

Workers' View of Korea #3 (Sept. 2012)

International newsletter of the PSSP-Research Institute for Alternative Workers Movements

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NOW IN KOREA

The Struggle of SJM and Mando Workers against Capital's Attack <http://www.pssp.org/eng/?p=354>

During the last week of July, the day before the summer holiday began, contracted private security squads were sent in to crush workers' struggles at the Hyundai Motor suppliers SJM and Mando. The attacks happened within 10 hours of one another, with management locking workers out at both factories.

Since the advent of the Myung-bak Lee administration capital has executed careful plans to break unions at important worksites in each region across the country: Valeo-Mando in Gyeongju, Sangsin Brake in Daegu, KEC in Gumi and Yoosung Enterprise in Chungcheong. Now this effort to weaken the democratic labor movement has been brought to the metropolitan area with the attack on SJM (Gyeonggi Province) and reached the a national scale with the attack on Mando, a company with worksites around the country. Each time, the method for breaking the union has been similar. As soon as workers begin a strike, a private security squad or hired thugs are brought in. Workers are forced out of factories, the doors of which are then locked. Following management proceeds to allow only those who leave the KCTU-affiliated democratic union or join a yellow union to return to work.

SJM is a central worksite among the affiliates of Korean Metal Workers Union (KMWU) Gyeonggi Branch, while Mando is the largest auto parts supplier in the country and the one structured most similarly to parent auto manufactures. Given that the SJM and Mando have no relationship to one another other than both being Hyundai Motor suppliers, it is widely believed that Hyundai Motor is behind the closely timed attacks. Since the beginning of the 2000s, Hyundai Motor has sought to minimize stock through the introduced "Just In Sequence"

(JIS), an extreme version of "Just in Time" production (JIT). JIS involves not only strict planning of the assembly process at Hyundai plants, but also tight control over the timing and sequence of subcontractors' production and supply of parts to bring them into sync with operations at the parent company. Given Hyundai's use of JIS, the blow to production caused by a work stoppage by a strong union at a subcontractor can be severe. For this reason Hyundai has sought to weaken unions at its first tier subcontractors. Against the backdrop of the Lee administration's anti-labor policies, Hyundai's intervention in labor relations at the KMWU's main worksites has grown to new extremes.



SJM workers face off at factory gate

3 days into the lock out at Mando, a yellow union was established. During the summer vacation, management carried out individual education for KMWU union members, seeking to convince them to join the new union. Only a week after the yellow union was formed, 1936 out of 2264 KMWU members had joined. When the number of workers who joined the yellow union reached 85% after two weeks the company ceased its lock out. At the same time, it notified the KMWU Mando Chapter of the cancellation of its collective bargaining agreement, saying that it would being procedures to unify bargaining channels now that there was a new bargaining representative. On September 4, the company fired the president of the KMWU Mando Chapter and other union officers for 'disciplinary reasons'. Having become a minority union (without

representative status) in a matter of days, the KMWU Mando Chapter is now trying to rebuild, but the road ahead is a rocky one.

The situation at SJM has been more hopeful. Workers there fought against the company's lock out for over a month. Of 260 KMWU members, only 10 disaffiliated. The remaining 250 gather in front of the factory every morning to protest and take turns maintaining a protest encampment at the factory gates. Having predicted forceful repression, the union officers and members prepared well for their struggle in advance. They are also receiving considerable support from other workers in the Gyeonggi area. KMWU members from other worksites join the SJM Chapter members to maintain the protest encampment each night. At an emergency KMWU Gyeonggi Branch, delegates assembly held on September 5, delegates voted to hold a 6-hour general strike on September 13 in solidarity with the SJM struggle. They also agreed that all KMWU Gyeonggi Branch members would contribute 20,000 won (roughly 18\$) a month for six months to a strike fund for the SJM workers.

