

# Workers' View of Korea #5 (May 2013)

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

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## NOW IN KOREA

### Workers Gather in the Tens of Thousands to Commemorate the 123rd International Workers' Day

<http://www.pssp.org/eng/?p=502>

On May 1, workers gathered in Seoul and 14 other locations around the country to commemorate the 123rd International Workers' Day.

In Seoul, affiliates of the Korean Confederation of Trade Union (KCTU), including the Korean Federation of Public Services and Transportation Workers' Unions (KPTU), the Korean Metal Workers' Union (KMWU), the Korean Government Employees' Union (KGEU) and the Korean Health and Medical Workers' Union (KHMU) held rallies earlier in the day and then conducted feeder marches, which converged on City Hall Plaza, where the main protest was held at 3:00pm.

The demands put forth by KCTU that day were: 1) Guarantee of public sector trade union rights and strengthening of democratic unionism, 2) abolition of mass dismissals, reinstatement of dismissed workers and regularization of the employment status of precariously-employed workers, 3) an end to attempts to close public medical clinics and strengthening of public healthcare and social services, 4) strengthening of the law penalizing work-related deaths and an increase in the minimum wage, 5) an end of the standoff between South and North Korea, South-North dialogue and the conclusion of a peace treaty.

Attended by an estimated 15,000 people, the main rally in Seoul was lively, including performances as well as speeches. Throughout the rally, workers 'performed' high-altitude protests on scaffolding set up at various places around the protest site to represent the actual high-altitude protests against mass dismissals,



May Day, Workers gather at City Hall Plaza

precarious employment and the repression of trade union rights, still underway in several regions around the country.

A 'Declaration of Workers' Rights' was also read from the stage.

Comrades from several other countries participated in the May Day events alongside the Korean workers. Every year, KCTU runs a 'Leadership Education and Exchange in Asia Program for Young Unionists (LEAP)' at the time of May Day as a means to strengthen the democratic labor movement and facilitate exchange between unions in different countries in the region. LEAP participants, including comrades from the Philippines, Indonesia, Cambodia and Thailand, shared in the May Day events and various other programs scheduled during the week they were in South Korea.

Near the end of the May Day rally, protesters attempted to cross the street to the site where the Ssangyong Motor workers' protest encampment had been demolished several days earlier. They were confronted by swarms of riot police, who prevented them from resetting up the camp using shields, police sticks and pepper spray.

While many tasks lay ahead of KCTU and the Korean labor movement, May Day was an important moment for workers to come together, recommit to our goals and reaffirm our unity both nationally and internationally.

**“Let us not pass precarious employment on to our children”: The Struggle of Hyundai and Kia Irregular Workers**

<http://www.pssp.org/eng/?p=494>



Protest encampment at the Kia plant in Gwangju where a worker attempted self-immolation on April 16

**Suicide and Self-Immolation at Hyundai and Kia Plants**

On April 14 an in-house subcontracted and later contract worker at Hyundai Motor’s Ulsan plant put a noose around his own neck and committed suicide. This man had first got a job at Hyundai Motor on the advice of his father, who had worked for automobile manufacturer until his retirement. He had wanted to be a Hyundai worker like his father.

As an in-house subcontracted worker this 28-year-old youth moved between the jobs left vacant by regular workers and eventually folded to the company’s pressure to accepting employment under a short-term contract, convinced by Hyundai’s promise that his contract would be maintained for at least two years. In violation of this promise, the worker was dismissed last year before the two years were up. Driven to despair by his sense of betrayal, he eventually took his own life.

In order to avoid a clause in the Act on Temporary Agency Work implemented on August 2 last year, which calls for the direct employment of temporary agency workers (many in-house subcontracted workers are considered temporary agency workers as a result of recent court cases) after two years, Hyundai had rehired this worker and 1,500 other in-house subcontracted workers on short-term contracts.

The company then fired these workers in rounds. This policy was the cause of the workers’ death.

