

Action Alert

After the death of Ha Jeun Keun, trade-unionists still face repression

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KCTU/KFCITU

63 UNION MEMBERS STILL IN JAIL

1 UNION MEMBER DEAD

MORE THAN 200 MEMBERS INJURED

1 UNION MEMBER'S WIFE MISCARRIES

As of August 15, 2006---“Liberation Day” for Korea, 63 union members still remain in jail for their participation in action supporting the strike launched by the Pohang local union, an affiliate of the Korean Federation of Construction Industry Trades Unions (KFCITU), KCTU. Although the vast majority of those imprisoned are leaders of the Pohang local union, four members of the national and local branches of the Korean Confederation of Trade Unions and the General Secretary of the KFCITU are also in jail. Despite the strike which began on July 1, negotiations between the union and the sub contractors are still proceeding forward, albeit in a turtle’s pace. The union’s main demands are a 15% increase in wages, five-day work week, and better working conditions.

Throughout the strike, the government’s actions have been to violently stop the strike in order to protect the interests of POSCO, a major leading South Korean company, where over 90% of the Pohang members work through a series of sub contractors. The government at the urging of the POSCO has sent in thousands of riot police to not only stop the strike but also any demonstration the union coordinates even though it has gained legal permits to hold rallies and marches. The police violence has resulted in serious injuries to several members and tragically it has caused a death and a miscarriage.

On August 1, 2006, Ha Jeun Keun, a 42 year old member of the Pohang local union died due to a sever beating he suffered by the riot police during a legal demonstration organized by the KFCITU on July 16. Witnesses have stated that the police repeatedly beat Ha Jeung Keun in the head with their metal shields. The police and the South Korean government have yet to take full responsibility for these actions. The union and the family of Ha Jeung Keun has asked the government to launch a full and impartial investigation on the circumstances leading to the death of Ha Jeung Keun, fully punish those responsible for his death, and sufficiently compensate the family of Ha Jeung Keun. The family has

refused to proceed with any funeral ceremonies until the government agrees to their demands. However, the government has to take any responsibility. In fact, the media has questioned the union's claims as to the true nature of Ha Jeung Keun's death.

In addition, on August 10, the union announced at a press conference that XXX, wife of one of the union members who was participating in a sit-down demonstration at POSCO headquarters tragically miscarried as a result of violent confrontation with the riot police. On July 19 during a demonstration coordinated by the KCTU Kyonggido Branch, she along with close to 100 family members of the union marched towards POSCO headquarters in an attempt to see their husbands, fathers, and sons; however, the riot police forcibly stopped their peaceful march and a confrontation between the riot police and the family members took place. As a result of this confrontation XXX was hurt and immediately hospitalized. At the time the doctors raised concerns about the status of her unborn child and advised her to be careful. Unfortunately she lost her child as a result of the riot police's actions. The union along with a number of women's groups has launched a complaint against the Human Rights Committee.

In one of the most recent rallies organized by the KCTU, the police continued its violence as they attempted to forcibly stop the union members in their efforts to march towards POSCO headquarters. 186 union members were injured and some of them are still seeking medical attention. 16 members were detained---a key leader of the KFCTIU was forcibly pulled down from the union truck and immediately arrested. The violence became so bad that even the Pohang citizens who were witnessing the confrontation attempted to intervene on behalf of the union members. The police response was to beat the Pohang citizens as well.

Despite the repression by both the government and POSCO, the Pohang local union is committed to continue with their struggle until their demands are fully met.

WHAT YOU CAN DO

Send a protest letter (sample enclosed) to President Roh Moo Hyun at the Blue House: 82-2-770-1690 (Fax) or e-mail at president.cwd.go.kr Copies should be sent to the Minister of Labor, Minister Kwon Ki-Hong at 82-2-503-9723 (Phone), 82-2-503-9772 (Fax) or e-mail at m_molab@molab.go.kr

Please send copies to the KCTU and the KFCITU.
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If you have any questions or need more information, please contact:

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