In recent years, unions at important worksites around the country have collapsed or been greatly weakened due to capital's offensive, carried out under the protection of the government. Given Mando's scale, and the fact that Mando workers have had a democratic union for many years, the quick defeat of the KMWU Mando Chapter was a great shock to the South Korean labor movement. The persistent struggle of the SJM Chapter, however, has kept hope alive. After the use of private security squads at Mando and SJM, other companies, including Doowon in Gyeonggi Province and Sensata in Northern Chungcheong Province, abandoned similar plans. Capital has become nervous, and workers empowered, due to the determination of the SJM workers. Hopefully, their resistance to capital's attack marks the beginning of a true workers' counterattack.

The Violence Commercialized: Capital's Private Army - Contactus

<http://www.pssp.org/eng/?p=358>

At 5 a.m. on July 27, 2012, the opening day of the London Olympics, 200 armed men raided the SJM factory in Ansan where members of the

Korean Metal Workers' Union SJM Chapter were staging a sit-in protest. A female union member called the police for help 4 times before they finally arrived. When they finally got to the factory, the police did nothing to stop the armed gang as it meted out violence against the union members. In all 35 union members were injured, 10 seriously. Following the incident images and video footage of the scene circulated widely through social media.

The strikebreakers who descended on the SJM workers that day were employed by Contactus, a security contractor specializing in quelling protests. Contactus owns not only 1,000 sets of riot police equipment, but also German-made water cannons. According to its website, the company can dispatch up to 3,000 individuals at one time and prefers offensive – as opposed to defensive - suppression tactics. It has been revealed that the chairman of Contactus is a staff member of the ruling New Frontier Party and that the company has a record of bribing police officers to win their cooperation. The fact that Contactus has been known to have its employees hired by its clients so as to disguise them as union members has caused a particular stir. Contactus even had plans to launch two media channels.



A banner demanding that SJM's owner be punished for contracting with Contactus to violently suppress the union's protest

Hiring security contractors is becoming a common method for quelling strikes and bursting unions in South Korea. In the past, capital organized managers and non-union members into company strikebreaking squads. Now, however, the violence - like everything else - is being outsourced. Capital now seeks to exclude even state power from its domain by contracting private armies. In other words,

capital is replacing state authority with its economic power, doing so with the consent of the police and conservative politicians. This collusion is making Korean workers into 21st century slaves.

Due to the public attention to this particular case, Contactus lost its business license, while 4 Contactus managers and the SJM director who orchestrated the raid are being prosecuted. Dozens of similar security contractors, however, are still in operation and vigorously expanding their businesses. Private violence is now a prosperous industry in South Korea.

A 'Third National Center' in South Korea?

<http://www.pssp.org/eng/?p=368>

In November of last year, the Korean Labor Unions Confederation (KLUC) was founded as a so-called 'third national center' in South Korea next to the progressive Korean Confederation of Trade Unions (KCTU) and the conservative Federation of Korean Trade Unions (FKTU). The KLUC's president, Yeon-su Jeong, who is also president of the Seoul Subway Labor Union (SSLU), promotes a 'new form of unionism' based on labor-capital cooperation to increase productivity. Criticizing the KCTU's "excessively ideological orientation", and both the KCTU and the FKTU's "bureaucratic nature," Jeong claims that the KLUC's philosophy is more in line with the perspective of ordinary Korean citizens.

Since its establishment, however, the KLUC has been fraught with controversy. Progressive forces criticize it as the 'MB (Myung-bak) union'. Indeed, Jeong, along with 747 former KCTU officers, publically proclaimed his support for then Grand National Party presidential candidate Myung-bak Lee in 2007. The KLUC was formed, moreover, with significant support from the Lee administration in the wake of the FKTU's break with Lee's New Frontier Party (NFP, the successor to the Grand National Party) and formation of a strategic alliance with the liberal opposition United Democratic Party (successor to the Democratic Party). The KLUC receives government subsidies, and has been granted seats on tripartite committees by the administration behind the backs of the other two

national centers. Strong suspicions also exist that KLUC officers gave financial support to government officials responsible for illegal surveillance of KCTU and FKTU leaders. Critics claim that the KLUC was formed, not so much to represent the interests of union members as to serve as a NFP tool for co-opting the labor movement and a means for Jeong to pursue his political ambitions.

