

Newsletter #2 of the KPAANG

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The 'Korean People's Action against Neoliberal Globalization' is a coalition of peoples and social movements of Korea, formed to mobilize against neoliberal globalization, particularly against the upcoming WTO Ministerial in Hong Kong. People's Action will be sending out English newsletters to share news about anti-globalization struggles in Korea and updates on preparation of the 'Korean People's Delegation against WTO Hong Kong Ministerial'.

Plan to Liberalize Korean Rice Market Ratified in Korean Parliament - Series of suicides... One peasant dead from police beatings

Much to the anguish of the 3.5 million farmers and the entire Korean population, and despite the continual struggles of farmers, the rice agreement was ratified in the National Assembly on 23rd November. Kang Gi-Gap, MP of Democratic Labor Party and peasant parliamentarian, had been on hunger strike for 28 days and several MPs tried to physically stop the ballot but in vain. 139 legislators voted in favour and 66 against.

The rice agreement is an agreement made with nine major rice exporters including China and US to open up the Korean rice market. The deal will permit Korea another 10-year delay in tariffication, however, only in return for doubling compulsory rice imports by 2014. Right now, compulsory import is limited to 4% and to processed foods and liquors, however, the deal includes an increase to nearly 8%. Moreover, direct sale of imported rice (unprocessed rice for household table) will be opened up to 10% and then 30% by 2014. In summary, the passed deal is basically a plan to liberalize the rice market rendering the 10-year tariffication postponement meaningless.

Peasants have been mobilizing almost everyday for the last couple of weeks - protesting all around the country and blocking highways with their vehicles. 2 farmers have committed suicide - and another lies in hospital after attempts - either in destitution or in protest. One other farmer passed away in the morning of 24th after injuries during a protest and several brain surgeries. Witnesses have said that he was severely beaten in the head by riot police.

The Korean Peasants League has announced that they will continue to struggle directly against the Noh Moo-Hyun government and his neoliberal regime. Farmers are holding candlelight vigils everyday in front of the National Assembly and are preparing for mass mobilization on 26th November. Another all-peoples rally is scheduled for 4th December which will include demands to scrap the government's bill to liberalize irregularization of labour and the proposal to adopt the anti-worker 'Roadmap on Advanced Industrial Relations'. The KCTU and rank-and-file workers have also set up protest tents in front of the National Assembly and are holding demonstrations everyday. The KCTU has announced that it will go on general strike on 1st December should the government push forth its bill on irregularization. °.

30,000 People Gather in Busan to Protest against APEC - APEC Leaders Adopt Special Statement to Stimulate the WTO Negotiations

On the occasion of the APEC Summit that took place in Busan, South Korea, on 18th and 19th

November, the 'Korean People's Action against APEC and Bush', a coalition of various movements that had come together to mobilize against APEC and Bush's visit to Korea, held the Busan International People's Forum on 16th and 17th November, and then series of cultural festivals and rallies from 17th evening to the 19th November.

Several hundreds of activists, not only from Korea, but also from Japan, US, Thailand, Indonesia and Hong Kong, sat together for two days of intense discussion. There were several self-organized workshops and the outcome was culminated to form the Busan People's Declaration, which was adopted at the final plenary session on 17th November. Another important initiative was the "Asian Movements Strategy Meeting against the WTO Hong Kong Ministerial" which took place late evening on 16th. The strategy meeting was co-organized by the Korean People's Action, Via Campesina, Hong Kong Peoples' Alliance, Focus on Global South and Japan Anti-WTO Coalition. Focus gave a presentation on the state-of-play in the WTO negotiations, while HKPA briefed about the preparation and plans of the HKPA. Other movements and networks also elaborated their plans and strategies. While agreeing on the objective that we need to strive to make the ministerial collapse, many issues were raised - for example, on the necessity for effective inside-outside coordination, and close coordination and effective joint tactics between the various groups of international protestors who will be in Hong Kong.

