

# **Korean Public and Transport Workers' News Issue #3**

Wednesday 24 April 2013, by [KPTU](#) (Date first published: 20 April 2013).

## **16<sup>th</sup> Korea-Japan Workers' Hiking Program**

Every year, the KPTU organizes the Korea-Japan Workers' Hiking Program together with the International Center for Labor Solidarity and Japanese JR East Labor Union to build solidarity between workers in the two countries. This year, the program took place from April 16 to 17 at Gyerong Mountain in South Chungcheong Province. 14 members from the JR East Labor Union's youth department participated along with members of the KPTU Rail and Subway Affiliates Council and KPTU officers.

On the first night, KPTU First President Jong-In Kim gave a lecture on Korean history and current state of the Korean labor movement history and briefly introduced the KPTU. Afterwards, the participants introduced themselves, shared a meal and engaged in exchange activities. The following day, the participants were joined by more KPTU members. A total of 320 workers built solidarity during five hours of mountain trekking. When the hike was over, the Japanese participants presented each of the participating KPTU affiliates with a banner imprinted with the words "Let's build solidarity and fight for rail safety and international peace." The following day, the Japanese participants visited Jeon Tae-il Street, Seodaemun Prison History Hall and the War and Women's Human Rights Museum.

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## **KPTU Calls for the Reinstatement of Dismissed Japan Railway Workers**

Twenty-six years ago, the Japanese government carried out the vertical separation and privatization of the Japanese railway. At that time, many union members fought courageously to stop privatization and protect public rail transport. They were rewarded with the loss of their jobs. Of 400,000 workers who had been employed by the public railway, only 200,000 were rehired by the private Japanese Railways Group (JR). Union members who had opposed privatization were excluded.

Since that time, the National Railway Motive Power Union of Chiba (Doro Chiba) has fought for the reinstatement of these dismissed workers. Doro Chiba won a partial victory last year when the Tokyo Municipal Court ruled that the exclusion of union members who had opposed privatization from rehire was an unfair labor practice. While the court ordered the payment of a small amount of compensation to the workers, however, it failed to order reinstatement. The case has now gone on to the Tokyo High Court, where a ruling is expected in the near future. The court has shown signs, however, of its intentions to reverse the original ruling.

In Korea, we know all too well what it means to face reprisal for defending public transport services. Like our Japanese brothers and sisters, a hundred members of the KPTU-affiliated Korean Railway Workers' Union have yet to be reinstated after being unfairly dismissed for opposing rail

privatization. In support of our Japanese brother and sisters' struggle for reinstatement, we are carrying out a petition drive among our membership calling for a fair ruling from the Tokyo High Court.

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### **Update: KPTU Democratic Korea Ginseng Corporation Branch Wins Recognition**

In the February issue of Korean Public and Transport Workers' News, we reported on the struggle of the KPTU Democratic Korea Ginseng Corporation for union recognition, which had gone on for almost two years. We noted that the Korean Confederation of Trade Unions had included a solidarity protest for the Democratic Korea Ginseng Branch in its period of concentrated actions that month,

We are happy to report that since then, the Democratic Korea Ginseng Corporation Branch has closed one chapter of its struggle victorious. On March 19, the South Chungcheong Labor Dispute Arbitration Committee put forth a proposal for settlement, which became the basis of a collective agreement signed with management on April 2. The agreement includes the following provisions: reinstatement of dismissed union officers, provision of union office space on company grounds, guarantee of time for union activities during work hours and space for union outreach materials and a commitment to good-faith negotiations for improvement of the pay scale and conditions for irregularly-employed workers.

Though this first CBA, the Democratic Korea Ginseng Corporation Branch has built the foundation from which to continue to fight to win truly fair conditions for irregularly-employed Korea Ginseng Corporation workers.

