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No 8, August 1990

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South Korea

The Labor Movement Growing and Strengthening Rapidly in South Korea and Its Characteristics

912D0003A *Pyongyang KULLOJA in Korean No 8, Aug 90 pp 85-90*

[Article by Kim Kyo-sik]

[Text] In South Korea today, the labor movement is growing and strengthening rapidly, with its development taking on new aspects.

The labor movement is a liberation struggle of the working class to free itself from capitalist exploitation, oppression, and enslavement. It is a powerful social movement hastening the downfall of capitalism. The working class is the leading, revolutionary class whose mission is to overthrow the capitalist system, to liquidate all forms of exploitation and oppression that violate the self-dependence of man, and to build socialism and communism. Labor movements can be successful only when the working class awakens to its historic mission, and rushes forth to a positive struggle for the self-dependence of the working masses.

Even in the past, there had been labor movements carried on in South Korea from generation to generation. However, due to the reactionary labor policies and the fascist, repressive maneuvers of the U.S. imperialists and the South Korean puppet clique, and because the political awakening of the workers was insufficient, the movement remained at low levels.

The South Korean workers, through vigorous struggles against the fascist rule that trampled upon their right to a living and democratic freedoms, awoke to their social, class status. This prompted them to rush forth to a positive struggle to shape their own destiny self-dependently and creatively.

The great leader Comrade Kim Il-song taught:

"In South Korea, not only youth and students but also workers are rising in a courageous struggle." ("Kim Il-song Works," Vol. 29, p. 483)

It was after the [1980] heroic Kwangju people's uprising and the subsequent June people's resistance that the South Korean labor movement entered into a new phase of development.

The growth and strengthening of the South Korean labor movement can be seen in the fact that the workers' struggles are unprecedentedly expanding and intensifying in scale.

While South Korean workers waged some 1,920 cases of labor struggles in the 10 years from 1977 through 1986, the figure soared to more than 7,230 in the following three years 1987-89, which is equivalent to the number of labor struggles in the 30 years following the end of the war and marks a 12-fold increase compared with the first half of 1980.

The number of South Korean workers participating in labor struggles also increased remarkably. A total of 6 million workers took part in struggles in the two and a half years following the June people's resistance. The figure accounts for more than 60 percent of the total number of South Korean people of all strata who participated in various struggles during the same period.

The growth and strengthening of the South Korean labor movement can also be seen in the fact that workers of major firms of South Korea's key industries are taking the lead in the struggles. Companies employing 300 or more workers made up 70 percent of the enterprises whose workers waged labor struggles from July 1987 through the first half of this year.

Lately, the South Korean labor movement has grown out of a limited scope and is expanding vigorously in every part of South Korea. In the past, struggles had been confined to specific sectors and regions in many cases. In recent years, however, they have grown out of them and developed into a mass movement embracing nearly every South Korean sector and region.

A typical example is the indomitable, staunch struggle of Hyundai Heavy Industries workers in Ulsan in April and the powerful solidarity strikes and joint struggles launched by South Korean workers to support them. Some 20,000 workers of Hyundai Heavy Industries staged a powerful sit-in strike on 25 April after two days of work stoppage demanding the release of union leaders illegally detained by the fascist clique and the fulfillment of a collective contract. As the No Tae-u puppet clique, in a flurry, resorted to frantic, fascist measures to quell the struggle, workers of Hyundai Heavy Industries, their families, students, and citizens, numbering more than 30,000 in all, launched fierce protest struggles. On 1 May, some 40,000 workers of Hyundai-affiliated firms went on a strike to protest the atrocious repression by the fascist clique. As the flames of struggle spread to other areas, workers in all parts of South Korea rushed forth to struggles. Charging that the mobilization of the armed police by the fascist clique against the striking workers showed the puppet clique's "plot to obliterate the labor movement itself," Chonnohyop [the National Council of Labor Unions] resolved to "go on a general strike to defend the right to a living for all the workers and the freedom of labor union activity." In response, 60,000 workers of 55 unions in 13 regions struck on 1 May.