Street actions started on 17th - during the afternoon, hundreds of anti-US base/anti-globalization/anti-war activists went to Gyeongju (one hour north of Busan) where the Korea-US Summit was taking place, and voiced out their dissent against US President Bush. In the evening, thousands gathered in central Busan for a cultural festival. At noon on 18th, five sectoral rallies took place in various parts of Busan - the workers', peasants', women's, students and civic & social organizations, urban poor - each of which gathered thousands of people. The five rallies held five different marches, which met at one point to form a 30,000-strong contingency. The march went to the riverside road, from which BEXCO (summit venue) became visible. It was also the final point that the police had permitted. There was intense repression from the riot police, who outnumbered the protestors by far. They had formed a barricade of container boxes. The demonstrators, who tried to tie ropes to the containers to pull them away, were met with water cannons and then direct police batons and metal shields. Several people were injured in the process. On the second day of the summit, protestors met again and marched through center of Busan.

Much to the indignation of the protestors, as well as all those who favor justice and peace around the world, the heads-of-state of the 21 APEC countries adopted the Busan Declaration which reaffirms the Bogor Goals - plans to liberalize trade and investment in the region by 2010 for developed countries and 2020 for developing countries - and also a special statement urging for a deal in Hong Kong. The statement reads, "Significant progress must be made in Hong Kong in resolving still remaining considerable divergences and a clear roadmap for completion of the Round in 2006 must be established. There is more at stake here than just another phase of economic liberalization. A successful conclusion of the Doha Round is crucial for the future credibility of the WTO and the rules-based multilateral trading system." It goes on to say, "We call for breaking the current impasse in agricultural negotiations, in particular in market access, which will unblock other key areas, including non-agricultural products and services. [...] We, the APEC Leaders, are committed to face up to the political challenges associated with the DDA. We are ready to provide strong political leadership and the commitment necessary to produce in Hong Kong a sound platform for successfully concluding the negotiations." °.

Korean Peoples Delegation against WTO Hong Kong Ministerial Decides on Its Position and Plans

The 'Korean People's Delegation against WTO Hong Kong Ministerial', consisting of more than 1,500

peasants, workers, NGO and social movement activists, is continuing its preparations for its 'offshore struggle' in Hong Kong. It has formed its basic organizational structure, decided on its aims and principles, as well as concrete plans.

While coming to an agreement that our struggles will aim for 'no deal in Hong Kong' - collapse of the Ministerial meeting - and that we will continue to strive afterwards for incapacitation of the WTO itself, the Korean Delegation decided that it will:

- expose through variety of ways how the WTO and the on-going negotiations devastate the lives of Korean people
- implement non-violent peaceful protests
- considering the effect the large Korean Delegation will have on local people and movements, adopt protest tactics after sufficient discussion and coordination with local and international movements
- place foremost priority on strong mass mobilizations
- implement diverse and creative forms of action
- elevate the level of struggle towards the end of the Ministerial
- implement strong struggles in case of illegitimate repression by the WTO or the Hong Kong government
- strengthen international solidarity

Further discussions will be needed, however, to come up with more specific strategy and tactics.

As for concrete plans of action in Hong Kong, the Korean Delegation will hold an 'inaugurating rally' and the consecutive Via Campesina rally in the morning of 13th December and then join the main rally of the Hong Kong People's Alliance. It will participate in the various internationally proposed rallies such as the anti-GATS rally on 14th and peasants' rally on 17th, propose and organize an Asian Peoples Rally on the afternoon of 14th and participate in the final HKPA rally on 18th. The Korean Delegation is also planning to organize candlelight vigils in the evenings and implement diverse small group campaigns throughout the whole week, aimed at sharing with the local people the reality of Koreans under the neoliberal regime. °

From the anti-APEC struggles to peasants and workers' strikes and to the upcoming anti-WTO protests, the last remaining months of 2005 is truly a period of enlarged contradictions in the neoliberal regime but also a time of elevated struggles - an all-out revolt - by the Korean people. °
