

Korean Government's hard-line stance continues

Monday 25 September 2006, by [KGEU](#) (Date first published: 7 September 2006).

Two KGEU offices have been forcefully closed up to now. One is the KGEU Gyeongnam Regional Branch office at Gyeongnam Provincial Government, and this was forcefully closed down and sealed off by the authorities on August 30th. The other is the KGEU Gyeonggi Regional Branch and provincial government Chapter office at Gyeonggi Provincial Government, which was forcefully closed down and sealed off with iron plates on May 27th.

The MOGAHA insisted that, as of August 31st, six KGEU local offices have been “voluntarily” closed down as of August 31st. But it is not true. 2 of them were not union offices, 2 others are still used as KGEU offices and the rest are those where the KGEU chapters had stopped working long before. This is a desperate attempt by the Korean government to try to ‘prove’ that there are substantial move to “transform illegal organisations into legal trade unions”.

- ***‘Two closed, but far from over’***

Moreover, the MOGAHA instructed local governments and agencies again that all the KGEU local offices at government buildings should be closed down by September 22nd. The MOGAHA held a meeting of vice mayors of Metropolitan Cities and vice governors of Provincial Governments on September 4th. The Minister stated that the government direction would not be changed at all. He claimed that notifications or warnings of forceful closing down of illegal organisations’ offices should constantly issued and that supervision on government employees should be more intensified in order to block them from joining the KGEU’s rally in Gyeongnam on September 9th. The MOGAHA took a much hard-line stance again that those who play leading roles in the KGEU’s rally on September 9th should be dismissed and that all other participants should be taken to disciplines.

- ***Dismissals and arrests waiting for rally participants***

Today the MOGAHA held a working-level meeting of the officials concerned with illegal activities of government employees’ organisations across the ministries with the police and the prosecutors participated as well and decided to take thorough countermeasures against the KGEU’s rally on 9th. According to a press release from the MOGAHA, the government claimed that the rally is illegal and therefore would be blocked in cooperation with the police and the prosecutors’ office, and that local government should intensify supervision of government employees, and that the local police should stop KGEU members’ departing for the rally from each municipality. It goes further that, when the rally is held, all the illegal activities of government employees participated should be photographed and videotaped for disciplines to be taken. The police also stated that *it would intensify inspection and check-ups at every point to the rally venue and block government employees from joining the rally. And furthermore, the police warned that the government employees not obeying ‘persuasion or guidance’ would be arrested.*

In fact, the rally has already been legally notified to the police in advance. The KCTU, the KGEU

affiliated umbrella union, notified that the rally would focus on workers' demand to stop repression against KGEU. Moreover, it's on Saturday. It has nothing to do with collective actions in working hours.

Union never retreats<

- sit-in protest, hunger strikes and more mass rallies to come

As mentioned above, the KGEU is planning to hold a national rally on September 9th in Changwon, Gyeongnam-do(province), where the KGEU Regional Branch office was forcefully closed down on August 30th. The rally, of which the main slogans are to defend our union, to stop the government repression and to protest the Gyeongnam-do governor's failing to meet the agreement with the union, will be the starting point of the KGEU's struggle in the second half of the year. Around 20,000 KGEU members are expected to join the rally. The rally will see the union itself converted into the KGEU Struggle Headquarter, a special organizing structure to fight back.

And the KGEU leadership will start a hunger strike at a sit-in protest tent set up in front of the central government building in Seoul from September 12th to 22nd. Indeed, the MOGAHA instructed local governments and agencies to forcefully close down the entire KGEU local offices nation wide by September 22nd. Till September 15th, the entire KGEU locals will also set up the KGEU Regional Struggle Headquarters. The regional rallies will be consecutively organised as well as national rallies with the KCTU and other NGOs. The forceful closing down of the union offices will be confronted with the all-out resistance of the KGEU members.

Meanwhile, the KGEU lodged a complaint to the ILO on Korean government's serious violations of the freedom of association principles on September 1st. As the ILO and other international organizations repeatedly pointed out, the government repression including the MOGAHA directives and its systemic campaign to destroy the KGEU is a clear case of contempt and infringement of trade union rights.

