

# The Democratic Labor Party (DLP)

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**A English language self-presentation of the Democratic labor Party (DLP), from Korea, taken from its website.**

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## Korea, a Brief Introduction:

South Korea, divided from the North since 1948, has a population of about 48 million (North Korea has 25 million). It is a presidential system, where the president and members of the National Assembly are elected by direct vote. The President is elected for a 5-year term, and cannot run for a second term. The National Assembly has 299 seats. Among these, 236 are elected by a first-past-the-post system, the rest through proportional representative voting. They are elected to 4-year terms. The voting age is currently 20. The most recent elections were in December 2002(presidential) and April 2004 (parliamentary). The next elections are due in June of 2006 (local), December of 2007 (presidential), and April of 2008 (parliamentary).

## The DLP

### **Background**

#### *The Working Peoples' Party*

The DLP is a political party of workers, peasantry, urban poor, small businessmen, women, students and progressive intellectuals. It belongs to working people suffering from inequality, discrimination and oppression. The DLP brings together various progressive forces and individuals yearning for full democracy in Korean society. At the same time, the DLP strives to form alliances with progressive movements around the world in opposition to neo-liberalism, militarism and violations of human rights.

#### *DLP's Vision*

The DLP seeks to establish and extend progressive political power in order to realize full democracy

with the full participation of the people. In this new millennium we will build a society in which human dignity is respected and people can hope for a better future through people-led politics and a democratic economic system.

Its ultimate goal is a society of equality led by workers and the people, where the majority dominates social wealth, where individual creativity and merits are recognized, and where all forms of discrimination are eliminated. The DLP seeks to control global speculative capitals and opposes US military hegemony. On the other hand, we promote mutual respect, equality and independence in international relations.

### *DLP Declaration*

*"2000 marks the beginning of the DLP's effort to sweep away the backward politics filled with corruption and injustice. The DLP heralds a new era where workers and the oppressed are emancipated, environment and humans coexist, where men and women are treated equally, and where the weak, like children, senior citizens and the disabled, enjoy equal rights.*

We now take the first step toward a new era and the better world.

Let us together move forward to put an end to the conservative politics of corruption, oppression and discrimination."

On the launching day, 30 January 2000

## **Party Programme**

### **Key Features of the DLP's Programme**

1) The programme clearly states that the DLP seeks to *"overcome the faults of State Socialism and the limits of Social Democracy"*, while at the same time *"maintaining the principles and ideals of socialism"*. It is a statement on the part of the organization that it firmly places itself in the tradition of socialism, but that it is critical of previous or existing forms of socialism. The DLP is the search, in practice, for another socialism.

2) The programme also clearly sets out that the party needs to be *"receptive to the products of various progressive social forces"*. This is an expression of the party's negation of class reductionism and its willingness to work for the emancipation of women, and protection of the ecology, parallel to, and alongside with the struggle for the emancipation of the working class.

3) Another key feature of the DLP's programme is that it strives for not just the seizure of state power, but also the construction of the people's power in all the corners of everyday life. It goes beyond the horizons of state power into the realm of daily toils. It also makes clear that the boundaries of the DLP's activities do not stop at national borders: it is at the global scale that the DLP must situate itself and act. *"People's power from below... non-hierarchical solidarity"* with various progressive forces at all levels of society all across the world. It is this 'non-statist' line that is another defining characteristic of our party.

4) A party in Korea cannot evade the question of unification. The DLP's programme states that the party's objective is a *"progressive reunification that works for the people of both countries and leads to progressive change for both the North and the South"*. Unification must go beyond the joining of two territories, and the party's programme declares that unification must serve as the momentum

for progressive change on the Korean peninsula. The subject for such change is neither the North nor the South, but the people of the two countries.

## **History**

The labor movement paved the way for the DLP. The Korean Confederation of Trade Unions (KCTU) organized a political alliance, Peoples' Victory 21, in concert with various social and political movements to field independent candidates in the 1997 presidential election and in the 1998 local elections. This was the rudimentary organization that had as its goal the establishment of a political party that would represent workers and a progressive social, economic and political agenda. It received the support of a 306,000 people, or 1.1 % of the total votes cast in the 1997 presidential elections, but its historical significance is that it led to the eventual formation of a full-fledged political party: The Democratic Labor Party.