The recent South Korean labor movement has come up with a series of new features.

First of all, the movement now presents political demands among the leading slogans and fights for their realization.

A struggle slogan constitutes one of the basic characteristics of a mass movement defining its nature and direction. Only by showing the working masses a correct goal of struggle and a correct direction of activity will it be possible to unite them as one and lead the mass movement to a higher stage. As long as the working class merely presents purely economic demands or reformist slogans, it cannot win a fundamental improvement in its status.

Only when a labor movement presents a political demand as its slogan and struggles for its realization will it be possible for the movement to achieve its basic goal. The reason is that since the political system is the basic factor regulating the economic system in any society, workers ultimately can achieve an economic demand only through a struggle to realize a political demand.

In the South Korean labor movement in the past, the struggle to achieve economic demands was given much weight. There were indeed some cases involving political demands, but even in those cases slogans chiefly called for democratization of labor like "Guarantee the three rights of labor" and "Abolish the evil labor law." However, struggles of the South Korean workers these days, unlike before, present new demands such as the democratization of society, anti-U.S. and pro-independence reform, and the reunification of the fatherland, along with demands concerning the right to a living.

Political demands were 17.7 percent of all the demands raised by the South Korean workers in their struggles in 1980. The percentage grew to 23 percent in 1983, and to over 50 percent in 1985. Analyses of the demands raised in struggles in the first half of last year indicate that 28 percent of them were economic and over 60 percent were political.

Showing the fact that the South Korean labor movement is increasingly presenting political slogans, it has come up with anti-"government" slogans like those demanding resignation of the present "regime."

On 7 April last year, some 2,000 workers held "rallies for smashing the repression against the Hyundai Heavy Industries labor union" in Masan and Chongwon and adopted resolutions urging all to unite in a struggle to force the present "regime", which was bent on suppressing the labor movement, into resignation. Following the rallies, they held street demonstrations shouting slogans such as "The present 'regime' suppressing the labor movement, get out." On 20 May in Kwangju, when the "national rally for carrying on the Kwangju resistance" scheduled for that day in the Kumnam Street area failed to materialize because of the "containment at source" operations by the fascist clique,

some 30,000 workers, youth and students fought a pitched battle with riot police firing tear-gas shells, shouting "Kill No Tae-u for the sake of reunification" and "Disband the 'DLP.'"

Anti-U.S. slogans ringing out resoundingly from the South Korean labor movement are a graphic example showing that struggle slogans of South Korean workers have reached a very high level.

South Korean workers had for a long period of time failed to produce anti-U.S. slogans in their struggles because they had not awakened to the fact that U.S. imperialism was both the root cause of all the misfortunes and sufferings, and the ringleader obstructing the reunification of the country. The lesson of the Kwangju bloodshed made them clearly realize that the U.S. imperialists are, precisely, out-and-out aggressors and plunderers, the root cause of all the misfortunes and sufferings of our people, and the archenemy of reunification. It thus prompted them to put up anti-U.S. slogans in their struggles.

The Inchon Regional Federation of Democratic Workers in its activity program declares—along with the federation's commitment to struggles for the independent reunification of the fatherland, the abolition of undemocratic evil laws, guarantees for the worker's rights, and for the establishment of the three rights of labor—that "we shall reject political interferences by the U.S. and Japanese outside forces, and establish a democratic government." The federation is in a struggle to achieve the goal. Lately, various South Korean organizations, including the Council for the Welfare of Laborers, in their worker declarations and struggle declarations, have strongly demanded the withdrawal of the U.S. forces from South Korea, branding the United States the instigator in the Kwangju massacre.

The political demands that are growing daily among the South Korean workers reflect their will and stance against the U.S. imperialists' policy of colonial enslavement and the reactionary labor policies of their puppets, and for gaining independence and democracy for the South Korean society. This clearly shows that the labor movement is developing onto a high new stage in South Korea.

