

# **South Korea: Some Progress in Incheon Airport Labor Dispute, Fears of Illegal Union Repression Remain**

Workers defer full strike to give Airport Corporation time to respond to demands

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Contracted property service, operations and security workers at Incheon International Airport, members of the KPTU Incheon Airport Regional Branch, went on strike again on November 16-17. Some 700 workers took part in the strike, while others used days off to participate in the strike rally held on November 16.

The Incheon Airport Branch had prepared to go on an unlimited strike on November 16. They decided to defer the unlimited strike, however, in response to advances in negotiations with contracting companies and a change in the attitude of the Incheon International Airport Corporation (Airport Corporation).

Until recently, bargaining with contractors had yield few results, while the Airport Corporation had staunchly refused to come to the table at all. This situation changed markedly following a 24-hour strike on November 11. On November 15, the Airport Corporation called a meeting with contractors and and union representatives to discuss a solution to the dispute. At the meeting Airport Corporation officials instructed contractors to actively seek agreements with the union on collective bargaining demands and promised to review particular provisions that could not be decided upon by contractors alone.

Since the meeting, the union and contractors have reach agreements on all but ten issues, solutions to which require a commitment from the Airport Corporation. These issues include demands for a guarantee of job security, wage increases, eradication of intermediary exploitation, respect for union activities, improvement of the shift system, increase in staffing levels, and the creation of an table for discussing a path toward the direct employment of currently contracted workers.

The union and contractors have agreed to collectively submitted a list of specific provisions related to these issues to the Airport Corporation for review. And, the union branch has agreed to give the Airport Corporation a week to present a proposal for solutions, deferring the declared unlimited strike until November 25.

There is, however, still great fear that the Airport Corporation will continue with its efforts to break the union. Charges against union leaders have not been dropped, and employers continue to use illegal replacement workers during union work stoppages. The union branch has made it clear that should this repression escalate in the days ahead it could go back on strike at any time before the November 25 deadline.

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