Succeeding Peoples' Victory 21, the preliminary Committee for a Progressive Party was organized in 1999. This was followed by the launching of the DLP in January of 2000. The DLP fielded 21 candidates in the April General Elections of 2000 and received an average of 13.1% support in these electorates. It came within a few hundred votes of winning in 2 of them, but came up short of entering the National Assembly. However, in the 2002 June local elections, the DLP took up the third position in political arena, winning 8.1 percent of party vote in the first elections in which a proportional voting system was introduced. The party secured 11 seats in the council of province level governments, and two district mayors in the city of Ulsan. And then, the DLP's candidate, Kwon Youngghil gained 3.9% of votes in the 2002 presidential election, coming in third. However, the real breakthrough was in the 2004 general elections. The DLP fielded 123 candidates, received 13.1 % of the proportional representation vote, and sent 10 representatives to the National Assembly.

The entrance of the DLP into the National Assembly was historically significant in the following ways. Firstly, the progressive forces such as workers, farmers, and the ordinary working peoples, who have been excluded and alienated from political establishment for the last five decades, were able to get inside the National Assembly. The Korean people were then able to hear various voices which existed in our society in the 17<sup>th</sup> National Assembly because of the DLP's entrance.

Secondly, the political framework for policy competitions between conservative forces and progressives was established for the first time by the DLP's entrance in the National Assembly. While the National Assembly has been tainted with an endless political strife among conservative political parties, the 17<sup>th</sup> National Assembly will be the first one where the conditions for policy competition regarding significant issues determining peoples' livelihood.

Currently, the DLP has a membership of about 61,000(an additional 8000 non-member endorsers), 43 seats in provincial and local assemblies across the nation, and 10 seats in the National Assembly. It also occupies two district mayor seats in the city of Ulsan. Support rate among the general public has been consistent at 13-18%.

## **Current Political Strategy**

In 2003, the DLP formed a Special Committee for Party Development in order to discuss strategies after the DLP had entered the National Assembly and also to contemplate ways to reform the party. After months of debate at all levels of the party, the party was able to come to the conclusion that the party must actively seek to combine activities within the parliament with mass movements

outside of it. It also set out to institute a few experimental policies within the party. It outlawed a member of parliament from taking a position of leadership within the party, and also limits party-list lawmakers to a single term. In addition, parliamentarians only receive the average salary of a worker in Korea (about 1300 Euros, or 1700 US \$).

The current DLP strategy can be expressed as the 'Large Minority' line. With a relatively small presence in all levels of government, the DLP is unable to enact a law by itself. Only ten of the 299 seats in the National Assembly belong to the DLP, but this does not mean that the positions and policies espoused by the DLP are also in the minority. The 'large minority' line, although it may sound like a contradiction, represents the will of the party to actively politicize the general public in issue where the voices of the people are not adequately represented in parliament. This is done through joint efforts with mass movements, with the aim of expanding public support for a progressive structural reform of society, while at the same time laying the foundation for social change and seizure of political power.

The most recent example of putting this party line into practice has been the movement against the dispatch of troops to Iraq. Despite the fact that the majority of the people in Korea oppose sending troops to Iraq, the National Assembly has allowed the dispatch bill to pass through. The DLP has been at the forefront of organizing the struggle against the dispatch of Korean combat troops outside of the parliamentary arena, while actively proposing resolutions and bills to cancel or oppose the dispatch. The struggle against the government's bill to retroactively change the law regarding irregular workers in 2004, in which the party closely collaborated with trade unions and other labor movement organizations to block the government's proposal while proposing a reform that would increase the level of protection contingent workers received, is another example.

## Structure

### **Decision Making**

Everyone who shares the ideals and platform of the party is welcome to become a member through proper procedures.

The DLP Congress is held annually (normally in February) to set the direction of the party as well as to decide on its major activities, with extra sessions of the Congress organized when need arises. It is the highest decision making body within the DLP.

The DLP holds quaterly Central Committee meetings to assess activities of the party and to approve appointments of officials. All delegates to the Congress and the Central Committee are elected directly by party members.

In addition, the DLP holds weekly Supreme Committee meetings to reach decisions on the party's direction/position, and to address day-to-day matters. The Supreme Committee is the highest executive body within the party. The Supreme Committee consists of 13 members. A representative from the Korean Confederation of Trade Unions, one from the Korean Peasant League, the Parliamentary Leader of the party, the party President, the General Secretary, the Chairperson of the Policy Committee, and 7 other directly elected members. All the members, with the exception of the Parliamentary Leader, are elected by a direct vote by party members.

