

Korean Healthcare Unions Strike against Healthcare Privatisation

Second strike announced for July 22nd

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The struggle against healthcare privatisation in South Korea has now taken center stage, with the Korean Health & Medical Workers' Union (KHMU) and the Korean Federation of Public Services and Transportation Workers' Unions Healthcare Workers Solidarity Division (KPTU-HealthSol) both taking strike action last week.

Both unions are affiliated to the national center the Korean Confederation of Trade Unions (KCTU) and the global union federation Public Services International (PSI).

Since the end of last year the conservative Park Geun-hye administration has been pursuing a plan to allow non-profit hospitals to establish for-profit subsidiaries and expand secondary activities such as medical hotels and specialty treatment centers. The plan will also permit large hospitals to carry out merger and acquisitions. Unions, civil society organizations and large portion of the Korean public fear the government's plans with transform healthcare into a for-profit industry, destroying its function as a public service and a human right.

After preparing throughout the first half of the year, the KHMU and KPTU-HealthSol went on strike and carried out a series of protests between June 24 and June 28. On June 24, 4000 KHMU members struck and participated in a rally in downtown Seoul. Following, close to 700 members of KPTU-HealthSol employed at Seoul National University Hospital (SNUH) and Kyungpook National University Hospital (KNUH) took strike action and gathered on Seoul for two days of protests.

Ahead of the KPTU-HealthSol strike, the union members at the two hospitals voted in favor of industrial action with a roughly 90% approval rate.

Workers at SNUH are particularly concerned that the changes to regulations on non-profit hospitals announced June 10 (scheduled to go into effect in August) will support SNUH administration's attempts to expand for-profit services and start a joint-venture clinic with private capital, while cutting costs on basic medical supplies and staffing.

As SNUH is the largest public hospital in the country, it is fear the hospital's profit-seeking activities will set a dangerous example for the rest of the health sector.

KPTU-HealthSol's activities during the two days of protests included a press conference, rally and march through downtown Seoul and cultural festival, during which solidarity images and messages from unions overseas were played on a large screen.

On June 28, both health sector unions joined other KCTU affiliates in a mass protests calling on the Korean government to stop privatisation and deregulation, which have proven to put lives of ordinary people at risk.

The struggle against healthcare privatisation is far from over. Both the KHMU and KPTU-HealthSol

are planning second round of strikes on July 22, ahead of the implementation of the new healthcare regulations announced on June 10. The KCTU is organising an 'alliance strike' for that day, to the two health sector unions and other KCTU affiliates.

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* Newsletter of the Korean Federation of Public Services and Transportation Workers' Unions:
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* Korean Public and Transport Workers' News

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