused it for something else. Drinking water was unavailable, so we depended on water wagons and friends who brought it to us. We used a kerosene heater and a portable gas stove for cooking. It was

almost like camping in a big tent.

I arrived at work with my daughter. My supervisors fully understood the situation, so they accepted my request to change the work schedule until March. I finished my duties at 3 p.m. and left for home after being notified to gather at the school for work the next day if I could. Taking the opposite route of the previous day, we arrived at Suzurandai when it was already dark outside. A long line of people were waiting for a bus. Because we wanted to save time rather than money, we took a taxi that we finally caught and shared with three other people. The two middle-aged men sharing the cab with us said they were going home to the shelters from work, and the middle-aged woman said she was taking some necessities to her friend at an evacuation center, whom she found on television news.

When we arrived at Kobe Station, we were afraid we would miss the bus to Suma. Because it was extremely crowded, we decided to ask the cab driver to take us directly to Itayado Station. The driver chose less crowded, bumpy back-streets, driving alongside fallen buildings, which made us worry about the next big jolt. While driving from Hyogo Ward to Nagata Ward, where the damage was among the worst, we smelled the smoldering ruins of buildings. We drove through many intersections with broken signals.

The 200-meter-distance between the place where we got out of the taxi and Itayado Station was roped off. Broken glass was scattered everywhere and shops near the station were flattened. We headed for the subway station, worried that the subway was not operating. We took a subway bound for a station in Nishi Ward in Kobe then changed to a bus. It was well past 10 p.m. when we got home.

I could understand why some business men who commute to Osaka temporarily stayed at a company dorm or an apartment to avoid all the trouble they had with transportation. Not only was it difficult to change trains, but they had to walk between stations, line up to buy a ticket and then ride on the train. One time, I had to line up for one hour and 15 minutes to ride on a special bus connecting stations where trains were suspended. That was the longest I could have waited for a bus on a cold February day. If I had to wait longer, I would have given up and sought for another route.

Then these were times when I finally did get on a bus. Once, 10 minutes after the bus left the station, it got stuck in a traffic jam and wouldn't move for one hour. It was sometimes faster to walk between two train stations. I tried to choose transportation that would require less physical or mental stress, depending on my health condition. Because reconstruction work was under way, every time I rode a bus,

it took a different route.

Why I had to go to work in spite of all that trouble is something many of my colleagues wondered about, but I needed to keep my source of income. I don't know how to express my gratitude to those who said I could stay at their houses near Osaka as long as I wanted. I would have accepted their offers if I were single. I was greatly encouraged by their support.

I left a comfortable life in Osaka, I returned home to a gloomy town where tap water was still unavailable. I was faced with my responsibility and the life I shared with my daughter and husband. I felt a large discrepancy between the two lives. And that reminded me that my family was the only place for me to return to. My daughter, whose school managed to offer just the morning classes, went to an after school daycare center with a lunch prepared by her father. When I did come home, sometimes it was really hard for me to gather all energy past 8 p.m. to cook for my family. At home, I seldom watched television as I didn't want to see any heartbreaking post-quake situations. The streets were vacant since most of my neighbors had gone to the evacuation centers. I felt as though I was simply watching the days go by. This was my life until mid-March.

Because the disaster cut off our everyday transportation, we could not live the same way we did before the disaster. That became a fundamental question for us to decide -- how should we live after everything has changed so much? Seeing the towns of Suma, Nagata and Sannomiya from the window on my way to work and going through Nada, Ashiya and Nishinomiya, I was on the verge of crying at the sight of flattened houses and damaged buildings. I imagined myself as one of the people who had left their neighborhoods and become a resident in another place since the earthquake. How I should continue being a part of this place a big question.

### **A wife of a rogue (A yakuza-like woman)**

**By Y.R., 40s, Kobe**

Our coffee shop on the second floor fell to the ground, leaving us no other choice but to close the shop. The money we spent to renovate our shop three years ago was wasted. The contract stipulates, "The key money shall be returned upon cancellation of this contract; however, this shall not apply in case of disaster." It means we are going to lose 20 million yen. Although our business is turning no profit, we have to pay our employees compensation for unexpected holidays, as well as disaster condolence money. We have no prospect of resuming our business. The loss was bottomless.

