

Tozen Union Bios

11 February 2019

Louis Carlet ...

... is the founder of Tozen Union, a Japanese labor union organizing [migrant workers](#), including foreign language teachers, bank and newspaper workers. He currently serves as senior organizer and chief finance officer.

In 2003, he became a full-time paid trade union organizer at NUGW Tokyo Nambu, the first ever foreigner to hold such a position in Japan.

From December 2007 until December 2008, he case-officered and helped lead a strike by over 100 Berlitz language teachers for a COLA raise of 4.6%.

(<https://www.japantimes.co.jp/community/2008/09/30/issues/berlitz-strike-grows-despite-navsavers/#.XGFjRlz7SUK>) (https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/2007%E2%80%9308_Berlitz_Japan_strike)

On Dec. 3, 2008, Berlitz Japan sued him and six other union executives for 100 million yen each, for organizing an allegedly illegal strike. The union countersued the language school on several counts of violations of Trade Union Law in the Tokyo Labor Commission. The fight dragged on for several years. In Feb. 2012, Tokyo District Court dismissed all claims by the company against him and the other executives. Berlitz Japan appealed to Tokyo High Court, but Carlet led negotiations toward a final settlement, which was reached in December 2012.

In April 2010, he led a massive defection of most foreign and some Japanese members from NUGW Tokyo Nambu to found Tozen Union. (<https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Tozen>) It was the first ever amalgamated union in Japan led by foreigners. Tozen has grown since founding from six to twenty-one local unions as of March 2019. In March 2014, he interpreted for Noam Chomsky when that intellectual met with Tozen leaders for a chat. (<https://tokvgeneralunion.org/chomsky-tells-tozen-that-systems-of-power-dont-say-thank->

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Gerome Rothman...

... is field director and organizer for Tozen Union. He serves as case officer for over 10 local chapters, including Japan Times and Apple unions. He has argued several cases in front of the Tokyo Labor Relations Commission and Central Labor Relations Commission, including one precedent setting case which made it illegal for management to unilaterally impose the language (Japanese) used in collective bargaining.

Prior to his work with Tozen Union, Gerome was an organizer with SEIU local 775NW in Seattle, Washington, a long-term care workers union. He also worked as a community organizer with the AFL-CIO Working America program in Seattle.

Aside from being an activist, Gerome is obsessed with baseball, supporting the New York Mets and the Chiba Marines.

Hifumi Okunuki ...

... teachers labor law, social security law, and the Constitution at Sagami Women's University. She is also serving her sixth one-year term as Tozen Union's executive president.

"Academia in Japan is clearly segregated from the practical world of activism. Law scholars in particular tend to look down on activists. I am the only labor law scholar in Japan who is simultaneously an activist. This reality certainly cramps my success prospects, but serving as president of a labor union has helped me gain so much perspective that I could not have gained sitting at a desk. I am proud to be a union activist."

For seven years, she has written a column dealing with labor issues called *Labor Pains* in the Japan Times. All the back issues can be found at: (<https://www.japantimes.co.jp/community/column/lifelines-labor-pains/>) .

"Japan's population is about 128 million, of which 2.7 million are foreigners. Japanese labor law treats all workers equally, including labor union activism. In reality, there is a great deal of discrimination and prejudice. Tozen is a multinational union, and we fight every day for true equality that transcends nationality, race, and gender. We are so grateful that our comrades in faraway Iceland have taken an interest in us at Tozen."

"In my personal life, I love collecting milk bottles. Use of such bottles has sharply declined in Japan, but I have collected them from all over the country. I hope to find some nice milk bottles in Iceland, so please let me know where I can find them. Also, I loved rabbits. I used to live with a bunny called Haneko-chan, but she returned to the moon about a year ago. I look forward to meeting Icelandic rabbits."