With at most 40,000 members, the KLUC is currently much smaller than the other two national centers, which both have memberships of several hundred thousand. The SSLU, which has 8700 members, is currently the KLUC's largest affiliate. Two other large unions, Hyundai Heavy Industries and KT, which were expected to affiliate to the KLUC last year, have failed to do so.

Perhaps, most significantly, several court rulings have called into question the legality of the SSLU's affiliation to KLUC and with it, Jeong's position as president. In April of last year, 53% of SSLU members vote to leave the KCTU and affiliate to the KLUC. The Ministry of Employment and Labor found the vote fair and permitted the SSLU to switch affiliations. A group of SSLU members, however, filed a suit against the decision, arguing that changing affiliations means a revision of the union's constitution and, thus, requires approval by a two-thirds majority. In October 2011, a lower court ruled that the change of affiliations was invalid. This July, an appeals court upheld the decision. A final ruling by the Supreme Court is expected next year.

According to one SSLU delegate, the appeals court verdict has given strength to KCTU supporters within the SSLU. At the same time, more and more SSLU members are becoming frustrated with Yeon-su Jeong's unilateral style. Pro-KCTU delegates are using this opportunity to talk about the nature of the KLUC and the likelihood that Jeong's policy of 'labor-capital cooperation' will lead to "emphasis on results, performance evaluation and competition (between workers), destroying the sense of community between colleagues." They are also reflecting on the fact that the shortcomings of the KCTU in becoming a true symbol of democracy and in protecting rank-and-file members against capital's attack, as well as their own failure educate their colleagues about the character and significance of the various

national centers, drove some members to seek a new path in the KLUC.

Commenting on the current state of the SSLU, the same delegate made the following remarks: “The Supreme Court decision may be helpful in the defense of our democratic (KCTU-affiliated) union, but it will not be decisive. Rather, it is how democratic (pro-KCTU) forces (within the SSLU) conduct ourselves, and the vision we put forth that will be most important. We have not yet been able to fully regroup or become fully active. But we are currently evaluating our past limitations, while beginning to build worksite committees to put a new vision into practice. Our goal is to make it possible for a democratic leadership to win the union election in December. If this happens efforts to build the KLUC will weaken or naturally die out completely.”

Migrant Workers Stand up to new Slave Labor Policy

<http://www.pssp.org/eng/?p=371>



Young Cambodian migrant workers at August 19 rally

On June 4, 2012, the South Korean Ministry of Employment and Labor (MoL) announced a new policy entitled “Policy for Improvement in Foreign Workers’ Change of Workplaces and Prevention of Broker Intervention”. This policy, which went into effect on August 1, changes the procedures used by local MoL job centers in processing migrant workers’ applications to transfer workplaces. While the policy’s title sounds good, it actually makes it incredibly difficult for migrant workers to change employers, even in cases where they face extremely severe labor rights violations and poor working conditions. The policy change has

sparked severe concerns by migrant workers’ advocates and the beginnings of a potentially powerful struggle based on the participation and leadership of migrant workers themselves.

Documented migrant workers in South Korea are regulated by the Employment Permit System (EPS). Under this system, migrant workers, who receive short-term residence permits, can change workplaces a limited number of times, but generally need the permission of their employers to do so. If a migrant worker who leaves one workplace cannot find new employment within three months he/she loses his/her residence status, becoming undocumented. Even without the new MoL policy, the limitations the EPS puts on changing workplaces means the workers are often stuck with abusive employers with no options except to endure the situation or leave the workplace without permission, thus becoming undocumented.

The new MoL policy makes the situation even worse. Whereas in the past, migrant workers seeking new employment were given a list of potential workplaces, now only employers receive a list of migrant workers looking for job. This means that migrant workers can do nothing more than sit at home hoping for a call from a prospective employer and will have a hard time refusing a job offer no matter how poor the working conditions for fear of not getting a second one. As such, the policy will further discourage migrant workers from leaving employer who violate the labor law in the first place, effectively forcing them into slave labor. The policy is a clear violation of the right to free choice of employment, guarantee in Korean labor law and ILO Convention 122, which South Korea has ratified.