Hanging his head low to the ground, my husband is psychologically fragile and

weak in contrast to his firm, strong body. It is time he demonstrated his skills as an employer, but he is trembling with fear of bankruptcy. As a wife of this discouraged man, I tried to cheer him up by gently saying, "The quake was not your fault. It was a natural disaster. We can buy another place for our coffee shops. I have savings we can live on that. Many people died, but we survived. We are lucky only to have survived." My husband replied, "We have worked 365 days every year. We are not injured in the least. But we don't have any money coming in. What a shame!" I told him, "It was not us but our employees who were working. We are as same as Japanese yakuza mobsters. Although we are not outlaws, we live on money we raked off of people. We are capitalists. Although small, we survived by pocketing money from the workers. We invested and failed. Now we have to take the responsibility. That is what we, employers, should do." My husband said, "Shall we sell our land?"

Idiot! What are we supposed to achieve by selling our land for the sake of small business? You think our land will pay for itself? Leave your wife the land as inheritance. Look at this newspaper. It tells about an office worker bringing important papers out of damaged building. He is just an employee, but he is risking his life for the company's sake. Now tell me what you have done since the quake. Have you done everything you can think of? You should have dug out the 3-million-yen coffee machine. "What if I die trying to get it out?" he said. "Don't worry. I'm with you. We die only once in our lifetime."

I had criticized my husband about giving priority to his company over a family. But now it is I who have turned into "a wife behind the gun." Later, when my husband too the construction guys to the shop, he watched the pieces of our coffee shop dissolved into the ground.

### **What is a company?**

**By Reiko Masai, 40s, Kobe**

I have founded Women's Net Kobe, a study group based in Kobe. I have also initiated various studies concerning women's issues and published newsletters as well. Since last year, I have rented a house and named it Women's House, offering a place where women can share opinions with others about various issues and encourage one another.

We were unable to resume our regular activities because some members of Women's Net Kobe suffered from the earthquake and there was danger of a landslide near Women's House. In March, however, we managed to set up a Women's Support Network providing telephone counseling service and holding meetings for women who

experienced the devastation quake.

Through these activities, I have learned that Japan is truly a company-oriented society. Some companies quickly provided dorms for employees whose houses were damaged. Some people were assured that companies were more reliable than the government in case of emergency. Other companies urged their employees to move to their dorms in Osaka so that they could continue working without any disturbance. In such cases, they had to leave their families in Kobe, where constant aftershocks still scared the residents. It was not always companies that were to be blamed. Some men went to work somehow and sometimes spend nearly 10 hours in transit and not bothering to return home for days. I was surprised to hear about a man who went to Tokyo, escaping a devastated Kobe, to attend a scheduled seminar just after the quake. Another man stayed at his office for two months.

I have heard many wives say they had a very hard time at home both mentally and physically. It must have been a backbreaking job for a woman to bring a bucketful of water upstairs in a high-rise condominium where elevators were out of order. I myself brought home 18 liters of water on the back of my wobbling bicycle. I never thought that water could be so heavy. While the aftershocks never ceased, many women left alone became sick from feeling uneasy. I still remember one of such women who would not move from the disconnected phone for hours.

It seemed especially hard for women with young children to deal with the situation. They still had to protect their children although they themselves were quite worried. This dilemma led them almost to abusing their own children. Recently, some young women told me they wanted their husbands to take at least a week off from work to help with the post-quake situation. I personally believe a month leave was needed for the aftermath of the devastating Great Hanshin Earthquake.

The quake also affected wives whose husbands are frequently transferred around the country. I met one of them, who moved five times during the past eight years. She said she has moved twice a year because of her husband's work. She had not spent a year in Kobe before the quake hit. Because she had few relatives in town, she was quite uneasy. She said that her husband went to work even the day of the quake and didn't return home until the next day. Therefore, she went through the hardships by herself, taking care of her child who had a high fever. That may or may not have been the reason, but she said she was still suffering from anxiety even two months after the disaster.

Some of the Kobe wives whose husbands were transferred elsewhere in Japan said their spouses phoned them just once to ask about the safety of their families. Others said their husbands never returned home. Even if houses and family members

were unharmed, the shock caused by the quake was beyond belief. Some wives who didn't have their husbands' sympathy, were still terrified and unable to resume household chores.

I wonder how these husbands thought of going to work, leaving their wives and children at home. Especially those who were transferred elsewhere in Japan seemed to have escaped from Kobe. It is true that people were living in fear of aftershocks a month after the quake. Were they afraid of getting fired if they didn't report to work? I have heard that some companies fired their employees because of too many absences after the quake. If that was the reason, I can't help but recognize a serious problem in the company-oriented principle of Japan, which gives priority to economy over family's safety.

Aside from those engaged in restoration work, companies should have given priority to restoring employees' personal lives after the disaster. However, it seemed that there was a common mentality between the companies and their workers. Particularly men apparently felt that they should go to work at any cost. I think that we, Japanese, tend to identify ourselves with companies to the degree where we never doubt going to work even in the aftermath of a devastating quake. Generally, company employees think that work is the priority rather than the family. This mind one would set, deeply connected to the Japanese lifetime employment system, is sometimes even considered manly.

