

KCTU Monthly Newsletter July, 2007

Thursday 2 August 2007, by [KCTU](#) (Date first published: 31 July 2007).

Korean Confederation of Trade Unions (KCTU)

Monthly Newsletter

July, 2007

[Press Statement] We urge the Korean Government and the International Community to call upon the US to take adequate measures for kidnapped Koreans by Taliban in Afghanistan

Another of the Koreans being held by the Taliban in Afghanistan has been killed. The man has been confirmed to be Shim Sung-min. The KCTU offers condolences to his family, who had pleaded for his safe return and now must be agonizing over his death, and also wish for the safe return of the remaining hostages. If there are to be no more deaths, the utmost efforts on the part of the Korean government that puts priority on the lives of the kidnapped Koreans are needed, as well as adequate measures from the US government and the international community.

Faced with the feeling of helplessness that all Koreans must have felt, we cannot but point out the responsibility of the Roh Moo-hyun government. We have already criticized the irresponsible comments by the Minister of Foreign Affairs and Trade Song Min-soon that "withdrawal of forces would take place according to plan(late in the year)" as being a prelude to tragedy. The government's approach has resulted in another life being taken away, and its incompetence has been revealed to all. The government must now openly and assertively do whatever needs to be done to protect its citizens. If need be, it needs to actively seek cooperation from the international community and to also unreservedly demand from the US, controlling much of Afghanistan, what needs to be done.

As the international community is aware, the current government in Kabul is one which the US set up after it attacked the country and toppled the Taliban regime. This is the reason a presidential envoy to Afghanistan cannot bring substantial results. The Taliban is currently demanding an exchange between the kidnapped Koreans and Taliban prisoners. The US holds the key to resolving the issue and the efforts of the Korean government needs to head toward that direction. The Bush government's comments that the kidnapped need to returned safely rings hollow. It has evaded the issue by saying that it is not something that the US can resolve, and has shown the 'recklessness' of stating that there will be no negotiations and no exchange of prisoners. Furthermore, it has stepped up the attacks on the Taliban in such a situation. We are angered once again at the disregard the US government has shown for the people of this country. This needs to change and the Bush government needs to change. For this to happen, the Korean government's efforts and pressure from the international community will be needed.

It is unacceptable to kidnap and kill civilians for military purposes, and the Taliban needs to release the remaining Koreans being held. It is also not too late for the Korean government to withdraw its troops from the minefield that the U.S. attack has created in Afghanistan. We will then be able to sever ourselves from the imperialist alliance with the US and become a country that does its part for

peace and solidarity in the world. Only then will we be able to call for the solidarity of the international community and evade tragic situations like the one we face. Kim Sun-il has been sacrificed in Iraq, and staff sergeant Yoon Jang-ho has returned as a corpse from Afghanistan. Now pastor Bae and Mr. Shim have died. We need no more additions to the list. We urge the Korean government and the international community to act for the safe return of the remaining hostages.

2007.7.31.

Korean Confederation of Trade Unions

The Tetra Pak Korea(Swedish Multinational Enterprise) Violates OECD Guidelines for Multinational Enterprises

The Tetra Pak Korea trade union, affiliated to KCTU, has been fighting since last March against the company's anti-union policies and its unilateral decision to close its factory at Yeosu.

The Tetra Pak Korea has threatened that it would close down the factory every year since 1995 during or around the time of collective bargaining negotiations. On the 30th of June in 2006, during the negotiation period, the company sent an e-mail to all employees, and presented 19 conditions and stated that if these conditions were not met in the next 3 months, the company could not continue to exist, in effect threatening a pull out and closure of the factory. The 19 conditions included no strikes during the coming years, no activities in solidarity with other trade unions during working hours, and removing the full-time union official post, among others. This is a violation of the OECD Guidelines for Multinational Enterprises, which prohibits using threats to withdraw during negotiations with the union, and a clear attack against the trade union. The Korean press has reported that the company has decided close the factory down because of the hard-line trade union, and this also seems to be a sign that the company had not respected OECD guidelines as well as basic labour rights.