Recognizing the problematic nature of this policy, the Migrants Trade Union, the Korean Confederation of Trade Unions and migrant worker support centers across the country formed a “Committee to Repeal the Slave Labor MoL Policy”. This Committee has been actively fighting the policy since mid-July. Even more important, however, has been the massive participation of previously unorganized young migrant workers who, recognizing the significance of the policy for their daily lives, have started to come out to meeting and protests in force. Nearly 700 such workers, mostly from Cambodia, showed up at a rally on August 19,

having seen advertisements for it on the internet or hearing about it by word of mouth. These workers held an impromptu discussion about what to do next at the rally site and then come out for a meeting the following weekend to discuss detailed plans. This level of voluntary participation by unorganized migrant workers is unheard of these days in the Korean migrant workers movements, which has been weekend over the last several years by massive immigration crackdowns and targeted repression.

The struggle against the MoL's new policy is significant for several reasons. First the policy represents a trend towards the increasing repression of migrant workers rights, even as the South Korean government and capital admit that migrant labor is essential to the Korean economy. Secondly, the struggle has brought together and energized organizations working on migrants rights around the country. Finally, and most importantly, this struggle presents a desperately needed organizing and leadership development opportunity. It will be up to union officers and activists to seize this rare chance to revitalized a migrant worker-led migrant rights movements.

UPDATES

<http://www.pssp.org/eng/?p=343>

KPTU Cargo Truckers Solidarity Division concludes Strike

On June 25, the Cargo Truckers Solidarity Division of the Korean Public & Social Service and Transportation Workers Union (KPTU) went on strike demanding an increase in freight rates, the waving of fuel taxes, the implementation of a standard freight rates system and unionization rights. For five days, logistics bases across the country experienced major delays due to the strike. The strike end on June 29, with the cargo truckers winning a 9.9% increase in freight rates. While the rate increase was lower than had been hoped, the strike was successful in winning a promise from the Democratic Party to include the cargo tuckers' demands in its party platform. More importantly, the strike was instrumental in increasing public sympathy for cargo truckers, which forms an important basis for further struggle.

Cleaning and Security Workers at Hongik University win Union Recognition

After an 85-days sit-in protest, cleaning and security workers at Hongik University forced the contract cleaning company Yongjin Sileob to recognize their union, the KPTU Seoul-Gyeonggi Public Service Branch. Yongjin Sileob had established a yellow union, and was claiming the yellow union had the status of bargaining representative as an excuse not to recognize the KPTU union. Through their struggle, the Hongik workers forced Yongjin to reach an agreement with their union on August 1. Under this agreement, the workers will be covered by the KPTU Seoul-Gyeonggi Public Service Branch's multi-workplace collective bargaining agreement, reached last April 19. Yongjin Sileob also agreed either not to seek a renewal of its contract with Hongik University after it runs out in Dec., or to bargain faithfully with the union if its contract is renewed.

Former President of Ssangyong Union Released from Prison after 3 Years



Former Ssangyong union Chief Sang-gyun Han standing with current Chief Jeong-wu Kim minutes after his release

At 12:00am on the night of August 4-5, Sang-gyun Han, former Chief of the KMWU Ssangyong Motor Branch was released from Hwaseong prison after serving a three-year sentence. Han, who is loved and respected by the Ssangyong Motor union members and the Korean labor movement, was arrested after leading a 77-day factory occupation and strike against mass dismissals in 2009. He was greeted by a crowd of union members, students and activists holding a cultural event in front of the prison to honor his release. Han addressed the crowd saying, "Thank you... I promise to struggle even more fiercely in the future."

