

Korean Federation of Public and Transportation Workers' Unions second English newsletter

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International Support for Public Sector Trade Union Rights in SK

By international labor standards, all workers possess the fundamental right to freely join trade unions and engaging in union activities. This is true for workers in the public sector, just as it is for those in the private sector. ILO Convention 151 clearly protects public sector workers' right to freedom of association, while ILO Convention 154 requires that national laws sufficiently protect and public authorities take actions to promote collective bargain for public sector and all workers. Recognizing the importance of trade union rights to the provision of quality public services, the ILO has agreed to review the global implementation and enforcement of Conventions 151 and 154 this June during the International Labor Conference.

Nonetheless, many countries have experienced a trampling of public sector trade union rights, particularly in the past several years since the onset of global economic crisis. South Korea is representative of this global trend. Under its policy for the 'advancement of public institution labor relations' the South Korean government has required that employers at public institutions eliminate 'irrational' provisions in collective bargaining agreements, making success in this area an item for review in management evaluations. CBA provisions considered irrational include requirements for consultation with the union concerning staffing issues, 'excessive' allowances for union activities during work hours, and benefits and wage provisions seen as too generous. In order to pressure unions to make concessions, employers have unilaterally cancelled collective bargaining agreements at dozens of public institutions and used every sort of tactic imaginable to pressure union members to disaffiliate. Hundreds of government employees and public institution workers, members of the Korean Government Employees' Union (KGEU), and the KPTU, have been unfairly dismissed from their jobs in retaliation for legitimate union activities. Since 2009, moreover, the government has refused to recognize the legal union status of the KGEU, making it an extra-legal organization. It is also currently threatening to cancel the union registration of the Korean Teachers Union (KTU), another public sector union in South Korea. In addition, nearly half of the 560,000 South Korean government employees, including fire fighters and police officers, are legally prohibited from forming and joining trade unions. All of these measures are in direct violation of the ILO standards

that will come under review at the ILC this June.

In the lead-up to the ILC, violations of public sector trade union rights in South Korea have been receiving growing attention. In February, petitions addressed to then president-elect Park Geun-hye calling for the reinstatement of dismissed public sector union members poured in from union officers, social justice activists and academics in Asia, Europe and South and North America. On February 14, the KPTU, KGEU and KTU held a joint press conference in front of the office of Park Geun-hye's transition committee to announce and deliver the petitions. In addition, the affiliates of Public Services International's East Asian Advisory Committee adopted a statement calling for respect for public sector trade union rights in South Korea at their recent meeting in Macao on February 24.

The KPTU greatly appreciates these demonstrations of solidarity from our brothers and sisters around the world. We will continue to struggle until all public sector workers — in South Korea and globally — can fully exercise their fundamental rights as workers.

The KPTU Holds Annual Congress, Elects New Leadership

On February 15, the KPTU held its annual Congress at the Railway Meeting Hall near Yongsan Station in downtown Seoul. Some 200 KPTU delegates and members attended the Congress to take part in the discussion on plans for 2013 and vote for a new KPTU leadership. Seok-guen Baek, leader of the Korean Confederation of Trade Unions (KCTU), the national center to which the KPTU is affiliated, attended and spoke in solidarity at the Congress' opening. In addition, Public Services International (PSI) General Secretary Rosa Pavanelli sent a solidarity message to commemorate the Congress, as did PSI-Japan Council Chairperson Hideaki Tokunaga, Australian Service Union (ASU) National Secretary David Smith, Japan Confederation of Railway Workers' Unions (JRU) President Takeshi Masaharu, Service Employees International Union (SEIU) President Mary Kay Henry, SUD Rail Executive Committee Members Emmanuelle Bigot and Frederic Michel and CGT Public Services Federation (CGT-FDSP) President Michele Kauffer.

The Congress passed KPTU's activities plan for 2013. In the first half of this year we will focus on the struggle to raise the minimum wage to a real living wage, and efforts to organize public and transport sector precarious workers to fight for regular employment. In the second half of the year we will focus on bargaining with the government concerning policies that affect public institutions. We will also continue our struggle against the privatization of the railway, utilities, healthcare and other important public services throughout the year. The Congress also voted to establish a Public Institution Organizing Division and carry out rank and file-level discussions on the best path towards building industrial power.

The new KPTU leadership elected by the Congress is headed by Sang Moo Lee, who continues in a second term as president. President Lee began his involvement in the labor movement as a member and officer of the KPTU's social insurance affiliate. He is joined by General Secretary Aeran Kim, formerly the Division President of the KPTU's Healthcare Workers Solidarity Division.

The Congress also elected Jong-in Kim, former Division President of the KPTU Cargo Truckers Solidarity Division and President of the KPTU-affiliated Transport Workers' Union, Jae-young Lee, originally from the social insurance sector and former President of the KCTU Seoul Regional Council, and Bo-hui Choi, former Branch Vice President of the KPTU Precarious Education Support Workers Division, Seoul Branch. The new leadership of the KPTU has committed to work together to fight retroactive public and transport sector policies, and build a stronger KPTU, KCTU, Korean and global labor movement.