Another major feature of the South Korean labor movement is that organizational unity, solidarity struggles, and allied joint struggles of workers are gaining strength.

The strength of a mass struggle lies in its organized strength and solidarity. The masses unorganized and unable to maintain unity in their activities are bound to be crushed one by one. The level of organization and the degree of solidarity constitute the basic yardstick to measure the depth and development of a struggle.

In the past, the South Korean labor movement had been in many cases launched as isolated and scattered struggles.

Since their July-September 1987, struggle, however, South Korean workers have turned to more organized struggles under the slogans "Our business by ourselves" and "United we live, divided we die."

They put primary emphasis on expanding and strengthening struggle organizations, and waged vigorous struggles to get democratic labor unions organized in individual enterprises, regions, and industrial branches. Thus, by February last year, more than 1,000 new democratic company-level labor unions had been formed. On this basis, the South Korean workers formed the National Council of Labor Unions (Chonnohyop) in January this year in place of its predecessor, a kept labor body.

Chonnohyop is a mass labor movement organization formed by embracing all the regional- and industrial-level labor organizations throughout South Korea. The formation, reflecting the demand of the working class, came at a time when the organizing and popularizing of the labor movement became a requirement allowing no further deferment. The inauguration of Chonnohyop was an unambiguous demonstration of the unanimous will of the South Korean workers to face—with expanded mass struggles—the repression and the maneuvers of appeasement and deception by the fascist clique. It marked an important turning point in getting the South Korean workers united.

The South Korean workers are actively waging solidarity struggles and allied joint struggles among them as they strengthen organizational unity.

Led by the regional or industrial struggle headquarters, they are stepping up the role of the regional or industrial struggle organizations on a regular basis through joint information activities, notification of joint struggles launched, and the drawing of strike schedules. They jointly make demands and wage solidarity struggles for their realization.

In mid-January 1989, South Korean workers held a massive "national rally of workers" in Ulsan against the brutal repressive maneuvers of the fascist clique against the labor movement. Then in early February, some 35,000 workers in 30 areas launched a powerful solidarity movement in support of the Hyundai Heavy Industries workers' strike. In mid-November, over 50,000 members of some 100 unions under the National Conference of Regional and Industrial Labor Unions struck in more than 200 places of work.

In the South Korean workers' struggles, the proportion of solidarity struggles and allied joint struggles jumped from 15 percent in 1988 to 75 percent in 1989.

In this connection, South Korean publications, favorably reviewing the development, said that "solidarity is the most striking feature" of the recent labor movement, and that "a major characteristic of the 1989 labor movement is the appearance of joint struggles and solidarity struggles at various levels."

The next important feature of the South Korean labor movement is the obstinacy of the struggle waged by workers.

In a mass movement, obstinacy represents one of the important factors determining the fate of the struggle. The general principle of mass movements requires that the ranks of struggle consolidate their organizational unity further, and fight on with even greater obstinacy as the enemy intensifies its fascist repression. In South Korea in the grip of fascist repression and terror, the success or failure of the labor movement depends on how much obstinacy workers display in their struggle.

Currently, undeterred by the puppet clique's fascist repression which is intensifying more than ever, the South Korean workers continue to step up their struggles instead of slowing them down.

Showing the obstinacy of South Korean workers, their struggles tend to be protracted ones.

Of the 90 major cases of struggles in the January-August period last year, 40 percent lasted longer than a month. Especially, workers of an electronic firm of the Chonju "industrial complex" carried on their struggle for 175 days, those of the (T.C.) electronic company for 160 days, and the (Piko) company for six months, while Hyundai Heavy Industries workers waged their struggle for 130 days. The average length of the struggles launched last year was 15 days, marking a 50 percent to 100 percent increase over the 1987 and 1988 averages. Even South Korean publications, commenting on this trend, said that "a characteristic point is that once a labor-management dispute occurs, it tends to be protracted."

The obstinacy of South Korean workers in their struggles can be seen in their increasingly daring defiance toward the repression by the puppet clique.