On April 16, only two days after the suicide, a 37-year-old worker who had worked in Kia Motors’ Gwangju plant for seven years lit himself on fire in protest self-immolation. The worker, Jong-hak Kim, had been an organizer for the Gwangju plant in-house subcontracted workers’ local. With his body ablaze Kim cried out continuously, “Let us not pass precarious employment on to our children,” and “Let us abolish precarious employment so we can live as human beings.” The father of three young daughters, Kim is now hospitalized, lying in pain. It was in response to management’s decision to hire new workers, rather than directly employ in-house subcontracted workers who had worked at the plant for 10 years to fill a labor shortage that Kim committed protest self-immolation.

**Hyundai and Kia Irregular Workers Protest**

The protest of irregular workers in Gwangju continues. In addition, since April 22, dismissed irregular workers from the Hyundai plants in Ulsan, Jeonju and Asan have been in Seoul where they have set up a protest encampment in front of the Hyundai and Kia headquarters. The demands of these workers are the imprisonment of Hyundai Motor CEO Mong-koo Chung, who has illegal employed temporary agency workers under the guise of in-house subcontracting for the last ten years, and the regularization of these workers’ employment status. In response to the protest, Hyundai Motor has mobilized hundreds of manager-level employees who have joined riot police in repeated violent attacking against the protesting workers. Despite this repression, the workers continue to hold daily rallies and maintain their encampment night and day.

On April 26, the Korean Metal Workers’ Union (KMWU), the industrial union to which the workers are affiliated, staged a protest and set up a tent at the protest site, which was torn down by the police that night. On May 4, workers in Seoul and Ulsan held simultaneous rallies to commemorate the 200<sup>th</sup> day of the high-altitude protest being carried out by Byeong-seung Choi and Ui-bong Cheon at the Ulsan plant.

On May 10, the three Hyundai irregular worker locals went on strike. That day 800 workers protested in Seoul, taking over the four lane road

in front of the Hyundai and Kia headquarters. On May 15, the KMWU held a major rally at the same location in which 3500 union members and officers participated. A 'Committee to Respond to In-house Subcontracting' has also been formed to support the workers' struggle, with a hundred organizations participating around the country.



**KMWU Protest in front of Hyundai and Kia Headquarters on May 15**

### **A New Shift Arrangement for Hyundai and Kia Workers**

<http://www.pssp.org/eng/?p=479>

Beginning on March 3, workers at Hyundai and Kia plants have worked under a new shift arrangement that reduces night work as well as overall working hours. For several decades, Hyundai, Kia and other Korean automakers generally operated on a double 10-hour shift system, which consisted of 8 hours of regular work and 2 hours of pseudo-regularized overtime work each shift. The second shift lasted through the night.

The new system, however, calls for an 8-hour day shift and a 9-hour afternoon shift. The first shift runs from 6:40 am to 3:20 pm, while the second shift runs from 3:30 pm until 1:10 am.

Among OECD countries, the average working time for Korean workers tops the list. In 2011, the annual work hours for workers in Korea stood at 2,111 on average, a figure 419 hours higher than the 2010 OECD average of 1,692 hours. At Hyundai, workers paid by the hour worked 2,488 hours on average in 2010. 19% of such workers at Hyundai (or 5,151 persons) worked more than 2,700 hours that year.

One of the reasons behind the extremely long working hours is the wage structure used by Korean automakers. Management has kept the basic wage rate so low that workers have to work overtime and even on the weekends and holidays to make a decent living. Roughly 30 percent of compensation is composed by pay for overtime and holiday work. The new shift arrangement was, therefore, expected to reduce the level of total wages accordingly. For this reason there were drawn-out and painful negotiations before the new shift arrangement was introduced.

Management and labor union first agreement to end night work in 2002, but it took ten years from then on before the two sides could reach a final agreement on how this would occur. The union demanded that management adopt the new shift system without lowering wages, intensifying the work load or increasing employment insecurity. Management, on the other hand, wanted to maintain the level of production.