ISSUE IN FOCUS

The Struggle of Hyundai Motor Irregular Workers for Regular Employment

<http://www.pssp.org/eng/?p=375>



Hyundai irregular workers' protest

In-house Subcontractors, Illegal Dispatch

Roughly 40,000 directly employed regular workers and 10,000 irregular in-house subcontracted workers work for the Hyundai Motor Company. The in-house subcontracted workers, who do the same work as regular workers inside Hyundai Motor plants, but are formally employed by other companies, are in fact no different from temp agency or 'dispatch' workers. Under South Korean law, dispatch employment is prohibited in the manufacturing sector. By law, therefore, Hyundai Motor should directly employ and 'regularize' these workers. Hyundai Motor management, however continued to refuse the regularization of the irregular worker in its factories.

In 2003, Hyundai Motor irregular workers formed their own union and have since fought to win regularization and the abolition of illegal dispatch employment. Currently, irregular worker union chapters affiliated to the Korean Metal Workers' Union (KMWU) exist at the Hyundai Motor plants in Ulsan, Asan and Jeonju.

Hyundai Motor's Obstinacy

In 2004, the Ministry of Labor found that 127 in-house subcontractors employing 9,234 workers at Hyundai plants were in fact illegal dispatch agencies. Energized by this ruling, the

Hyundai irregular workers struggle moved forward with full force. This struggle involved the occupation of Factory 5 at the Hyundai Plant in Ulsan, the self-immolation of one worker and the self-hanging of another, and yet the company did not waiver in its position.

In 2010, a historic Supreme Court decision found that Hyundai Motor irregular worker Byeong-seung Choe was an illegally dispatched worker and should, therefore, be regularized. Still, Hyundai management refused to budge, calling the verdict "not the final decision" and even going so far as to make a second appeal to the Supreme Court. In response, the Hyundai irregular workers occupied Factory 1 of the Ulsan Plant from November 15 to November 25, 2010 demanding regularization. At this time, irregular worker In-hwa Hwang also set himself on fire in protest.

Hyundai Motor's efforts to crush the irregular workers' struggle have been extreme. Over the last ten years some 200 workers have been fired and the company has made claims for damages and provisional seizure of assets against union members worth several billion won (several million dollars). It has also sent managers and hired thugs to violently suppress protests.

The Legal Basis for Regularization

Finally, in February of this year the Supreme Court issued its final verdict finding that "Hyundai Motor has the responsibility to directly hire union member Byeong-seung Choe, given that he is indeed an illegally dispatched worker." Hyundai, however, refused to follow the Supreme Court's decision, claiming "because Byeong-seung Choe has been dismissed, the company has no obligation to rehire him," and filing a complaint with the National Labor Relations Commission (NLRC). The NLRC found that Choe had been unfairly dismissed, but Hyundai has not rehired him, nor has it regularized any other in-house subcontracted workers.

The main content of the Supreme Court decision is as follows: "Due to the particular characteristics of Hyundai Motor's automated-flow production method, which uses a conveyor system, the various steps of the manufacturing and assembly process must be carried out

continuously without stop and, thus, cannot be independent. Given the fact that the in-house subcontractors in fact dispatch their workers to Hyundai Motor and that these workers are directed and supervised by Hyundai Motor, the contract between the in-house subcontractors and Hyundai Motor falls in the category of a contract for dispatch labor.” Thus, the Supreme Court recognized in-house subcontracting as illegal dispatch.

In addition, an amendment to the Act on the Protection, Etc. of Temporary Agency Workers, which went into effect on August 2, 2012, stipulates that in cases where illegally dispatched work is verified, the parent company must directly employ the related workers even if they have only worked for a single day. The Ministry of Labor and Supreme Court decisions, the new revision of the Temporary Agency Worker Act and the general state of public opinion are all highly disadvantageous to Hyundai Motor.