Media reported *karoshi* of restoration workers as though their deaths should have been admired and cast the men as heroes because they died from having worked day and night in the office after the quake.

I do appreciate their hard labor; on the other hand, I wished they had lived. No media reported the anguish of these men's families or questioned human rights, as I recall. Men working in the media themselves must have also been on the verge of death from overwork.

In the end, I want to ask non-Japanese women the following questions: Would your husbands go to work in the aftermath of disaster such as the Great Hanshin Earthquake? Do companies in your country force employees to work and to live apart from your families? If the company ordered your husband to transfer and to leave his family behind, would he accept it? And would you, as a wife, accept it without any protest?

### **Mass dismissal of part-timers**

**By Tomoe Kuroda, 40s, Kobe**

At the time of the Great Hanshin Earthquake, I was a clerk of a large-scale workers union. I also worked for Kobe Workers Union, which admits even part-timer workers.

On January 24, I called my supervisors and went to the office to clean up the mess. Afraid of the aftershocks, I took my teenage daughter with me. We took the subway from Nishijin-Chuo Station to Itayado Station and walked along the JR railway from Shin-Nagata Station to Sannomiya, where the train was suspended.

The town turned into a pile of colorless debris, where a wave of people kept moving in silence. The people were not recognizable because all of them carried a backpack and wore trousers, a hat and mask.

Our office had just moved to Kumoi Street on January 15, and we were going to install the telephone on the 17<sup>th</sup>, the day after the earthquake. When I arrived at the office, I found bookshelves and file cabinets piled up inside, blocking the doorway. Wearing thick gloves, we cleared scattered glasses and broken concrete, carried buckets of water and continued cleaning for days.

Everyday excavators were destroying the remaining half-destroyed buildings in Sannomiya, gathering steel frames. In this aftermath, an unbelievable thing happened. Part-time workers, who had been ordered to stay at home until the company called them, were dismissed en masse. The phenomenon first occurred at small companies in January, followed by large firms in February. Some 630 part-timers at Daiei supermarket chains, 670 at Sogo Department Store and 200 at Kanetetsu Delica Food chains were just discharged.

We reconnected the office telephone in February and set up a Labor and Employment Hotline related to the Great Hanshin Earthquake. From the time we announced the service, the phone never stopped ringing, and the calls exceeded 1,700 by the end of June. Most of the callers lamented they could not go to work because all of the transportation was shut down. When the companies restarted, people called in to complain about layoffs of certain workers, including pregnant women and senior workers. Even some part-timers who lived near the office were laid off because companies had to relocate their regular workers and reduced shifts.

Each instance revealed a tragic situation. Some women lost their jobs because they had to take care of their elderly family members or children because daycare centers were closed.

We held a counseling session on February 25 and formed the Earthquake Victims Labor Union. After media reported that unemployment insurance was paid, more people came to apply for it on a due date. We negotiated with more than 50



companies, sometimes persuading them to maintain their employees or to raise the amount of retirement money.

Conflicts between husbands and wives also re-surfaced. Husbands were afraid of being fired from their companies, which suffered from unstable finances. Husbands worried that their wives' involvement with the union would affect their own careers. The men didn't like their wives gathering at union meetings and coming home late at night. The men were mad at the company's attitudes; however, they wanted their wives to leave the issue to someone else rather than taking the initiatives.

According to a survey conducted by the Earthquake Victims Labor Union, companies stopped giving employees insurance money at the end of June, and more than 70 percent of people remained jobless. Some 6 percent of people were too busy securing shelters or taking care of families to look for jobs. This was just the tip of the iceberg. As many as 50,000 people were job hunting. This figure excluded those who were unofficially guaranteed jobs but didn't get them, or those who had worked on a limited term basis. Considering such situations, it would get harder for women to look for a job in the future.

Every time I find a fragment of glass between the filed in the office, I'm startled. It is a reminder of a wave of people just walking around in the dusty town of Sannomiya. Earthquake damage is still spreading. Some companies are problematic because they hire part-timers who work only four hours. Because these part-timers are excluded from employees' insurance, the companies end up accepting only temporary workers..

We should remind the workers to question themselves before going to work. Do they go to work to support their families, or do they live to support their companies?

Although not many people remain in the union, they are carefully considering and discussing jobs, families and life styles. It is certain that they have learned to stand on their own feet.

