Transformation of Migrant Farmers’ Image: Seasonal Workers’ Unemployment Insurance Problem

KASE Kazutoshi

This article reports the actual status of migrant farmers in temporary employment and the changes in people’s awareness about them in the high-growth period. In the high-economic-growth period, together with improvement of educational attainment, the amount of modern clerical work and technical work increased. At the same time, however, simple labor or unstable employment in the construction industry, the subcontracted industry, and small-scale businesses also increased. In the latter bottom labor market, as a typical example, workers from rural countries who had already been engaged in agriculture seasonally moved to places with demand for labor and worked as migrant workers. At first, people were sympathetic to migrant farmers working in temporary employment. This was because of their difficult life conditions, whereby they had to stay at construction sites away from their families for about half a year because their agricultural income was low and life was hard, drew people’s sympathy. But the fact that many migrant farmers working in temporary employment repeatedly received unemployment insurance payments every year when they returned home after finishing their work was widely known; this sympathy waned and people gradually looked at them with critical eyes. The Ministry of Labor explained that they received much higher insurance payments than the premium, resulting in worsening of the financial condition of the unemployment insurance business and an increase in the premium of general insurers, and the mass media widely reported it. This criticism against farmers was worsened by the further complaint that the price of rice was unjustly increased for political reasons, that the Foodstuff Control Special Account was in the red, and that farmers were avoiding payment of taxes. Concurrently with this transformation of public opinion, job opportunities were increasing in rural villages and their entitlement to unemployment insurance payments was weakening. As a result, the migrant workers union, which had claimed entitlement to unemployment insurance payments as a vested right, had to retreat, and the local governments and the employment exchanges that had supported migrant farmers receiving insurance payments were obliged to take strict action against them.

Key words: Migrant Farmers working in temporary employment, Seasonal Workers, Unemployment Insurance, Employment Exchange, Ministry of Labor