The two parties finally reached an agreement in 2012. They agreed to maintain production volumes at their current level at the time the agreement was concluded. They also agreed to maintain the total wage level. To do so, the union accepted an increase in line speeds by 30 units per hour at all factories (from 402 to 432 units for all of five factories in Ulsan and one plant in Asan) and made minor changes in work schedules to increase working hours. (Regular overtime work for the afternoon shift is actually one hour and twenty minutes.) On the other hand, the management agreed to invest in additional equipment needed to attain the higher level of productivity.

There are, however, several problems with this agreement. The additional investment that Hyundai management announced does not include a budget for hiring new workers. The global automaker has made a phenomenal amount of profits for the past few years. These profits were made possible in principal because of the use of numerous precarious workers on the production line and by squeezing parts suppliers and other service providers. Two in-house subcontracted workers have carried out a high-altitude protest atop a power transmission tower for more than 200 days and the numerous cases in which company has forced suppliers to

agree to unfavorable supply contracts by using its advantageous bargaining position are well known.

Considering these facts, the decrease in working hours should be accompanied by an increase in employment, which would enable the redistribution of unfairly accrued profits back into the society. Hyundai has not agreed to do this.

Moreover, the line speed increase without regular overtime work means that in the case of an economic slowdown workers are likely to see their jobs threatened. If the market conditions changes and demand for Hyundai vehicles goes down, management is likely to consider the existing equipment, facilities and workforce as overcapacity. In such a situation, regular workers as well as precarious workers will find their jobs under attack.

### **Korean Public Sector Workers Demand Trade Union Rights**

<http://www.pssp.org/eng/?p=486>

On April 11, representatives from the Korean Confederation of Trade Unions (KCTU) and seven KCTU affiliates gathered in Gwanghwamun Plaza for a press conference to announce the launch of the ‘KCTU Alliance to Win Public Sector Trade Union Rights, Stop Privatization and Defend Quality Public Services’. The establishment of this alliance represents a commitment on the part of democratic public sector unions to work more closely together in the face of the South Korean government’s attack on public sector workers and the services they provide.

The seven affiliates participating in the Alliance include the Korean Federation of Public Services and Transportation Workers’ Unions (KPTU), the Korean Government Employees’ Union (KGEU), the Korean Teachers and Education Workers Union (KTU), the Korean University Workers’ Union (KUWU), the Korean Health and Medical Workers’ Union (KHMU), the National Union of Media Workers (NUM) and the Democratic General Union. The Alliance’s main goals are to: 1) Win guarantee of public sector trade union rights and the reinstatement of unfairly dismissed public sector workers, 2) stop privatization and strengthen

quality public services, 3) win regular employment for an abolish discrimination against precariously-employed workers in the public sector, 4) and win a system for determining public sector working conditions through labor-government negotiations.

In addition to the KCTU Alliance, coalitions including unions and civil society organizations have also recently been established to focus specifically on the issues of privatization and public sector precarious employment. These coalitions are working on issues such as the attempts to close public healthcare clinics, the government’s plans to increase the involvement of private capital in transport and utilities (privatization), and the government’s policy on public sector precarious employment, which leaves the vast majority of precarious workers facing job instability and discrimination in wages and working conditions.



**Press conference to announce launch of the new alliance on April 11**

One of the main issues, therefore, that the KCTU Alliance must focus on right now is that of trade union rights. By international labor standards, all workers, including public sector workers, possess the fundamental right to freely form and join trade unions and engage in union activities. Nonetheless, public sector workers in many countries are denied these rights, Korea being a representative example.