The Deceitful Proposal of 3,000 New Hires

Given this situation, Hyundai Motor finally put forward a proposal to directly hire 3,000 of its in-house subcontracted workers as new employees by 2016. 3,000 hires, however, is far less than the full number of in-house subcontracted workers. Moreover, 2,800 regular Hyundai workers are scheduled to retire by 2016. This means that Hyundai Motor’s proposal amounts to little more than filling the slots vacated by retiring regular workers with some of the irregular workers, excluding those who have been dismissed. The slots left open by the irregular workers who become directly employed would simply be filled by more in-house subcontracted workers. In other words, Hyundai Motor’s proposal amounts, not to the regularization of irregular jobs, but the passing of irregular jobs from one set of workers to another. It is Hyundai Motor’s plan to change the role of in-house subcontracted workers so that they will not qualify as dispatch workers by the above definition and, thus, free itself of the debate on illegal dispatch.

At the same time, Hyundai Motor has carried out a campaign of terror against the irregular workers. In one recent incident, managers and hired thugs beat and kidnapped officers of the

KMWU Hyundai Motor Irregular Workers Branch, later leaving them outside factory grounds. The irregular workers’ struggle has continued in the face of these hardships, receiving considerable solidarity from unions around the country who have gathered in front of the Ulsan plant to hold solidarity protests.

Seeds of Division

Meeting with the irregular workers’ union through the ‘Parent Company-Subcontractor Workers Alliance’, the regular workers union made a promise to work collectively to achieve the regularization of the Hyundai irregular workers. Last April, the Alliance put forth the following six demands: 1) regularization of all irregular workers employed by in-house subcontractors; 2) immediate withdrawal of all charges, arrest warrants, dismissals, claims for damages and provisional seizure of assets against in-house subcontracted workers in relation to their struggle; 3) a public apology for the illegal acts and repression against the irregular workers; 4) an agreement between labor and management to discontinue any further use of irregular workers, 5) an immediate end to structural adjustment related to irregular workers, and 6) adherence to labor laws with regards to the three irregular workers’ union chapters and non-interference in union activities.

In fact, however, the regular workers union has come under heavy criticism failing to stick by these demands. Engaged with Hyundai management around its own collective bargaining, the regular workers union accepted the proposal for 3,000 new hires. It even carried out a campaign to convince the irregular workers to go along with the proposal, leading to divisions among the irregular workers. Worrying that if they persist in struggle they might not even win fulfillment of the promise of 3000 new hires, and some members have left the irregular workers union.

Given this situation, the irregular workers union demanded that the issue of irregular worker regularization be taken out of the irregular workers union’s collective bargaining and dealt with in a special negotiation session. Towards the end of August, it also adopted a new policy of “winning regularization for members who stick with the struggle first.” The proclamation

of this policy was an effort to remobilize, yet it marks a retreat from the principle of “regularization of all in-house subcontracted workers.”



The regular and irregular workers unions in a special negotiating session on August 20

Results of the Regular Workers Union’s Collective Bargaining

On August 29, the Hyundai regular workers union reached an agreement in its collective bargaining with Hyundai without settling the issue of the irregular workers. The content of the agreement is as follows: 1) An increase in basic wages by 98,000 won, a bonus of 350% of basic wages plus 9 million won and an incentive bonus of 150% plus 600,000 won (including a 100,000 won tradition market gift certificate), for a total increase of 27 million won per person; 2) a two-week trial of the two daytime shift system (replacing late night work), beginning on January 1, 2013 and full implementation at all plants based on one 8-hour and one 9-hour shift. The issue of regularizing irregular workers was deferred to a future special negotiation session.

In the bargaining session that took place beginning at 5:00pm on August 29, 4 members of the union bargaining committee walked out in protest against the company’s proposal. That night, the 4 bargaining committee members and some 50 Hyundai Motor Branch delegates and activists held a protest in front of the factory opposing the agreement, which lasted until roughly 12:00am. Their criticisms focus on the fact that the agreement failed to include a provision for an increase in employees to accompany the implementation of the two daytime shift system, meaning an increase in work intensity, and the fact that the bargaining committee had agreed to the belated

reinstatement of fired workers in the first quarter of next year. The results of the union vote on the agreement reflected this atmosphere of discontent. The agreement barely past with a vote of 52.7% in favor.

