

# **Precarious workers (South Korea): Statement on Government Measures Concerning Kim Yong-gyun's Death**

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*It is Now Our Duty to Carry Out the Tasks Left to us by Kim Yong-gyun*

## **KPTU statement on the measures announced by the South Korean government and ruling party (Feb. 5) in relation to the death of Kim Yong-gyun**

58 days have passed since precariously-employed young worker Kim Yong-gyun died, and his funeral has still not been held. It has been 15 days since leaders of the “Civil Society Coalition for Justice for Precarious Young Worker Kim Yong-gyun” (civil society coalition) began their hunger strike calling for a resolution to this incident. Today, February 5 - New Year's Day - the government and ruling party announced measures in response to Kim's death.

The measures the government announced today fall far short of the demands that the civil society coalition, power plant workers and Kim's family have been making, which include eradication of the outsourcing of danger, investigation into the causes of Kim's death and punishment of those responsible, insourcing and permanent direct employment for all precarious workers in the power industry and other measures to ensure that a similar accident does not occur. The KCTU Korean Public Service and Transport Workers' Union (KPTU) and the civil society coalition consulted with the government and ruling party in the development of a response, but the measures announced today are greatly lacking. KPTU and the civil society coalition are deeply angered that the Ministry of Trade, Industry and Energy and vested interests in the public institution bureaucracy, who have pursued privatisation and outsourcing for the last several decades, have not changed their attitude. The measures announced today include permanent employment for Kim's co-workers, but not directly by the five public power companies, but instead by a separate public corporation. No concrete plan for improving the situation of power plant light maintenance workers has been put forward, despite the fact that these workers experience an even higher accident rate. We are gravely disappointed that we have not been able to completely counter the logic of capital and the public sector bureaucracy, which has led to the outsourcing of death.

Nonetheless, following collective discussions KPTU, the civil society coalition and Kim's co-workers have recognised that despite short-comings the government and ruling party's announcement today represents progress in relation to their original position, which was a complete denial of any responsibility. Furthermore, we feel we cannot delay Kim's funeral any longer. We are clear, however, that we cannot not simply rely on the government and ruling party to stop the killing of

precarious workers caused by the outsourcing of death instead we recognise that it is our task to achieve this goal ourselves by uniting through our democratic and continuing to struggle.

It is also true that it would not have been possible to achieve the measures announced today without the unity of purpose of workers, the public, Kim's family and co-workers who came together with the civil society coalition and fought as one. Through this struggle we were able to win recognition of the principles of ending the outsourcing of danger and accountability of the principle company in the case of accidents involving subcontracted workers. The principle company (Korea Western Power) has agreed to ensure that subcontract workers are paid the wages originally agreed to, thus eliminating intermediary exploitation, and improve working conditions. Expanding the application of these principles throughout the public sector and to the private sector as well is an important task before us. Our struggle has formed the basis from which to challenge and reverse the drive towards fragmentation and privatisation pursued by government bureaucrats. And we have achieved the transfer of all fuelling and equipment operation workers like Kim to direct employment by a public corporation. In addition we have achieved the establishment of a special investigation committee to investigate the causes of Kim's death and the government, ruling party and employer have agreed to follow the recommendations of this committee. Given that so many problems have been left unsolved, the work of this committee to fully diagnose the situation and put forward recommendations for a fundamental solution in the future is vitally important. An agreement on the direct, permanent employment of light maintenance workers must also be reached.

Another important result of this tragedy was that the Occupation Safety and Health Act, which applies not only to power plants or the public sector, but to all workers, was revised for the first time in 30 years. All workers are in debt to Kim Yong-gyun for this. More than anything else, we ask the Korean public not to forget the things taught us over the last 50 days by Kim's death and by the struggle of his co-workers and his mother, Kim Mi-suk, and family. We have learned clearly that the outsourcing of danger and death must be stopped at all workplaces, regardless of whether they are in the public or private sector. The system which divides workers between principle companies and subcontractors, designating them permanent or precarious, must end.

We express our gratitude to all KCTU members, workers, members of the public and the international community who participated in this struggle with us. The struggle of KPTU and the civil society coalition to stop the misuse of precarious workers and the outsourcing of danger and to create safe workplaces where workers's lives are not sacrifices will continue. We ask you to remember Kim's tragic death and continue to fight with us until we realise the goals that were not achieved today. Recognising that these tasks are the duties of our democratic , we promise you that KPTU and Kim's co-workers will do everything we can to fulfil our responsibility by continuing to stand at the forefront of a renewed struggle.

2019.2.5.

### **KCTU Korean Public Service and Transport Workers' Union**

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## **Settlement Reached on Measures in Response to Death of Kim Yong-gyun - Struggle goes on**



*Press conference.*

### **AGREEMENT REACHED ON MEASURES IN RESPONSE TO DEATH OF KIM YONG-GYUN**

Today, Feb. 5 (lunar new years), the South Korean government announced measures in response to the industrial death of Kim Yong-gyun, a 24-year-old power plant worker, killed 58 days ago in a tragic accident resulting from the outsourcing of danger and lack of safety measures at Taean Power Plant.

Korea Western Power Co. and Korea Engineering & Power Service, the subcontractor that Kim was employed for have agreed to abide by the government's measures and in particular to cooperate with the special investigation into root causes (see below). They have also agreed to compensation measures and to ensure sufficient time off and a safe work environment for Kim's co-workers.

The government's measures include (rough translation):

1. Establishment of a Special Workplace Safety Investigation Committee to investigate the causes of Kim's death and come up with plans to prevent a reoccurrence, including addressing structural and fundamental problems.
2. Increase workforce levels and ensure that work at power plant facilities is done in teams of two, with a clear means to respond to emergencies.

In the future, hold public institution heads accountable for grave industrial accidents that occur at their worksites, regardless of if they involve directly employed or subcontracted workers.

3. Timely transfer of power plant fueling and equipment operation workers like Kim to direct permanent employment by a public institution (power company subsidiary).

The exact means for this, including wages and working conditions to be discussed by a committee made up of , employer and expert members.

4. Establish a -employer-expert committee to establish measures on the employment of light maintenance power plant workers, which will make a detailed assessment of different tasks and develop specific plans aimed at reducing risk and improving expertise, working conditions and job stability in line with the principle of ending the outsourcing of danger.
5. Establish and operate a taskforce on power plant industry safety and employment stability to ensure the execution of the above measures.

According to the agreements reached today, the KPTU and the civil society coalition held a press conference today to announce our position and the hunger strikers (in their 15 day) have broken their fast today. Kim's funeral will be held on Feb. 9.

The measure announced fall far short of the original demands of Kim's family, KPTU and the civil society coalition supporting the struggle, but they are a first step towards eradicating 'the outsourcing of danger', stopping the drive towards fragmentation and privatisation of the power industry and acheiving safe working conditions for power plant and all precarious workers. KPTU statement to be released shortly [see above].

- 05/02/2019 :

[https://www.kptu.net/english/detail.aspx?&idx=24748&bid=KPTU\\_PDSENG](https://www.kptu.net/english/detail.aspx?&idx=24748&bid=KPTU_PDSENG)

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