For the last several years, the South Korean government has been attacking public sector union’s collective bargaining rights, requiring that employers at public institutions eliminate provisions in collective bargaining agreements considered ‘irrational’, including those calling for consultation with worker representatives on staffing issues, ‘excessive’ allowances for union activities during work hours, and benefits and wage provisions seen as too generous. Unions at dozens of public institutions that have resisted

making these concessions have faced unilateral cancelled of their CBAs and pressure tactics aimed at getting members to disaffiliate.

Hundreds members of the KGEU and KPTU, moreover, have been unfairly dismissed from their jobs in retaliation for protests opposing faulty government policy. In addition, since 2009 the government has refused to recognize the legal union status of the KGEU, making it an extra-legal organization. The government is also currently threatening to cancel the union registration of the KTU. In addition, nearly half of the 560,000 South Korean government employees, including fire fighters and police officers, are legally prohibited from forming and joining trade unions. All of these measures are in direct violation of international standards.

Recognizing the importance public sector trade union rights to the provision of quality public services, the ILO has agreed to review the global implementation and enforcement of Convention 151, which guarantees trade union rights the public sector, this June during the International Labor Conference (ILC). In the lead-up to the ILC, the KCTU Alliance is engaging in a range of activities to call attention to the government's violations and demand correction. These activities include a petition campaign calling for the ratification of Convention 151 and related core convention (ILO Convention 87 (Freedom of Association), and 98 [Collective Bargaining]) and an end to the repression of public sector unions and a national rally planned for June 1. In addition, the KCTU Alliance is sending a delegation to the ILC, which will participate in the formal ILC discussion, engage in outreach and protest actions and exchange information and experiences with public sector unions from around the world.

**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.

**ISSUE IN FOCUS**

**The Park Geun-hye Government and the Crisis of Labor Movement**

**- A criticism of the Park administration's labor policies**

<http://www.pssp.org/eng/?p=454>

It has been three months since the right-wing Park Geun-hye administration took office, succeeding the former Lee Myung-bak administration. During the presidential election campaign period, Park was able to win the votes of people who were angered by the former government by emphasizing the center-left discourses of 'economic democratization' and 'welfare'. She took office at the Blue House, under such favorable titles as 'first female president since the Korean Constitution was established' and 'first president to earn a majority since the Amendment of the Constitution in 1987'.

President Park, however, soon betrayed herself when she gave important government positions to corrupt public officials, and conservative figures from the military and the judiciary. Her rosy promises to improve the situation of the economically and socially vulnerable and correct *chaebol's* (large conglomerates') corrupt practices of have faded from sight. In just two months expectations have turned to sour disappointment.

**Economic Crisis and South Korea's *Chaebol***

Immediately after Park's election, workers at Hanjin Heavy Industries, Hyundai Heavy Industries, Ssangyong Motors and Hyundai-Kia Motor Group committed or attempted suicide. The direct cause of these deaths was economic, social and psychological hardship due to mass dismissals, precarious employment, and repression against trade union activities. The indirect cause was the frustration these workers felt when they recognized that the Park government has no real intention to solve these problems or punish big businesses that violate trade unions rights.

Large manufacturing companies in the electronics, automotive, shipbuilding and steelmaking industries bolster the export-led

economy of South Korea, the world's eighth-largest trader. Under the export-centered economic policies of Park Chung Hee, the dictator who led South Korea in the 1960s and 70s and Park Geun-hye's father, Korean *Chaebol* enjoyed special favors and accelerated growth. The 'democratic' Kim Dae-jung and Roh Moo-hyun governments continued these export and *Chaebol*-centered policies. During the unprecedented 1997~98 Asian Financial Crisis, these two governments faithfully followed the doctrines of neo-liberalism, allowing and supported the *chaebol* to institute structural adjustment programs, conduct massive layoffs and use countless precariously-employed workers and promoting the myth of 'too big to fail'. In addition, the government implemented measures to depreciate the Korean won. These measures enabled the *chaebol* to regain profitability and export competitiveness. At the same time, the police and other government authorities aggressively intervened in labor relations to weaken trade unions.