**\*Follow-up survey for those who consulted the hotline:**

More than 70 percent of people answered "I have not yet found a job." 63 percent answered "I lost my job because of the earthquake." 30 percent answered "I stopped working temporarily."

The labor union surveyed people who consulted the Post-Quake Job and Employment Hotline, and asked their situations and problems six months after the quake. Some of them had received unemployment insurance that expired at the end of June. In July, 5,000 people were on the unemployment insurance. On the other hand, only 8 percent of surveyed people answered that they had found jobs. It shows that

during the six months people's lives have worsened because they were unable to find new jobs and they have lost their primary sources of income. The following is a result of our survey.

**<70 percent were women, and 74 percent were 40 or older>**

Women respondents accounted for 69 percent while men accounted for 30 percent. As for their ages, 31 percent of all the respondents were in their 50s, while 21 percent were in their 40s and 60s, respectively. 63 percent of people surveyed lost their jobs because of the quake and 30 percent got a temporary layoff; overall, 93 percent were unable to continue working.

**<89 percent received unemployment insurance>**

89 percent of the people received unemployment insurance. Of them, 52 percent answered that they renewed the contract.

**<38 percent received unemployment insurance for 90 days>**

Insured period ranges from 90 days (42 percent), 180 days (26 percent) to 210 days (19 percent). People with 90-day (three months) insured period gained 60 days, which is guaranteed for those who suffered more damages than average. However, the extended period of 60 days still expired at the end of June, and 5,000 people received this insurance by July. Those who had 180-day insured periods started losing their insurance from late September to late November.

**<Only 55 percent returned to their previous workplaces>**

Among the people who were laid off, 55 percent of them resumed their previous jobs, 24 percent answered that they were going to return to their previous workplaces, and 21 percent said they were unable to do so.

**<6 percent answered they were not yet inclined to find a job>**

Among those who lost their jobs, 29 percent said they had landed new jobs, 65 percent said they had not yet found suitable jobs, and 6 percent answered that they were not yet ready to find jobs.

(Excerpt from "The Great Hanshin Earthquake and Workplace" of Kobe regional council of labor unions)

**Surveys concerning employment of earthquake victims: An interim report**

1. What happened to your job after the quake? (100 responses)
  - 1) I lost my job – 63 (63 percent)
  - 2) I got some time off – 30 (30 percent)

- 3) I still work at the same place – 7 (7 percent)
2. If you lost your jobs, did you receive unemployment insurance? (74 responses)
    - 1) I received it – 66 (89.2 percent)
      - a) I have paid for the insurance – 19 (28.8 percent)
      - b) I bought the insurance after the quake – 34 (51.5 percent)
    - 2) I didn't receive it – 8 (10.8 percent)
      - a) I haven't paid long enough to get it – 2 (25.0 percent)
      - b) I hesitated to ask the employer for it – 3 (37.5 percent)

As for 1), how long did you receive the insurance? (not including extended 60-day period)

- 1) For 90 days – 24 (42.1 percent)
  - 2) For 180 days – 15 (26.3 percent)
  - 3) For 210 days – 11 (19.3 percent)
  - 4) For 240 days – 3 (5.3 percent)
  - 5) For 300 days – 4 (7.0 percent)
3. If you got some time off after the quake, did you return to the previous workplace? (33 responses)
    - 1) I returned to the previous workplace – 18 (54.5 percent)
    - 2) I'm going to return to the previous workplace – 8 (24.2 percent)
    - 3) I was unable to return to the previous workplace – 7 (21.2 percent)
4. If you lost your job, did you find another job? (66 responses)
    - 1) I got a new job – 19 (28.8 percent)
    - 2) I'm still looking for a job – 43 (65.2 percent)
    - 3) I'm not ready for job hunting – 4 (6.1 percent)

5. Gender ration
  - 1) Male – 29 (29.9 percent)
  - 2) Female – 68 (69.1 percent)

6. Age
  - 1) Twenties – 13 (15.5 percent)
  - 2) Thirties – 7 (9.7 percent)

- 3) Forties – 18 (21.4 percent)
- 4) Fifties – 26 (31.0 percent)
- 5) Sixties – 18 (21.4 percent)

### **Together with the labor union, I fought against the company**

**By O.M., 20s, Kobe**

After graduating from a technical school last year, I landed a job at a sewing company that produces high-quality dresses. At that time, I was so busy getting accustomed to the new physically-demanding job that I didn't have the slightest time to check the Labor Standards Law. I was able to look at the company as a whole after several months, and that raised some questions. However, since I knew almost nothing about labor laws, I was somewhat convinced that this might be the way a company works.

But through the January 17 earthquake, I found that the company was not abiding by the law.