After signing a "memorandum of understanding on reorganization of office" with management in 1987, Seoul subway workers struggled to have it implemented for one year and four months by holding rallies, sit-ins, and by refusing to collect fares. Finally in March last year, they held an emergency general meeting and decided to go on a strike until their demands were met. The decision was put in effect and, by erecting barricades in strategic points and organizing defense teams armed with wooden staffs and steel pipes, they fought on vigorously and unyieldingly. Meanwhile, Hyundai Heavy Industries workers in Ulsan, unable to have their demands met after 99 sessions of wage increase negotiations with management in the six months from June 1988, went on a strike in mid-December. The fascist clique perpetrated atrocious repression in every possible form, including raids on the union office, and the abduction of and terror against key unionists, in an attempt to crush the strike. However, the workers fought on obstinately, shouting slogans such as "Dying yes, losing no" and "One step of retreat means falling over the end of living and into an abyss."

All these things indicate that the South Korean labor movement, emerging from the old pattern, is now growing and strengthening into a more comprehensive and positive struggle, a goal-conscious and organized struggle. At present, the labor movement occupies a firm position in the South Korean people's movements and is becoming the most vigorous movement of all.

The rapid growth and strengthening of the South Korean labor movement is of great significance in the South Korean people's struggle for independence, democracy and reunification.

The great leader Comrade Kim Il-song taught:

"The just struggle being waged unyieldingly by youth, students, and people of all strata in South Korea clearly show the high spirit of independence of our people and their unbreakable will for reunification. Their struggle is drawing great sympathy from the progressive peoples of the world." ("Let Us Give Fuller Play to the Superiority of Socialism in Our Country," monograph, p. 19)

As the South Korean labor movement grows and strengthens to unprecedented levels, the workers' struggle has gradually taken up a key position in the mass movements, bringing about basic change in the overall structure of mass movement forces.

The struggle for independence, democracy and reunification is a work for the people of all strata in South Korea to undertake jointly; it can be led to victory only when they launch into it vigorously and fight on. To lead the struggle to victory, workers and peasants, youth and students, intellectuals and religionists, as well as people of all strata must firmly unite and fight.

The South Korean workers today are fully aware of this. They are actively engaged in activities to strengthen solidarity with youth, students, and people of all strata, casting away the outdated methods of the movement. In the labor movement in the past, there had indeed been some solidarity struggles involving youth, students, and people of various strata; in many cases, however, those struggles were confined to youth and students either supporting and encouraging the labor movement or demanding workers to accede to their struggles. Presently, however, the South Korean labor movement is entering a new phase, with workers discarding the passiveness of the old days, taking the initiative, and playing a positive role in the solidarity struggles. They are active in taking concerted actions either by joining forces or by providing each other with reinforcements.

Commenting on the labor movement rapidly growing and gaining strength in South Korea today, even South Korean publications say that the center of the mass movements is now shifting gradually from the student movement to the labor movement, noting that the 1990's will be a decade marking the evolution of the labor movement into a "leading movement" of all the mass movements.

The vigorous advances being made by the South Korean workers today for the right to a living and democratic freedoms, are dealing heavy blows to the U.S. imperialists' colonial rule, and to the No Tae-u military fascist clique, as well as revitalizing the South Korean people's struggle for independence, democracy, and reunification.

The new developments in the South Korean labor movement in recent years, and its rapid growth and strengthening have important connections with the fact that levels of consciousness are growing higher among workers, and that they are getting increasingly organized.

The spread of the chuche ideology among workers and their growing consciousness of self-dependence represent a basic factor responsible for the rapid growth and strengthening of the South Korean labor movement.

In South Korea today, the chuche ideology is spreading out of the limited sphere of some youth, students, and core elements of struggle and into the broad strata of workers, peasants, and all other masses.