Ironically, the democratic governments were determined to implement and execute neo-liberal reform policies, lowering wages and deteriorating working conditions. Given that South Korea lags behind Japan in terms of technological competitiveness and also behind China in terms of price competitiveness, Korean businesses responded by further strengthening the low-wage economic structure. Caught at the bottom of a system of multi-level subcontracting that characterizes Korean manufacturing, workers at small and medium-sized businesses suffer low wages, long working hours and high labor intensity, while large businesses at the top of the supply chain enjoy disproportionate benefits.

In 2008, financial crisis shocked the global economy in 2008. In South Korea, the newly-elected Lee Myung-bak administration implemented undisguised business-friendly policies, accelerating all the trends described above. As a result, Korean workers now work longer than any other OECD countries with the majority of them making an hourly wage that is slightly more than what is need to buy a Big Mac.

On the other hand, Samsung Electronics, Hyundai, Kia and other large Korean companies have been able to emerge as global players

boasting ever-larger profits by taking advantage of the financial crisis. Lee Gun-hee of Samsung and Chung Mong-koo of Hyundai, whose images are recall Rockefeller, Carnegie and other robber barons of the gilded age, wield omnipotent power, even ignoring the rules of free market capitalism.

### **Labor Policies of the Park Geun-hye Administration**

The situation described above forms the backdrop against which both conservative and liberal parties came up with 'economic democratization' and 'welfare' as the main concepts in their platforms during the 2012 general and presidential elections. An economy highly dependent on exports, strong dominance by the *chaebol* and the ongoing economic crisis leave Park few options, however. Moreover, the government and the ruling party have to care for the interests of large businesses and the wealthy population because it is from these groups that their support traditionally comes. Symbolically, President Park demonstrated her intention relying on the *chaebol* for an exit to the crisis when she let the largest-ever business delegation, including Lee Gun-hee and Chung Mong-koo, accompany her on her trip to the U.S. earlier this month.

Given these circumstances, the labor policies of the Park government can hardly be labor-friendly even though she loves to use the title "president that cares for people's livelihoods." In fact, the policies of the current administration resemble those of the former Lee government more in the area of labor than in any other field. The Lee government presented raising employment rates as the first goal of labor policies, pursuing 'flexicurity' programs. Likewise, the Park government has set as a top priority raising the employment-population ratio to 70 percent.

The key idea behind flexicurity, which includes some aggressive labor market policies, is to increase employment by making the wage and employment conditions of regular workers more flexible, expanding working hour elasticity through flexible work hour schemes and working time accounts, creating part-time jobs. The policies for a flexible labor market have evolved from the introduction of mass dismissals (flexibility in employment) to agency

work (flexibility in employment relationship) to job sharing (flexibility in wages and working hours).

To raise the employment-population ratio to 70 percent, work-life balance policies for women are implemented in combination with programs to address the low fertility rate and Korea's aging society. The government sees the expansion of part-time jobs and discretionary work as an effective policy tool to prevent women workers from leaving the labor market. The logic here is based on belief that women leave the market when their domestic duties intensify as part of the natural life cycle because the current labor market is mainly organized with long-working-hour, full-time jobs and that part-time work is therefore preferable. In fact however, the measures planned by the Park administration will lead to the expansion of short-time, low-wage, precarious jobs for women workers.

Prioritizing measures to raise the employment-population ratio means pushing respect for basic trade union rights and healthy labor relations aside. The Park government has clearly demonstrated that it has no intention to amend current labor laws, which allow claims for damage and provisional seizure of assets against unionists in retaliation for union activities and charges against unionists for obstruction of business and ban employer payment of salaries to full-time union officers, industrial actions taken by minority unions and political activities by government employees and teachers. While the government emphasizes the importance of tripartite committees, its true intention is to isolate and weaken the Korea Confederation of Trade Unions (KCTU) by forming an alliance with the business-friendly Federation of Korean Trade Unions (FKTU) just as the Lee government did.