Furthermore, Tetra Pak has made an annual profit of several million dollars each year after establishing its factory in Korea 20 years ago. The company nevertheless unilaterally decided to close down the factory at Yeosu, where 100 workers worked and 400 family members depended on, without consulting the trade union and then implemented the decision within a month. This is an absolute disregard for corporate social responsibility and we question how such a company could be selected as one of the top 10 respected companies in Sweden. If there is a double standard, or a duality in the company's management depending on the country, this needs to be criticized. The company will maintain its sales network for selling their products, after closing down their factory in Korea. This fact demonstrates their total disregard for social responsibility and their exclusive focus on profits.

KCTU thereby urge the Tetra Pak to take every measure to solve this issue including a dialogue with the trade union in a good faith, and reconsider the decision to close down their factory at Yeosu, Korea so that the company can fulfill its social responsibility as a corporation and the workers of the company can continue to work at the factory.

[KGEU News] Delegates confirm union's registration within October and further struggles - KGEU congress on July 21

The KGEU held an extraordinary congress on July 21 and decided to get registered under the current special act by the end of October. During the congress, the union leaders, including president KWON Seung Bok, general secretary KIM Jeong Soo and vice presidents, stated that they would resign their offices.

The delegates confirmed that Bro. KIM Paek Kyu, Chair of KGEU Educational Administrative Organs Branch and a member of KGEU central executive committee, would take over the office as acting president. According to the result of the congress, the KGEU is expected to elect new leadership of the union in September and then to get registered by the end of October.

The delegates agreed that the June struggle was quite successful, in that the union once again managed to firmly fight back in unity against the government and repression, and that the members regained confidence in union activities. However, they also admitted that the June struggle had not produced visible outcomes in negotiations with the government. The government has not changed its attitude at all and accordingly no talks and negotiations took place.

The union leaders, as the leadership, stated that they will take all responsibility failing to make the government come out for negotiations, as well as for not being able to stop the union from splitting up.

Followings are some excerpts of the statement of the resigned union leaders issued shortly after the congress;

"We are offering our sincere apology that we had to resign. Although we had been elected under the pledge that the union would fight back for full guarantee of our basic labour rights, reinstatement of the dismissed and our rights to livelihood, we were not able to complete our term in office, leaving many problems unresolved.

As soon as the 3rd union leadership launched in March, 2006, the government tightened its hard-line stance and implemented intensive crackdown on the union. The repression has come from all directions. Our members were intimidated into withdrawing from the union. The authorities blocked our members from paying union dues. The repression was so barbaric and inhumane enough that some of us, threatened and horrified, had to leave the union. Our local union offices were attacked and forcibly closed down by the police.

However, some members voiced out that the union should accept the special act and to get registered right away in order to avoid further repression, rather than strengthening the impending struggles to defend our rights to livelihood and to fight back the repression, causing internal contention within the union. Meanwhile, our public officialdom was being attacked with introduction of forcible retrenchment system and worsening of government employees' pension system.

We felt that the mandate of union leadership should be met and that we should fully reflect our rank and file members' interests to defend our rights. At the congress on May 19, our delegates decided that the union should take intense struggles in June. This decision was a reaffirmation of the principles and traditions of the democratic trade union movement, whereby a union cannot live nor

workers' rights be upheld without struggles, as well as an effort to consolidate these principles within the KGEU.

The June struggle did not end with visible outcome in negotiations with the government. But all of us witnessed that we firmly fought back in unity and that the members once again became confident in union activities.

We are very sure that the new union leadership to be elected will be able to shape and reconstruct our union, to become a much stronger democratic union, by overcoming the internal contention and discord during our term. And we all fully understand the meaning of the decision the delegates made at the congress on July 21 - that the union should be registered. Yet, we also know that it does not mean that the union is giving up struggles or changing its direction into compromises or corporatist and opportunist lines.

As we did in June, let's firmly resolve to keep fighting back to defend our democratic union, to fully guarantee our basic labour rights, and to protect our rights to livelihood. As trade unionists and proud members of the KGEU, we will be at the front of the struggle with you."

During the congress, many delegates argued that the union should continue to remain outside the special act, which is far from what we can agree upon and also not in line with international labour standards including the recent ILO recommendations in June. Moreover, they confirmed that the union should take further intense struggles in the second half of this year, especially before the presidential election in December and the general election in April in 2008. Majority of the delegates shared this view.

