

South Korea: Korail workers on 72-hour strike for rail safety an reintegration

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Following the strike in Seoul Metro Line 9 last week, Korea Railroad Corporation (Korail) workers - members of the KPTU-Korean Railway Workers Union (KRWU) -are on a 72 hour strike from October 11 to October 14. The main demands in this strike are for an increase in safety-related staff, in-sourcing of outsourced workers and reintegration of the high-speed rail.



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For the last several years the Korail, along with other public institutions, has fail to increase workforce levels leading to longer hours and less breaks. Many stations are now staffed by one person while the Korail has the highest number of occupational accidents among all public institutions. The Moon Jae-in government has admitted the need for increase workforce levels, but has not moved on these recommendations.

In 2014, a second operating company - SR - was established to introduce competition on the high-speed rail. This was the starting point for the then conservative government's plans for rail privatisaiton. While the full privatisaiton plan was stopped, fragmentation of the high-speed rail has led to inefficiency and costs to the public. The SR simply cherry picks - re-contracting most functions back to Korail, while sapping profits from high-speed operations. Reintegration would allow for more efficient operation based on need and for reinvestment into less profitable lines and a in fares. Despite promises by the Moon Jae-in government, however the move towards reintegration has stalled due to the lobby of pro-privatisation forces in the Ministry of Land, Infrastructure and Transport.



During the same period, Seoul Metro workers are also engaged in work-to-rule actions and preparing for strike action next week.

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