In addition, the government has announced no plans for addressing mass dismissals or agency work, the root causes behind the deaths of workers at Ssangyong, Hyundai and Kia. On the contrary, the ruling party has presented a bill to legalize in-house subcontracting practices to the National Assembly, and is working on policies to link the wage peak system with the extension of the retirement age. Privatization of the railway and energy industries, closure of a

public medical clinic, and other programs to deteriorate the public sector are also underway.

### **The Labor Movement's Response**

Having been continuously defeated under the neo-liberal reform initiatives of the Kim Dae-jung and Roh Moo-hyun governments and the attack of the Lee Myung-bak government, the Korean working class is now in a serious predicament. The labor movement is facing the challenge of confronting the Park government in the midst of deepening economic crisis.

Many of the traditional union leadership, workers who gained their experience as union officers during the 1987 Great Workers' Struggle, are now aged and about to retire, while the new generation of workers is largely unorganized. Divisions and conflicts within the working class based on business size, employment status, gender and nationality are growing more extreme, yet the democratic trade union movement, as not been able to put forth wage and employment policies that can reduce these divisions and increase working class unity. Above all, the KCTU, which is responsible for representing the entire labor movement in Korea, is faced with significant external and internal challenges. Externally, progressive parties, formed as a result of a decade-long effort to organize the working class as a political force, have collapsed. Internally, the KCTU has been unable to elect a leadership due to disagreements between various political forces.

In order to overcome its current predicament, the Korean labor movement first needs to win real victories in ongoing disputes so as to rebuild the trust and confidence of the union membership. Going forward, it must renew its work on the ground with the mindset of opening up a new gate for democratic unionism. To develop new rank-and-file officers and promote leadership among the new generation, we must come up with multifaceted strategies to aggressively organize unorganized workers and truly represent precarious, low-wage workers rather than merely supporting the defensive fights of existing trade unions.

To this end, we must develop a strategy to change the *chaebol*-led economic system. This means transforming the vertical hierarchy of the multi-layer subcontracting and the split labor

market. To do this we must develop solidarity wage and employment strategies that include workers in subcontracting companies at the industrial and sectoral levels. Strategic organizing campaigns in key industries and industrial complexes that play pivotal roles in supply chains or the manufacturing basis of specific sectors will also be part of this process.

In the process of these struggles and organizing campaigns, we need to revise the basic principle that ‘liberation of the working class must be won by the power of the working class itself’. If we can commit firmly to the ideals of liberation and transformation, we will have a chance to turn the current crisis of labor movement into an opportunity. If we cannot, the crisis will remain and deepen as such.

### **The Development of a U.S-South Korea ‘Global Partnership’ and its meaning for the South Korean Labor and Progressive Movement**

<http://www.pssp.org/eng/?p=463>

From May 6 to 9, President Park Geun-hye made her first trip to the United States since her inauguration. The highlight of the trip (save the sexual harassment scandal that has emerged surrounding her former spokesperson), came on May 7 when Park held a bilateral meeting with U.S. President Barak Obama in the White House Oval Office. The Park-Obama meeting drew widespread attention, coming as it did amidst a particularly high level of tension between the governments in Seoul and Pyongyang. Many observers in the U.S. and South Korea expected the two leaders would layout a new blueprint for policy towards North Korea.

In general, these expectations proved to be correct. Regrettably, however, rather than discussing a new policy framework that might lead to the possibility for a breakthrough in the South-North stalemate, the two leaders essentially confirmed the currently existing hard-line stance towards North Korea and committed to increasing their military capacity vis-à-vis the already defensive nation. Further, the two leaders put forward a vision for an upgrade of the U.S.-South Korea alliance, committing to latter’s full integration into the former’s plans to maintain its hegemony in the East Asian region.