KPTU Cleaning and Security Workers win Provisional Agreement

Over the last several years, cleaning and security workers at university campus and hospitals in the Seoul metropolitan area have united through the KPTU Seoul-Gyeonggi Public Service Branch (abbreviated 'Seo-Gyeong Branch') to fight for the improvement of wages and working conditions across worksites. This struggle has paid off considerably. After a multi-worksite strike on March 8, International Women's Day, in 2011, these workers won their first multi-employer collective bargaining agreement covering workers at three universities (Korea University, Yonsei University and Ehwa University) and one hospital (Korea University Hospital). Since then, the Seo-Gyeong Branch has succeeded in bringing successively more worksites into the collective bargaining agreement and winning improvements in wages and benefit each year. The struggle of cleaning and security workers has been particularly symbolic because it has brought the wages of a mostly elderly, female and subcontracted workforce above the legal minimum and given momentum to the wider struggle for a living wage.

The power of cross-worksite unity has paid off again this year. Feeling the heat after workers voted in favor of a full strike and demonstrated their power during International Women's Day Protests, employers at five worksites reached a provisional agreement with the Seo-Gyeong Branch on March 14. Once finalized, the new agreement will give cleaning workers an hourly wage of 5,700 won, 840 won above the legal minimum. Together with other promised benefits, this will mean an increase of 130,000 won per month. Security workers will receive a basic wage at 90% of cleaning workers.

The struggle, however, is not over. Presently, employers at Yonsei University, Induk University and Hongik University are refusing to join the agreement. The Seo-Gyeong Branch and the whole of the KPTU will continue to fight together to bring these worksites into the agreement

Taxi Branch, Jeonil Gytong Chapter ends High-Altitude Protest

On March 14, Jae-ju Kim, President of the KPTU Taxi Branch, Jeonbuk Local, Jeonil Gytong Chapter climbed down from the 30 meter transmission tower at Jeonju Sports Complex where he had stayed for 69 days. His feet touched the ground in victory. Earlier that day, over two months since he first climbed up, and more than a year since workers at Jeonil Gytong and Wansan Gytong, two Jeonju taxi companies, formed union chapters, employers had signed an agreement committing to respect union activities.

Taxi drivers in the Jeonju area first formed union chapters on January 31, 2012 with the goal of fighting illegally low wages and precarity. From the minute the chapters were established, however, employers retaliated. Union officers faced violence from the company-supported yellow union and company managers themselves. Several union officers were illegally fired, then reinstated under orders from the Labor Relations Commission, only to be fired again months later. When union members asked to be granted office space on company grounds - the same rights granted the yellow union - they were refused, and when they pitched a tent in lieu of an office, managers cut off the electricity. Using bargaining channel unification provisions in the Trade Union and Labor Relations Adjustment Act, the employers have insisted on treating the yellow union as the only bargaining representative and refused to negotiate with the KPTU union chapters.

Seeing no other option, Jeonil Gytong Chapter President Ju-jae Kim climbed up the transition tower on January 4, 2013, committing to remain there until the union's demands were met. Finally, his struggle paid off. After hours of tense negotiations among the KPTU, the Ministry of Labor, Jeonju City and the employers, employers at both companies agreed to respect union activities, provide

office space and reinstated dismissed workers.

Chapter President Kim is now back on the ground. But there is much more work to be done. The union chapters must now organize aggressively and continue their struggle to win collective bargaining rights.

NHRC calls for correction of Asiana Gender Discrimination

On February 4, the South Korean National Human Rights Commission (NHRC) issued a recommendation to Asiana Airlines calling on it to correct gender discrimination in its dress code for female cabin crew. In particular, the NHRC recognized Asiana's requirement that female cabin crew wear skirts while working as discriminatory and recommended that Asiana grant the option to wear pants.

This NHRC recommendation was made in response to a complaint submitted by the KPTU last June in connection with the KPTU-affiliated Asian Labor Union's struggle to defend the rights of female cabin crew. The Asiana Labor Union has pointed out that forcing female cabin crew to wear skirts threatens workers' health and passenger safety because it makes it impossible to dress warmly in cold weather and hinders movement during flight turbulence. The Asiana Labor Union has also been struggling against Asiana's excessive pressure on cabin crew to prioritize duty free sales, subservience and service to customers above transport safety.

Notably, on March 15, Asiana Airlines announced its intentions to allow cabin crew to wear pants. This is an important improvement, but far more is needed. Over the last decade, Asiana has made profits of the backs of its cabin crew by denying them adequate rest and vacation time and forcing them to compete with one other on service, while using every means possible to break the union. We must use our success in beating back gender discrimination as the basis to demand that Asiana prioritize passenger safety and workers' rights.

KPTU Stands in Solidarity with Turkey Public Sector Workers

On the morning of Tuesday, February 19, Turkish police arrest more than 100 public sector workers, members and officers of the public sector national center KESK. Of those arrested, 58 were detained.

The arrests, which followed a suicide bomb attack on the U.S. Embassy in Ankara on February 1, were made based on allegations of links to terrorist organization. They represent a clear attempt by the Turkish government to link legitimate, democratic trade unions with terrorism. Sadly, using anti-terrorism laws and mass arrests as tools of union repression is not new in Turkey. On April 10, the Ankara 13th Heavy Criminal Court will start the trial for 72 other KESK members and leaders who were arrested on June 25, 2012 under similar circumstances. Last February, nine female KESK members were also arrested in connection with activities commemorating International Women's Day.

The KPTU stands in solidarity with our public sector sister and brothers in Turkey. As a small demonstration of support, we have issued protest statements condemning the actions of the Turkish government. We are also encouraging our members' participation in the online petition campaign calling for the release of KESK members and respect for public sector trade union rights. We must fight together to stop the global attack on public sector unions and make respect for the

fundamental rights of all workers a true international standard.

P.S.

*http://www.kptu.net/mboard.asp?strBoardID=KPTU_PDSENG