The trouble began when I told the company president that I had to quit. Because I couldn't use trains, it was hard to commute and make it in time for work. Then I said I wanted the last day of my paid holidays that I was going to take as my resignation day. The president refused my request, saying that the company had had enough hardships in restoring its regular activities. The president seemed so determined at that time that I left the place without trying to discuss it further with him.

Later, however, I read the Labor Standards Law in the library and learned that the president was telling me something illegitimate. I received a postcard a few days later notifying me that I officially left work on the day I broke my will to the president. Finding that he had no intention to pay me even for paid holidays, I rushed to the labor counsel founded by the Mukogawa Union. I consulted the union about what I had read in the newspaper. While telling the staff about my company, I came to realize that some of its practices were against the law.

When the employees take one paid holiday, the company deducts 8,000 yen from the bonus payment of 16,000 yen a month. This is then given to employees who don't take a holiday during the month. What is even worse is that the president decided to raise the amount from 8,000 yen to 10,000 yen this January. Some employees were not paid overtime. The company does not deliver a written labor contract or post any clear office regulations. Even when the company replaced working days with holidays, they wouldn't pay us extra. The law stipulates that the company shall pay 60 percent of

the day's wages. In addition, the company must pay overtime to the employees when it requires them to work on holidays. There is no end to these infractions.

The union staff made my statement, including the following five proposals: 1) the payment for nine months paid holidays; 2) reimbursement of 8,000 yen, which was deducted from the bonus payment of 16,000 yen; 3) my savings for company travel; 4) the payment for the overtime work; and 5) the payment for 10 day offs after the earthquake. With this statement, we went to the company and negotiated directly with the president, demanding the payment.

It seemed that the president had never experienced such an objection raised by an employee in his decade-long career at the company. He looked at the statement with his eyes wide and used every possible excuse to evade paying the money. He was then convinced by the union staff that the statement was based on the law and that he had no other choice but to pay.

Finally, he said he would consult with the Ministry of Labor and transfer the sum into my account. Doubtful of his words, I went to the Labor Standards Office in Kobe with the union staff and asked to keep the company under surveillance.

Our efforts finally bore fruit. The president transferred almost as much money as I demanded. At last, the negotiation with the company that had started on January 30 ended on March 2.

I have learned and experienced various important things through this procedure. Now that I managed to find a new part-time job, I'm going to turn over a new leaf.

### **Don't allow unfair dismissal**

**By Tomoko Shimokawa, 20s, Taki-gun**

I had been working for an esthetic salon in Sanda until six months ago. When the earthquake hit the city, the president abruptly requested that I quit, saying he would pay me a month salary as compensation.

Later, it turned out that my supervisor had urged the president to fire me by using the earthquake as an excuse. The supervisor didn't like me and wanted to dismiss me.

He held the position simply because he was a president's cousin, but he knew nothing about the business or how to manage people. As I served the clients at the salon every day, I wanted to please them. One time I suggested to my boss to improve our service, and he took it as an insult.

When there was a theft in the salon, all of us who happened to be there were

suspected and ordered to hand in a written apology with our name seals. Because I didn't steal anything, I refused to turn in the apology. I was the only one to do so, which upset my boss.

I later found that one of my co-workers had turned in her resignation notice but had been asked to stay. Instead, the president asked me to quit since I always conflicted with my boss.

It was unfair that he fired me while retaining my co-worker who wanted to leave. Moreover, the president treated my case as a resignation and refused to issue the unemployment certificate, which made it very difficult for me to find another job.

In the end, I consulted the labor union, and I was able to settle the case satisfactorily. From this experience dealing with layoffs, I learned that I should have the courage to claim the company's wrongdoings. I also felt that this should not happen to other people.

I would like to say to those who are facing unfair dismissal, "Don't be compelled to accept such an order. Fight back!"

### **Unreasonable instruction from the National Personnel Authority**

**By N.Y., 30s, Akashi**

I'm a part-time employee at a national university. But I was unable to go to work from the day of the earthquake on January 17 to 23, except for on weekends. The apartment in Akashi I lived in collapsed. I escaped to another place with other residents. After that, since public transportation became unusable, I could not go to work.

Other co-workers were also unable to go to work during the same period. The university gave full payment to most of the absentees, while my pay was deducted for January 20 and 23.

This was because the university treated absences as special holidays (paid holidays) for official employees, and as annual holidays (paid holidays) for part-timers. However, I used up the annual holiday by January 19.

I understand up to this point.

Meanwhile, on January 24, the National Personnel Authority issued the instruction (No. 14-11) stipulating that government workers may be exempted from official duties. This order enables the employees, part- and full-timers alike, who couldn't come to work because of the quake to receive pay during the exemption period.