However, they also agreed that, in order to continue and succeed by firm struggles, the union must remain intact under the banner of the KGEU. In other words, in order to continue our struggles in unity, we needed to put the argument of registering or not registering behind us and prevent any further division from taking place.

In conclusion, about 55% of the delegates voted in favour that the union should register by the end of October. But, whether the union gets registered or not, the KGEU will not acknowledge the special act and will continue to fight back to guarantee our basic labour rights in accordance with international labour standards.

Followings are excerpts from the statement issued in the name of acting president on July 25:

"The KGEU, that we have been so proud of, has been devoting itself to the struggles for full guarantee of basic labour rights, truthful reform of public officialdom for people and eradication of corruption and injustice in civil service by unveiling the past of government employees as tools of the powerful and capital.

Since its establishment, the KGEU, on behalf of 900,000 government employees, has been fighting back the government repression, and succeeding spirits and principles of democratic trade union movement as a unique affiliate to the KCTU in civil service.

This is the time that unity is urgently needed under the banner of the KGEU more than ever. I would like to request that all union members be united to make the union stronger and sturdier with respect and trust to union's decisions.

Until now, the KGEU has been moving forwards in spite of barbaric repression by the government and we have been capable of overcoming all difficulties with united struggles. We will keep

continuing this history of struggle and making our union stronger. Let's be united again under the banner of the KGEU and make our history filled with struggles.

The Korean Metalworkers' Union's collective bargaining agreement will open the way to an age of collective bargaining

The Metalworkers' Union and the Association of Metal Industry Employers came to a provisional agreement on the 25th of July after sessions of centralized collective bargaining. The Metalworkers' union, with 150,000 members and the 4 automobile companies affiliated to it, is the largest industrial union in the country and the agreement in itself is a historic step toward industrial collective bargaining for the labor movement.

One of the main points agreed to during bargaining was an industry-wide agreement regarding the minimum wage for metalworkers. Of the rates of 900,000 won per month, or 3,840won per hour, the higher amount will be applied to all parties in the metal industry, including irregular workers and migrant workers. This is an increase of 8% over last years industrial minimum wage. This industrial minimum wage was an attainment of one of the KCTU's main goals. It is a result of efforts that date back to 2004, and will contribute to raising the wage of irregular and migrant workers, as well as laborers at small and medium sized factories. This is a product of efforts to respond to policies which further labor flexibility and that exacerbate divisions within the working class.

The Metalworkers' Union and the Metal Industry Employers arrived at an agreement that brings together the contents of the agreements of the last 5 years into a single collective bargaining agreement. This will assist the workers at small factories that have had their right to organize and engage in trade union activities limited in the past. The agreement consists of a basic agreement that contains the preamble, and provisions on the subjects of the negotiations and deduction of union fees, and a centralized collective agreement, which consists of provisions on working conditions, trade union activities, employment, irregular work, corporate social responsibility, and wages.

However, despite this historic change, it is a disappointment that the 4 auto companies did not participate in the agreement. However, at the time of conclusion, Kia, GM-Daewoo, and SSangyong submitted statements promising to participate next year, and 20 or so other companies have also signaled their willingness to participate in the future. Others, including Hyundai Motors, are expected to follow. Industrial agreements are now becoming the norm, but companies such as Doosan, Hyosung, and S&T Group have ignored the changes and have yet to express their willingness to participate in the industrial collective bargaining process. They need to promptly decide to be part of the process. If they don't, as the current case of E-Land shows, high social costs will have to be paid in order to provide the arena for bargaining and not on the actual contents of an agreement.

The KCTU has presented the following as the central tasks for the 2007 industrial bargaining period: 1) the end of discrimination against irregular workers/regular jobs for irregular workers, 2) affiliation of irregular workers in industrial unions and 3) attainment of industrial minimum wages. According to the KCTU's directives, the affiliated organizations have been bargaining with the central focus on attaining regular jobs for irregular workers and ending discrimination against them. With the Metalworkers' Union taking part in this process, the labor movement has gained the momentum to shift from a movement that is based on regular workers at large individual factories,

to one that works for the principle of equal wages for equal labor. The KCTU will be doing all it can in the future to extend the application of these agreements so that the rights and interests of non-organized, irregular, and SME workers can be furthered.

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