Voices and actions from international community

The Workers' Group of the ILO 14th Asia Regional Meeting issued a statement during the meeting that strongly condemns the actions of the Korean government oppressing basic labour rights and trade union activities. The statement is attached in the end of this news.

The Public Services International (PSI), a global union of 20 million public sector workers in the world, to which the KGEU is also affiliated, sent a protest letter to Mr. ROH Moo-Hyun, President of the Republic of Korea on August 31st, and issued an urgent action alert for all PSI affiliates. These are also attached in the end of this news.

The International Confederation of Free Trade Unions (ICFTU) also sent a protest letter to President ROH Moo-Hyun on September 1st, condemning serious violations of the principle of freedom of associations and intensified campaign against the KGEU. This is attached as well.

And on August 31, the South African Municipality Workers' Union (SAMWU) adopted a special resolution on the repression against the KGEU at its national congress. The SAMWU strongly condemns the barbaric actions of the Korean government to oppress the KGEU and calls upon its members and other organizations to mobilize support and actions for the KGEU. The resolution is also attached.

On September 6th, the Nordic Council of Civil Servant Unions (NSO) representing 250,000 civil

servants in five Nordic countries (Denmark, Finland, Iceland, Norway and Sweden) also sent a protest letter to President ROH Moo-Hyun demanding immediate cease of all acts of repression on the KGEU and withdrawal of the MOGAHA directives. The letter is also attached.

KGEU Breaking News

August 30th, 2006

Repression goes far bitterer while ILO ARM held in Busan, Korea

- Successive Forceful Closing down of KGEU Offices nation wide

The government repression on the KGEU has been continuing and even getting worse while the ILO Asia Regional Meeting is being held in Busan, Korea.

In spite of repeated recommendations and protests from the international community to stop repression and to guarantee government employees' trade union rights, the Korean government has constantly proceeded its actions to destroy the KGEU.

The Gyeongnam Officials Training Institute, an affiliated agency to the provincial government issued an official letter on August 29 informing that it would execute the administrative action to forcefully close down the KGEU's branch office at 4 o'clock pm on August 30 (Gyeongnam Officials Training Center Official Letter, Department of Education Support-1641, August 29, 2006). The warrant attached to the official letter stipulates that, According to the government instruction that prohibits providing offices to unregistered government employees' unions by the public officials trade union act, the forceful administrative action would be executed.

Hundreds of riot cops have been deployed around the union office right away. And KGEU members are prohibited from entering the union office except 4 union staffs working there.

Today, the KGEU Gyeongnam Regional Branch held a rally in front of the union office building. During the rally, all the chairpersons from the chapters of KGEU Gyeongnam Regional Branch shaved their hair in protest. Riot cops were deployed again inside and outside of the office building and blocked KGEU members from entering the union office. Several union members tried to block the forceful close down of the union office in vain. They were oppressively moved out by the police. The union office was sealed off with thick plywood with a warning sign attached. (The pictures are attached in the end of this news.)

The KGEU Gyeongnam Regional Branch has been using the office in the Gyeongnam Officials Training Institute according to a written agreement between the union branch and the provincial government since April of 2003.

Busan Metropolitan City, the host city of the ILO ARM, is also warning with official letters that, if the KGEU Busan Regional Branch does not move out from the office in the city hall by August 31, it would forcefully execute the administrative action to close down the union office (Busan Metropolitan City Official Letter, Department of Civil Service-11316, August 17, 2006). All the municipalities under the Busan Metropolitan City have been proceeding the same actions.

- Repression steps up

These closing down of the KGEU offices nation wide is based on “the directive to promote the transformation of illegal organisations into legal trade unions (voluntary withdrawal of membership)” on March 22 by the Ministry of Government Administration and Home Affairs (MOGAHA) and another directive “to take thorough countermeasuring including forceful closing down of the illegal government employees’ organisations against illegal activities” (MOGAHA Official Letter, Public Officials Organisation Supervision Team-406, August 3, 2006) is propelling this kinds of actions nation wide.