Party members are given the right to participate in elections within the party if they meet two requirements: 1) If three months have elapsed since the date they have joined 2) and they have paid the memberships fees for ten month out of the year (if their membership is less than a year, they

cannot vote if they have missed more than two payments).

### **Secretariat**

The DLP has departments for administration, planning, organizing, training, public relations, external relations, IT as well as committees for planning and spokesman at its headquarters. Furthermore, the DLP has special commissions covering labor, peasantry, women, youth, anti-corruption, economic democracy, national reunification, local politics, sexual minorities and the environment. They are currently about 60 full time staff under the Secretariat and party headquarters.

It also has regional organizations at the cities and provinces (16, each with 5-10 full time staff). Affiliated to these regional organizations are party branches at the electoral district level (currently about 150, each with 1 or 2 full time staff). These party chapters have local organizations (either at the workplace or at a neighborhood level). There are currently about 1200 such local organizations nationwide.

### **The Policy Committee**

The head of the policy committee is also elected by a direct vote, and holds the responsibility of producing party positions and policies, as well supporting the lawmaking activities of parliamentarians. Members of the policy committee are subdivided into 4 groups, and come up with the core policies of the party, and at the same time directly support the legislative activities of the lawmakers. There are 45 researchers currently working for the policy committee.

### **The Policy Institute**

Korean party laws stipulate that a certain proportion of state subsidies to political parties must go to establishing and operating a policy institute. In accordance with this law, the DLP set up the Progressive Policy Institute. The responsibility of the institute is to come up with alternative social, political, and economical models for Korean society over the long-term. It has 7 full time researchers.

### **Publications**

The DLP published a weekly newspaper, Jinbojungchi (Progressive Politics) with a paid-up subscription of about 8000, and a monthly political and theoretical review titled « Theory and Practice ». Finances of the party paper are independent from the secretariat.

## **Leadership**

**President:** Kim Hyekyung

**General Secretary:** Kim Changhyun

**Chairman of policy committee:** Ju Daehwan

**Members of the supreme committee:**

Yi Yongsik; Ha Yeonho; Kim Mihee; Yi Jeongmi; Yu Seonhee; Park Insuk; Kim Jongcheol; Yi Yeonghee; Choi Gyuyeob

## **Members of the National Assembly:**

Choi Soon-Young; Chun Yung-Se; Dan Byung-Ho; Hyun Ae-Jah; Jo Seung-Soo; Kang Ki-Kap; Kwon Young-Ghil; Lee Young-Soon; Roh Hoe-Chan; Shim Sang-Jung

## **Party Finances**

The DLP is the only party in Korea to regularly open its finances to the public. It is also the only party in Korea to procure a substantial proportion of its budget from the membership fees of party members. Party members normally pay at least 10,000 won (about 7 Euros or 9 US dollars) monthly, with additional voluntary contributions during election time. There are also more than 8000 endorsers who, while they are not party members, make monthly contributions. The DLP is currently actively engaged in a campaign that seeks to reach 100,000 party members by early 2005.

## **Related Organizations**

### **Korean Confederation of Trade Unions:**

The Korean Confederation of Trade Unions is one of the 2 national centers in South Korea. It has more than 700,000 members, and played a central role in building the Democratic Labor Party. The KCTU is allotted delegates at various decision making levels of the party.

### **Korean Peasants League:**

The Korean Peasants League, with about 20,000 members, decided as an organization to support the DLP in 2003. It is allotted a seat on the supreme committee.

## **A Brief History**

1997. 12 People's Victory 21 (Presidential Elections, 1.1%)  
1999. 09 Preparatory Committee for a Progressive Party established  
2000.01 DLP inaugurated (President Kwon Young-Ghil, Secretary General Chon Young-Se)  
2000. 04 General Elections (2.1% of the total vote)  
2002. 06 Regional Elections (8.1% of the total party representation vote)  
2002. 03 Leadership Elected (President Kwon Young Ghil, Secretary General Roh Hoe-Chan)  
2002. 12 Presidential Elections (3.9% of the total vote)  
2004. 04 General Elections (13.1% of the total party representation vote)  
2004. 06 Leadership Elected (President Kim Hye-Kyung, Secretary General Kim Chang Hyun, Policy Committee Chairman Joo Dae-Hwan : Term is 2 years )

- The next leadership election is in early 2006.

View online : [Democratic Labor Party \(Korea\)](#)

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