Core elements of struggle are waging positive struggles to increase the consciousness of the working masses, after keenly realizing from past experiences that for self-dependence, democracy, and reunification, they must arm the broad masses firmly with the immortal chuche ideology. They opened "political schools" of various names in Seoul and other cities and are working unceasingly to arm workers with the chuche ideology, using works by our great leader and the dear comrade Kim Chong-il for teaching—including "**Kim Il-song's Selected Works**" and "**On the Chuche Ideology**" which students are required to read.

As the chuche ideology spreads, South Korean workers are gradually awakening to the class and national interests. Now they clearly know about their targets in the struggle for self-dependence, democracy, and reunification and they are fully aware of their position and role in the struggle.

According to an opinion survey of workers conducted some time ago by the South Korean Sektap Institute of Labor, 93.7 percent of them think that "South Korea is politically under U.S. influence," while 89.3 percent feel that "U.S. pressure for the market opening is based on a selfish notion that interests of lesser nations can be sacrificed for the sake of U.S. interests." These percentages indicate that the spread of the chuche ideology is pushing up the national awakening of the South Korean workers to higher levels, and that they have come to clearly recognize the U.S. imperialists' true colors.

South Korean publications wrote that the South Korean workers—who "have become the subject of history that takes the lead in generating the progress of history"—achieved in the course of their struggles in the face of the puppet clique "the result of discovering the intrinsic class nature of power and gaining a one-step higher class consciousness." They also wrote that "the enhanced

consciousness of the working people is leading the flow of the times." The favorable assessment of the development represents a precious fruition of the chuche ideology that has spread among the South Korean workers.

As it spread among the South Korean workers, the chuche ideology taught them that they are the master of their destiny, thus showing them the most correct way to shape their destiny, and creating a new source of strength to lift the labor movement to a new height.

The South Korean labor movement also owes its rapid growth and strengthening in recent years to the remarkable growth of core elements of labor.

Many workers have grown into core elements of the labor movement amid the flames of arduous struggles for self-dependence, democracy, and reunification.

Core elements put themselves deep among workers and launched energetic activities to help them awaken to class and national interests, using various forms and methods. At the same time, they are training workers further through struggles.

As a result, the South Korean workers are now awakened to class and national interests to incomparably high degrees. They came to know the truth that they must fight exploiters and oppressors if they are to achieve class liberation, national liberation, and the liberation of humanity, and to enjoy a self-dependent life; thus, they are rushing forth to actively struggle. Today, even under the fascist repression by the puppet clique, their struggle is rapidly growing and strengthening along the correct path, thanks to the leadership of core elements that grew and were trained in the flames of struggle.

The U.S. imperialists and the No Tae-u puppet clique, frightened by the daily growing and strengthening South Korean workers' struggle, have gone berserk and are

running amuck to thwart their just struggle by means of fascist repression, appeasement, and deception. Under the pretext of "industrial peace," they are ruthlessly suppressing the struggle of workers for the right to a living and democratic freedoms. However, their cowardly act is nothing more than a deathbed kick of the dying. Wherever there is exploitation and oppression, there comes the inevitable revolutionary struggle of the people; the more the oppressors intensify their repression, the more organized and stronger will become the people's struggle to resist it.

If the South Korean workers are to enjoy a true, self-dependent, and creative life, they must wage resolute struggles to the last against the fascist colonial rule of the U.S. imperialists and their puppets.

With the firm faith that struggle and unity is the only way to survival and victory, the South Korean workers must unite firmly, strengthen the organizational solidarity between regions and sectors, and wage mass solidarity struggles vigorously. Also, peasants, youth, and students should form a powerful, united front with democratic opposition groups, and launch joint struggles for self-dependence, democracy, and reunification more vigorously.

The struggle of the South Korean workers, growing and strengthening daily, showing firm faith in the cause of justice and confidence in victory, is bound to win.

International

The U.S. Imperialists Are the Worst Violators of Human Rights in the World

00000000 *Pyongyang KULLOJA in Korean No 8, Aug 90 pp 91-96*

[Article by An Myong-hyok; not translated]

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