Hyundai Motor’s profits in 2011 were 4.8 trillion won (\$4.2 billion) a 36% increase over profits in 2010 (3.5 trillion won). Nonetheless, company management has maintained its position that, while it might give a bit more to regular workers, it will never regularize irregular workers. By so doing, it has succeeded in creating division between the regular and irregular workers. Despite the agreement to revisit the irregular worker question in special negotiations, hopes are not high that the regular workers union will give the needed support to the irregular workers’ struggle now that their collective bargaining agreement has been reached.

Future Prospects

The irregular workers union must now regroup and preparing for the special negotiations. To do so, the union must succeed in re-energizing its members to struggle and beat back company repression. It must also find a way to build common cause with active members of the regular workers union. Currently, the irregular workers union is planning a new struggle for the end of September and beginning of October. In the end, the struggle of Hyundai irregular workers, is the struggle of all in-house subcontracted workers South Korea. The solidarity of the labor movement and all progressive forces is, therefore, absolutely essential.

<p>People’s Solidarity for Social Progress (PSSP): Is a social movement organization in South Korea struggling against neoliberalism and working to build an alterglobalization movement by (re)constructing revolutionary social justice thought and theory, searching for internationally-based people's alternatives to neoliberalism's financial and armed globalization, and reforming and revitalizing the workers and women's movements.</p>
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SONGS OF THE PEOPLE

Don't Make a Sour Face

<http://www.pssp.org/eng/?p=364>

By Chang-un Choi

1.

Don't make a sour face.

You know things are difficult for everyone.

And you know you have comrades

working with you for a more joyful day.

When you feel alone, just look around you.

All of these people are our comrades.

2.

*The road we are traveling is not going to be
easy.*

And there will be times

when we are brought down by repression.

But if we are with our comrades we need not be afraid,

Until the day of workers' liberation, advance, ad! vance! Let's advance!

Directly after the 'Great Workers' Struggle of 1987' social movements in South Korea developed rapidly, both quantitatively and qualitatively. The diverse movement forces, however, could not agree among themselves about political strategy, a problem that was exacerbated by the collapse of socialist governments in Eastern Europe and the Soviet Union. A downturn in the movement came with the turn of the decade. At this time, a self-reflective atmosphere spread among progressive forces. Instead of the solemn and majestic marching songs of the 1980s, lighter and more speculative songs became popular.

'Don't Make a Sour Face', which was released in 1991, began this trend. Its light and quick tempo was a bit shocking to listeners, who were accustomed to the heavy mood and slow tempos of the songs of the 1980s. The lyrics, which propose "the rediscovery of the existence of the comrades around you," are quite trivial compared with the "grand" songs of the past decade. But in an era in which everything was obscure, 'comrades' were the only concrete thing that was left.

The song became unexpectedly popular after a celebrity did a remake of it in 2003 with a few changes to the lyrics. Now the song can be heard not only in movement spaces, but also in everyday life.

http://p1song.com/bbs/box.php?ver=&sanha_out=&sno=5641 (Sound Only)

The movement band 'Ggottazi' (<http://ihopesong.tistory.com>) singing 'Don't make a sour face'.

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=hmHvrTdxpqY>

A performance of "Don't make a sour face" at a community festival.

The Research Institute for Alternative Workers Movements (RIAWM): Is PSSP's research institute dedicated to revitalizing the workers movement in South Korea and beyond. Through empirical and theoretical study and dialogue with workers themselves, we are working to critically analyze the conditions workers face amidst the structural crisis of capitalism, and develop concrete policy for a workers movement that both improves workers' lives and strives towards an alternative political-economic system.

Central to our work is the concept of social movement unionism, which calls for unions and other workers' organizations to play a leading role in political and social transformation. Social movement unionism also signifies union collaboration with social movement forces and the articulation of the struggle for labor rights with struggles against other forms of structural oppression, including the women's, anti-war, anti-racist and environmental justice movements.

By fostering social movement unionism in South Korea we seek to cultivate the Korean workers movement as part of a worldwide alterglobalization movement.