What I do not understand is that this stipulation became valid from January 24. It was between January 17 and 23, when there was the largest number of people working. Since January 24, the transportation partially resumed and more employees

came to work.

The employees were paid unequally even though they took absences during the same period. If the exemption order had been valid on January 17, this discrimination could have been avoided in the first place.

### **Why I resigned – the reasons I had as an insider of a large organization**

**By Yoko Azumi, 40s, Akashi**

“As we don’t use the word ‘waiting period,’ nobody will fall in that category,” said my supervisor. I was dumbfounded by his remark as if I heard a murderer say there was no dead body as he stood right in front of it.

First, my boss said, “Please wait at home for our call.” When I finally received the phone call, he ordered me to report to the office on February 8. It took me three and a half hours to go to the office on that day because of the inconvenient transportation. It was three weeks after the earthquake. The words I quoted at the beginning were the response from my supervisor when the part-timers asked him about pay during the suspension period.

While listening to what my boss said, I decided to quit my job, as I felt people there had no common sense. Feeling helpless, I chose to quit rather than to fight back. Besides, the department section I was working for closed down due to earthquake damage.

I worked for the Kobe Co-Op, which was said to be the largest in the world. It appeared an ideal company with the spirit of love and cooperation. The inside, however, was a typical male-dominated society filled with competition and greediness, which continuously disappointed me.

Out of job, I couldn’t earn any money. As if throwing fuel on fire, the company sent me a bill requiring me to return the overpaid salary. The note said I should return the paycheck the company “loaned” me while I was absent from work due to the public transportation shutdown. Because of the malfunctioning computer, the company mistakenly transferred the money into my account, the note said. It further mentioned that my retirement money would be withheld until I pay the debt. I was having a hard time making both ends meet as I hadn’t yet received the unemployment insurance. I had to ask for an installment plan to pay the sum by end of the year. The company said it would be possible if I owed all the commission. I was dumbstruck.

I managed to pay the money with all difficulty. I even borrowed some from my children. One day a large package arrived. There was a gorgeous frame as thick as a photo album with a certificate of appreciation addressed to me inside. “What on earth

are they thinking?" I was disgusted.

Even if we are hired by a big company, we should never feel safe. This earthquake revealed which company truly cares about the employees.

Concerning this "dead" Co-Op, all the part-timers must feel relieved as they no longer have to work for such a company even if they were forced to quit.

### **Double shock**

**By U.Y., 20s, Akashi**

I had been teaching Yoga at sport clubs and public facilities. When the earthquake devastated all of them, I lost my job. However, I was also so shocked by the quake that I hardly recognized the fact that I became jobless.

I didn't know what to do while because I had so much trouble in a daily life after the quake. But as staying alone in the house would not change anything, I decided to do some volunteer activities at the rescue center in Kobe. I found what I should do first at the center. I needed to overcome the financial difficulty. I began job-hunting after returning to Akashi. And I realized that landing a job was like hitting the jackpot as there were so many, like me, competing for few opportunities.

When I almost gave up on the idea, the employment agency, to which I had been registered, introduced me to a month-long job. I was overjoyed.

On the third morning, on the way to my new job, I ran into a crane with my bicycle, bruised the right side of my body and suffered whiplash injuries. The bicycle brake wasn't working properly, so I sped down the slope and failed to avoid the crane.

I had no other way but to cancel the new job. I was battered both physically and mentally. It had taken me two months to get back to the previous normal life.

I felt as though something pivotal inside me had suddenly collapsed.

Three and half months have passed since the quake, and I'm beginning to restore my energy. Now I'm thinking about working again. The 20-second disaster on January 17 made all the difference in me and inspired me to rethink about my life.

### **A dentist took advantage of the earthquake turmoil**

**By A.M., 20s, Kobe**

I had worked for a dentist. Although the earthquake caused a lot of damage to people and buildings, my workplace suffered only a little damage except that the dishes were broken and the water faucet became inoperable. Because all the medical equipment was unharmed, we were able to resume our business. Although the business was not quite the same as before, the patients began to come back one by one every day.



Then the dentist asked us, the full-time employees, to quit. The reason was that the nearby apartment had fallen and not as many patients as before could be expected to come. He said he could no longer pay us.

I didn't think people living in the apartment composed all of our clientele. I also thought it was strange. He was supposed to receive the money from the insurance two months after the patient claims, but only one month had passed since the quake.

In the end, he finally confessed that he had been thinking about opening a new office somewhere else. When we asked him if he intended to keep us at the new place, he answered no. We ended up quitting.