### **Update: KPTU Seoul-Gyeonggi Public Service Branch Wins Multi-employer Collective Bargaining Agreement**

In the last issue, we reported that the KPTU Seoul-Gyeonggi Public Services Branch (Seo-gyeong Branch) had signed a provisional agreement with employers covering security and cleaning workers at several universities and university hospitals in the Seoul metropolitan area. On April 3, this provisional agreement became a full collective bargaining agreement, guaranteeing an hourly wage of 5,700 won, a monthly meal allowance of 70,000 won, the non-introduction of trainee system and prohibition of discrimination against the KPTU union.

In addition to increasing wages and improving conditions, this round of multi-employer collective bargaining was significant because of increased recognition of the responsibility of school administrators as the true employers of contracted cleaning and security workers. At Korea University and Yonsei University, school administrators signed written confirmation of their commitment to the CBA. At Indeok University, where employers refused to join the CBA, school administrators signed an agreement committing to bring wages up to the level of schools participating in the CBA by 2014.

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### **Korean Education Support Workers begin next stage of the Struggle**

In November of last year, education support workers in South Korea held a historic general strike

calling for union recognition, regularization of employment status and elimination to discrimination in pay and working conditions.

In the beginning of 2013, the courts, Labor Relations Commissions and Ministry of Employment and Labor issued several decisions confirmed the obligation of municipal governments to collectively bargain with education support workers' unions. Collective bargaining has now begun in several municipalities including Seoul, Gyeonggi, Gangwon, Gwangju, Southern Jeolla and Northern Jeolla.

The struggle of the KPTU Education Workers Solidarity Division (KPTU EdSol) and other education support workers' unions has, therefore, moved into a new stage. Whereas last year, we were fighting for basic union recognition, now we are fighting to turn recognition into real good faith bargaining, the conclusion of collective bargaining agreements and the implementation of new laws to protect the rights of education support workers.

To announced the beginning of a new struggle, the National School Precarious Workers Alliance, a coalition of education support workers' unions, held a press conference on April 8 and began a sit-in protest in front of the Ministry of Education directly afterwards. And, on April 12, KPTU EdSol held rally at the same location. Over 600 KPTU EdSol members and supporters attended to call for a real commitment to collective bargaining, introduction of a pay scale, guarantee of job security and regularization of employment status (employment by municipal governments rather than individual schools). Alliance member unions are taking turns holding similar rallies on Fridays during this month.

These actions are only the beginning. Recognizing a demonstration of power will be needed before our demands are met, KPTU EdSol and the Alliance are preparing for a likely general strike at the end of June. As part of this effort KPTU EdSol is currently holding a training course of local union officers to prepare them to educate and organized members and non-members for the struggle ahead. KPTU EdSol also recently participated by teleconference in a meeting of the Public Services International Education Support Staff Affiliates Network, where we learned about the struggle of education support workers in other countries, reported on the situation in Korea, and called for international solidarity. We hope that through a successful struggle this year, we can create a positive example of education support workers fighting for and winning trade union rights and respect as members of the school community, which gives hope and inspiration to education support workers in other countries.

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## **April 20, Day for the Elimination of Discrimination against Disabled People**

In 1961 the South Korean government designated April 20 'Disabled People's Day'. Municipal governments, support centers and facilities for the disabled commemorate April 20 by putting on shows and providing food for people with disabilities.

For many years, a strong disabled people's rights movement has existed in South Korea. This movement has criticized the paternalistic commemoration of April 20 and, for many years, fought to change this day from one of pity and condescension to one of struggle for respect and dignity. To so, they have renamed April 20 'Day for the Elimination of Discrimination against Disabled People' and every year organizing protests and related activities to put forth their demands for an end to discrimination and a fair system of care that supports disabled people's mobility, access and self-determination.

