



## Korean railway strike: What is at stake?

On 31 December railway workers returned to work after a three week strike against government plans to set up a subsidiary company to operate a KTX bullet train service in competition with the state run carrier Korail.

This was the longest railway strike in South Korean history. Korail management and the Park Geun-Hye administration cracked down on the strike with full force. Arrest warrants were issued against the Korean Railway Workers Union leaders and almost 8,000 workers had their positions suspended or terminated for their involvement in the strike. On 22 December 6000 riot police raided the Korean Council of Trade Unions headquarters in Seoul. After a siege lasting for 12 hours the police smashed their way through the building and arrested 130 people.

The railway strike ended with an agreement to set up a parliamentary committee. But the fight is not over. The government refuses to drop its plans to set up a subsidiary and Korail refuses to drop disciplinary action and wants to sack 490 workers. Korail is also pursuing a law suit against the union for AU\$8 million.

Government claims that privatisation is not on the cards are difficult to believe. The high speed KTX line between Suseo Gangnam and Pyeongtaek is a major part of Korail's revenue. If Korail drops further into debt this can be a justification for privatisation. Private railways in the UK, Japan and Australia demonstrate that privatisation leads to the degrading of public assets. The government knows that privatisation is unpopular so they are cutting Korail's revenue and attempting to smash the militant KRWU.

The KRWU is a union with a proud heritage of struggle. If the government is able to destroy the KRWU it will be possible to force down wages and conditions across the board.

The KRWU and the KCTU are major centres of working class struggle in the Asia Pacific region. This attack damages the organised strength of all workers. We need to stand up and fight together, we have a world to win!

**단결-투쟁 !**

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