We asked him to let us apply for the unemployment policy, but he turned a deaf ear. As we were uncertain about immediately finding another job, we asked him for unemployment insurance and retirement money. He refused to give me the retirement money because I had worked only two years. According to his explanation, people who worked over three years were entitled to it. But I had heard that previous employees who had worked less than three years had received the money. When I mentioned this, he said he did so because he had money then. He also refused to pay retirement money for the two years I worked there if he were to pay unemployment insurance. Reluctantly, we settled to get the full payment of employment insurance. A few days later, I heard about the labor union for dental technicians, and I went to Mukogawa union to ask more about it.

The dentist seems to have hired new part-timers now and continues his business as before. I'm still looking for a job, with determination that I will not repeat the same mistake.

### **Beware of employers' ignorance**

**By Naori Morimoto, 20s, Kobe**

The earthquake has left ugly issues emerge in many respects. One of them was mass a layoff. Many people lost their jobs, and that indicates employers themselves had been at a loss.

My case was also that kind of dismissal. Through negotiation with the company, I was astonished at the fact that employers knew very little about the Labor Standards Law. Under the labor-management relationship, part-timers have almost the same rights and duties as the regular employees. Some companies think they can hire part-timers any time and fire them when they are no longer needed.

Along with the labor union staff, I went to see Labor Minister Hamamoto to hand in our proposal. At that time, I felt that everything would probably be delayed

further if we left the matter with the administration.

For example, employment insurance that was finally paid would be cut off in six months. What would happen if our savings ran out by then? The workers would need opportunities and the jobs themselves by then. The administration should take the initiative to offer more jobs to workers instead of leaving everything to volunteers. We have lived comfortably under the lifetime employment system. However, isn't it time for us to review our way of thinking and try to live on our own?

### **I want to return to my previous workplace**

**By M.A., 50s, Kobe**

I lost my husband four years ago. Since then I had lived in Nagata Ward with my two sons, aged 22 and 20, and an 18-year-old daughter. We lived on the second and third floors of the ferro-concrete apartment, half of which collapsed in the quake.

It is March 16 today. The gas service has not yet resumed. The water mains were broken. Because it was dangerous to have water leaking in the storage room on the first floor, we had the outside water pipe pulled into our apartment. Because we can't do laundry at home, we go to the nearby elementary school, which is used as an evacuation center. Our toilet tank and bathroom were also broken, but the landlord has no intention to repair them. We have decided to move to a sophisticated residential area in Suma Ward, and we are negotiating for the return of our deposit with our landlord.

I was working as a long-term part-timer at one of the major convenient stores, but it was also damaged by the quake and is now closed. The company gave equal relief funds to part-timers, but we haven't heard from them since.

Here, I would like to discuss women's issues, which the earthquake has uncovered, as far as women's working conditions.

After the disaster, the first thing that came to women's minds was their family lives and the ways to secure daily necessities. Men, on the other hand, thought of their offices and how to resume the companies' business activities. Many men rushed to their offices, shifting the responsibility of the household chores and children to their wives. Left alone, women had to bear the burden to take care of the rest of the family. They remind us of the wives who saw their husbands off to the battlefield, who were not allowed to shed tears. This time, their husbands left for the "business" battlefield.

It has become more difficult for career women to continue working and keeping house. Because they had to look after their family members, women were unable to rush to the workplace immediately after the quake. Men in their companies labeled these women as irresponsible and unreliable, and that also made women blame themselves.

In one company, a woman in a managerial position was ordered to cook during the restoration work. This is clear evidence of how men regarded their female counterparts. Cooking, of course, was an indispensable job at the time of emergency. However, men must have subconsciously believed that such chores should be left for women because men had more important tasks to tackle. They had to restore business. It was women indeed who noticed some small tasks in the workplace that needed to be done such as securing water and cleaning restrooms.

Unlike male colleagues, women who managed to rush to the office after the quake felt guilty toward their families at home. Some received severe reprimands from their relatives because they left the kids at home. Many women in managerial positions, however, said they felt like it was not so hard to handle both work and family matters because they had understanding and strong support from their families. They were reassured that children who grew up watching their mothers working with all the difficulties understood how hard it was for women to continue careers.

However, even these women who devoted their energy and time to the office restoration work couldn't help wondering if they did the right thing as a human being. Told that women should work as hard as men, some were unable to return home for nearly one month. They had to spend hours just getting to the office because of insufficient transportation. Others reached their mental and physical limits, and in some cases they became ill. Learning these anecdotes, I can't help wondering if it was really necessary to risk one's own health or life for the sake of a company. I think that these examples clearly show how the Japanese attitude as a whole puts companies and economy first rather than human lives.