Much of the substance of the bilateral meeting can be gleaned from the ‘Joint Declaration in Commemoration of the 60<sup>th</sup> Anniversary of the Alliance between the Republic of Korea and the United States of America’ released at the meeting’s conclusion. This declaration proclaims the commitment of the two leaders to development of a U.S.-South Korea relationship described as “inextricably linked to regional and global security and economic growth” into a “global partnership”, while also strengthening its original function as a military alliance. In so doing, the declaration demonstrates the momentum gained by Obama’s so-called ‘pivot to Asia’ policy (of strengthening of military and economic intervention in the region) due to the current crisis on the Korean Peninsula, and South Korea’s commitment to assuming the role of junior partner in the U.S.’ regional and global strategy.



**Obama and Park meeting in the Oval Office on May 7**

### **Cooperation on Policy towards and Military Pressure on North Korea**

Through the Park-Obama meeting, it became clear that the U.S. and South Korean governments agree that sanctions and collective military pressure are more likely to bring about change in North Korea’s attitude than negotiations. The Joint Declaration states that the two countries, ‘Share the deep concern that North Korea’s nuclear and ballistic missiles programs and its repeated provocations pose grave threats to the peace and stability of the Korean Peninsula and Northeast Asia.’ Moreover, Obama’s statement in a briefing after the meeting that, “The days when North Korea could create a crisis and elicit concessions... are over,” signals the United States’ lack of willingness to change its policy framework. Park’s call for the international community to, “Speak with one voice” about “North Korea’s bad behavior” and “constantly send a firm

message that they will not stand for it,” struck a similar chord.

The two leaders also discussed a broad plan for strengthening their military alliance in order to back up cooperation on North Korea policy. The Joint Declaration reaffirms the United States’ commitment to, “The defense of the Republic of Korea, including through extended deterrence and the full range of U.S. military capabilities, both conventional and nuclear.”

At negotiations concerning North Korea’s nuclear program, held before the bilateral meeting, the two countries agreed to early development of a “tailored deterrence strategy” in relation to North Korea, suggesting plans to increase the reliability of the United States’ nuclear umbrella and strengthen the joint U.S.-South military force through restructuring of its command and weapons structure. In particular, the Joint Declaration implies the plan to include South Korea in the U.S.’ Missile Defense System (MD), stating, “We are resolved to continue to defend our citizens against North Korea’s provocations by strengthening our comprehensive, interoperable, and combined defense capabilities, to include shared efforts to counter the missile threat posed by North Korea and integrated intelligence, surveillance, and reconnaissance systems.” Based on this statement, it can be expected that South Korea’s, as well as Japan’s, integration into MD and the related issues of the conclusion of a South Korea-Japan information agreement and the strengthening of the two countries’ conventional weapons capacity (such as through the introduction of precision-guided munitions or ‘smart weapons’) are likely to become heated issues in the wake of Park’s trip to the U.S.

### **Development of a ‘Global Partnership’**

In addition to discussing the strengthening of their military alliance, Obama and Park discussed the development of the two countries’ relationship into a ‘global partnership’. As can be seen in the Joint Declaration, the U.S.-Korea FTA is a central piece of this plan. According to the declaration, through expanding trade and investment between the two countries, the FTA will not only bring economic profits to both countries, but will also, along with their military cooperation, enable the two country’s to serve as a ‘linchpin’ to peace and security in the region.

Over the course of the past three administrations, the character of the U.S.-Korea alliance has expanded and evolved to include more and more spheres of cooperation. The labeling of the alliance as a ‘global partnership’ signifies its development to include active involvement on a diverse range of issues including not only economics and culture, but also climate change, energy security, human rights, humanitarian aid, development, responses to terrorism, nuclear power safety and cyber security, with South Korea being brought in as a junior partner in the U.S.’ global governance in these areas. This process has already been evident in the last several years in South Korea’s dispatch of troops to Iraq to support the U.S. ‘War on Terror’, South Korean consent and aid to the realignment of the U.S forces in Korea based on the latter’s Global Posture Review, the conclusion and enactment of the U.S.-Korea FTA and South Korea’s hosting of the Nuclear Security Summit originally proposed by the U.S. as a means to maintain its nuclear hegemony.