As a union representing care workers who assist people with disabilities in facilities, at home, at school and in life, the KPTU recognizes that the rights of the disabled and their assistants are intimately intertwined. Improvement of the working conditions of assistants through the reform of related government systems is necessary to ensuring that the disabled receive the support they need to live with dignity and independence. This year, the KPTU participated in the 4.20 Coalition to Eliminate Discrimination against Disabled People to call for legislation to protect the rights of developmentally disabled people, communication rights for the hearing-disabled through sign language use, reform of related legal structures and adequate funding to ensure sufficient assistance to the disabled and abolition of the disability ranking system, which leads to discrimination in treatment and care. On Saturday, April 20, the 4.20 Coalition held a rally, march and cultural festival in downtown Seoul to publicize these demands.

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### **The Struggle to Save Jinju Medical Clinic and Defend Public Healthcare**

In South Korea, local public medical clinics provide affordable healthcare to rural and low-income patients and their families. These medical clinics are central to the maintenance of public healthcare in a country where the vast majority of hospitals are privately owned and operated.

Despite the essential services they provide, local medical clinics have recently come under attack. On February 26, Joon-pyo Hong, the conservative governor of South Gyeongsang Province, suddenly announced the Jinju Medical Clinic would be closed, citing the clinic's deficit as a reason.

Recognizing the danger of applying the logic of profit to public healthcare institutions and that the clinic's closure as a threat to the very lives of patients, the Korean Health and Medical Workers' Union (KMWU), which represents Jinju Medical Clinic workers, began a determined campaign to keep the clinic open. This struggle has been backed by the entire Korean labor movement.

Despite workers' persistent protests, which include a hunger strike by clinic nurses and a high-altitude protest begun on April 16, the South Gyeongsang Province government has moved forward with legislation to facilitate the clinic's closure and pressured clinic patients into discharge. Tragically, two elderly patients have passed away since they were forced to transfer from clinic in the last several days.

The KPTU fully supports the struggle to keep Jinju Medical Center open. On April 13, we joined other KCTU affiliates for a National Workers' Rally to Protect Jinju Medical Clinic. We continue to hold protests opposing the clinic closure as part of the KCTU Public Sector Unions' Alliance. The KPTU Healthcare Workers Solidarity Division has been holding lectures to educate division members about the struggle and is fundraising to support the protesting KHMU clinic workers.

The fight to save Jinju medical clinic is a fight against the deterioration of public healthcare and, thus, vitally important to all public sector workers.

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### **Unions and Civil Society Organizations Unite to Fight Privatization**

With the Park Geun-hye administration now up and running, social movement forces are preparing

for a long fight ahead. In addition to precarious employment, public sector privatization is expected to be a main front in this protracted struggle.

On March 28, the KPTU joined the Korean Confederation of Trade Unions (KCTU), the Korean Government Employees' Union (KGEU), the Korean Health and Medical Workers' Union (KHMU) and over a hundred labor and human rights organization in the establishment of a Coalition to Oppose Privatization and Defend Quality Public Services. From the KPTU, the Korea Railway Workers' Union, the Korean Tourist Organization Union, the Korean Gas Corporation Branch and the National Pension Service Branch will take a leading role in the Coalition's work.

Coalition members have their work cut out for them. Currently, the Park administration is seeking to introduce competition to the operation of the KTX rapid transit train through the establishment of a second rail corporation, ease regulations to allow private companies to participate in the piping of gas into the country and propel privatization in the power and water industries as well as in finance, pension services, airport operation and duty free shops selling Korean traditional products. The administration has also signaled its intentions to apply the logic of profit to healthcare through the forced closure of the public Jinju Medical Clinic in South Gyeongsang Province.

The Coalition is currently planning campaigns to opposing the government's plans in all of these areas. It will also work to strengthen public welfare and conduct research aimed at developing alternatives to privatization based on the participatory and democratic operation of public institutions

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\* [http://www.kptu.net/mboard.asp?strBoardID=KPTU\\_PDSENG](http://www.kptu.net/mboard.asp?strBoardID=KPTU_PDSENG)