Middle-aged women, mostly part-timers, were laid off en masse. Some cases were obviously mass layoffs, rather than due to the quake. Other cases dismissed workers who had not bought unemployment insurance. Women usually work to supplement their household incomes. Indeed, it would not be as problematic for companies to lay off women if they let go of men, as well. Such mindsets underline the mass layoffs of female part-timers. Actually, their income is indispensable in paying loans and children's education. Coupled with lasting economic recession, the disaster worsened the employment of many female students. Moreover, rape, molestation and other sexual crimes have increased in number, proving that women's rights are far from being respected.

These women's issues prevailed after the quake, but the problems already exist in our daily lives. The post-quake devastation revealed the hidden reality. These problems -- such as based gender roles, death from overwork, contempt for women,

importance of work and economy rather than family and community -- have already existed in Japanese society, but they asserted themselves after the quake. The emergent situation was used as an excuse to evade criticism against many unfair practices.

As I don't have family to take care of, I failed to empathize other women's pain and hardships. I certainly thought that I would have been suffering if I were married and had children or elderly family members. But the problem was still other people's business. I rather felt obliged to work even harder for the sake of other women who couldn't do it. I devoted myself to work and volunteer activities. My mind was much too occupied with personal affairs to ponder upon the problems women shared. Although I realized there was something wrong in the way the society treated us, I could only blame the disaster. I had thought I was well aware of women's matters, but problems can be easily ignored under the name of emergency. I later felt so more keenly.

First of all, in reviewing our daily lives, we should try to create a society where women can feel safe and lively even when emergencies arise. We need to question men's senses of values that emphasize job and company. Women should reflect on this more thoroughly and raise issues concerning their rights. It is necessary to consider working as our right and remain more conscious of these privileges. Women in managerial position are yet few. By questioning their passive roles they learned through education and community, women should be encouraged to take leadership. Various steps should be taken for that purpose. At home, husbands and children should be encouraged to take part in the housework and cooperate with one another. In society, the number of nursery schools should be increased, and working hours should be shortened. The system where men can take child and family care leaves should be established. These improvements should also be consistent.

An ideal society that is comfortable for its residents will be created when men and women cooperate and supplement each other's shortcomings. A cooperative society is created not with the economy- or enterprise-centered mentality, but considerate human-centered minds. Only the cooperative society makes it possible for men and women to keep the balance between work and family, hobbies and community activities.

### **The Great Hanshin Earthquake and working women**

**By Kumiko Fujimoto, 20s, Kobe**

On January 1995, an earthquake with a magnitude of 7.2 hit Kobe, killing an injuring more than 30,000 people, and destroying or damaging as many as 160,000 buildings. Gas, water, electricity and telephone lines were cut off. Elevated highways were tilted. There suddenly appeared a new form of daily life. An imaginary world

became reality. In this new world of disaster, it was the elderly, the disabled, foreigners, children and women who suffered the most. The catastrophe brought hidden social problems to light. These people's devastating situations motivated many people to help out. Human relationships and cooperation that had been fading were recaptured. The warmth of the heart rather than materialistic wealth was reconsidered. It was an opportunity for students, working men and women, to review everyone's role in the community.

Many people reconsidered the concept of prioritizing work and realized the invaluable asset of family and community. However, because conservative gender roles that condone men working and women staying at home have strengthened at extremely tense workplaces, it became harder for working women to continue balancing work and home. In addition, the basic necessities were cut off.

Some men began to show interest in family, community and volunteer activities. Working women and students are also joining in various volunteer jobs. This change has the potential to influence the concept of conservative gender roles in the workplace. This earthquake is a good opportunity to contribute to a new trend. How can we solve the problems that were brought to light by the quake? How can we improve this society into a place where men and women are treated equally? We are going to find the solution in family, workplace, and everyday life.

(This is a part of the report presented at the Women's Conference in Beijing by B.P.W. Kobe Club)

### **Women's domestic role in the post-disaster restoration work**

**By Yoko Yamamoto, Itami**

Women's domestic role after the disaster

Fetching water was a task shared by every family member. Husbands and wives generally cooperated in carrying large furniture out. Repairing roofs or other parts of the house was usually done by men or construction companies. Women cleared away broken glasses or dishes and supplied food.

Generally, it was often women who made contact with neighbors and local communities.

A few days after the quake, whole families, including children who were old enough, helped each other to restore their houses. According to the figures household chores were entrusted to women as time went by. It is obvious, however, that there is an assumption that women should deal with the housework.