Obama’s pivot to Asia is a significant part of the U.S. strategy for exiting the global economic crisis. The pivot centers on a dual policy of engaging China (G2), but also developing the relationship with Japan and South Korea (G3) as guarantee against the possibility of conflict with former. This strategy appears on the one hand in the U.S.’ attempt to respond to the changing balance of power resulting from China’s growing economic power through changes in its military strategy and strengthening of its alliances with Japan and Korea and on the other by its plan to first include Japan and Korea in the Trans-Pacific Partnerships (TPP) and then develop the TPP into a Free Trade Area of the Asia Pacific (FTAAP) modeled on the U.S.-Korea FTA. Despite the fact that the TPP was not discussed directly in the recent bilateral meeting, the Joint Declaration’s positive evaluation of the U.S.-Korea FTA suggests that in the near future efforts will be made to coax Park into join the TPP negotiations.

### **Tasks for the Labor and Progressive Movement**

As stated above, the Park-Obama bilateral meeting marked a commitment to a strengthening of military cooperation, continuation of the policy of sanctions and

military pressure against North Korea and the development of a U.S-South Korea Global Partnership. We must be clear that the continuation of pressure against North Korea is not a solution to tensions on the Korean Peninsula and instead will only exacerbate them. The strengthening of the U.S. and South Korea's already highly superior military strength will likely provoke North Korea to seek further development of its nuclear and missile capacity. In addition, if South Korea begins to participate in MD and the TPP, this will instigate a response from China, expanding tensions throughout the region. So, what must the labor and wider progressive movement do to respond?

First, we must commit not merely to participate in the peace movement, but rather to reinvigorate and eventually lead it. Over the last few months, the U.S. and South Korea have been strengthening their combined conventional and nuclear capacity under the name of 'tailored deterrence'. Concretely, this means joint military exercises, an increased coverage under the U.S.' nuclear umbrella, South Korea's introduction of smart weapons, the establishment of Korean Air Missile Defense (KAMD) and attempts at MD forward deployment. The labor and progressive movement must call for an end to joint military exercises, stop the augmentation of U.S and South Korean troops and the introduction of U.S.-made weapons, oppose an increase in South Korea's share of payment for the stationing of U.S troops in South Korea and demand a withdrawal of the U.S. nuclear umbrella and U.S. troops. At the same time, we must also respond to Park's attempt to make way for South Korea's own nuclear armament

and export of nuclear power (not addressed directly in the bilateral talks). To make this possible we must care out education for union members and the wider public about the reality of U.S.-South Korea and South-North relations, and also build a wide alliance with other progressive forces in South Korea and throughout the Asian region.

Second, we must keep watch for signs that South Korea is moving towards joining the TPP negotiations and at the same time develop a comprehensive alternative to free trade agreements in general. Up to this point, the South Korean government has kept its distance from the TPP, choosing instead to focus on the possibility of South Korea-China and South Korea-China-Japan FTAs. Nonetheless, given that the U.S. government has made it clear that the TPP is a top priority it is likely South Korea will not be able to delay participation for long. In the past, the U.S.-Korea FTA was seen as a key to advancing the U.S.-South Korea alliance by both governments. Now, Japan's participation in the TPP negotiations is being seen in a similar vein as a means to strengthen the U.S.-Japan alliance in the face of conflict between Japan and China. Reflecting on these facts, it can be assumed that the commitment made by Park and Obama to forming a global partnership will justify the U.S. to demand South Korea's participation in the TPP.

The labor and progressive movement must put forth a clear critique of the likely consequences of this global partnership, educate union members and the public on this critique and develop a multifaceted strategy for response.

#### **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.