Since its directive on March 22, 2006, the MOGAHA has tightened its repressions up far bitterly to destroy the KGEU.

The MOGAHA instructed all the local governments and agencies to weekly submit “performance records regarding the directive on March 22” (MOGAHA Official Letter, Public Officials Organisation Supervision Team-1479, May 23, 2006). The records should have information on “lists of the leaders of illegal organisations”, and “outcomes from propelling such transformations”.

On June 7, the MOGAHA asked for the local governments concerned to take disciplinary measures against the KGEU members participating in the rally in front of the Rural Development Administration on May 25 (MOGAHA Official Letter, Public Officials Organisation Supervision Team-1588, June 7, 2006). The ministry even pointed out the KGEU members concerned with an attached list. (It is provincial or metropolitan city governments that take disciplinary measures against local government employees.)

On June 21, the MOGAHA disseminated another official document, calling on local governments to execute the government directives and instructions and to take stern responses to all illegal activities (MOGAHA Official Letter, Officials Organisation Supervision Team-1771, June 21, 2006). During the campaign for the local election on May 31, several candidates answered to KGEU’s policy questionnaires that they would recognise the unions and guarantee independent trade union activities when elected. The MOGAHA document asked “to discard their written pledge or promise of the governor-elected on recognition of the KGEU”. The ministry claimed on the document that “connivance at activities of illegal organisations in discord of the government directive would have bad effects on establishing labour relations in civil service.” Moreover, the ministry warned that “the local governments that bargain or even conclude a collective agreement with illegal organisations and give any support like overlooking of full-time union staffs, allowing of union dues check-off and providing an office to illegal organisations will be taken to administrative and financial actions government-wide for disadvantages.”

The KGEU held a rally on July 8 in protest of the government repression. More than 2,000 KGEU members participated in the rally, which was legally notified to the police in advance and held on Saturday. However, the ministry requested local governments and agencies to take “thorough countermeasuring in advance against KGEU’s rally on July 8?or it is illegal activities violating public officials act stipulating prohibition of collective activities (MOGAHA Official Letter, Officials Organisation Supervision Team-1861, June 29, 2006)”. At the rally, several officers from the MOGAHA and the police videotaped and photographed the participants of the rally. Shortly after then, the MOGAHA sent local governments and agencies an official letter with the videotape and the photos requesting of the list of the KGEU members participating in the rally (MOGAHA Official Letter, Officials Organisation Supervision Team-61, July 11, 2006).

On August 3, the ministry issued another directive “to take thorough countermeasuring including forceful closing down of the illegal government employees’ organisations against illegal activities”

(MOGAHA Official Letter, Officials Organisation Supervision Team-406, August 3, 2006). The ministry requested all the local governments, ministries and agencies to take firm actions against KGEU. It asked "to close down all the KGEU offices in government buildings nation wide by August 31." It asked "to exclude KGEU members from personnel committees, to actively encourage all the government employees joining illegal organisations to withdraw memberships, to prohibit union dues check-off system and to blocking any financial supports like voluntary contribution or donation to the organisations." It asked for "positive efforts to stop payment of union dues through cash management system(CMS)". After prohibition of union dues check-off, KGEU encouraged its members to pay union dues through CMS from the bank account. Finally it stated that the ministry will investigate the actual process and conditions on implementing government directives and instructions together with auditing departments and it will take administrative and financial actions government wide against the local governments that don't implement the directives.

In fact, the government held a meeting of the vice-ministers concerned to deal with government employees' organisations on July 21, 2006. The meeting was presided by the Minister of the MOGAHA and confirmed that the government would take actions for disadvantages against the local governments such as Songpa-gu(municipality, district) in Seoul Metropolitan City and Anyang city in Gyeonggi-do(province) that haven't implemented the government directives and instructions. And the ministry listed up what kinds of administrative and financial actions could be taken to give disadvantages to such local governments (MOGAHA Official Letter, Officials Organisation Supervision Team-317, July 27, 2006).

On August 21, the Minister of Government Administration and Home Affairs issued and sent all the government employees a letter "demanding to withdraw from illegal organisations such as so-called the KGEU".