



defend ssangyong workers

On 2 September 2009 the AAWL General Meeting was organised in the form of a conference call over the Internet to Korea. The Korean participants were Kim Bong-Min of the Ssangyong branch of the Korean Metal Workers Union (KMWU), with translation and comments from Hye-Won Chong from the KMWU International Department and Reverend Jang & Reverend Jones from APWSL Korea.

KMWU: The company & the State have not been honouring the agreement reached to end the occupation. The company is not recognising the Union. It is blocking workers from entering the union office in the factory and also prevents union activists from entering the plant at all. The company is trying to get the workers to withdraw from the KMWU. It now has a captive audience in the factory.

AAWL: Do you think that the company will be successful in getting workers to withdraw from the Union?

KMWU: The situation looks very bad. In a normal situation, there would be the possibility of resisting the company's efforts, but it is not possible to conduct union activities there at the moment.

AAWL: How many jobs have been lost in the factory now?

KMWU: About 2,200.

AAWL: Have conditions deteriorated in the factory? Are there longer hours or pay cuts?

KMWU: Working conditions have degraded seriously. The remaining workers have to cover for the 2,200 dismissed workers and the pace of work has therefore increased. As well, management control has increased. Workers now have trouble even being allowed to go to the bathroom.

AAWL: What is happening to the unionists in prison?

KMWU: Arrested officers of the Ssangyong KMWU branch have been put in solitary confinement. Many unionists have been questioned under duress. One tried to commit suicide after being forced to make a false confession. Fortunately, he was not successful and is now recovering.

AAWL: What is the situation of the families of the jailed unionists?

KMWU: It's not just the families of those arrested, but the families of all the workers who were on strike. They are getting a lot of help from the local community, but they are still suffering. The children have been harassed severely at school for their parents' actions.

AAWL: We have heard that the company & the State are suing the Union. What is the latest news on that?

KMWU: The company is using a massive lawsuit to claim all their losses from the Union. They are also harassing union members to give up their jobs by including them in the lawsuit but promising to drop it if they take early retirement.

AAWL: Is the situation at Ssangyong affecting the rest of the KMWU?

KMWU: The workers at other plants are under pressure as well, but not as much as at Ssangyong.

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Everyone is aware that the situation is important for them all.

AAWL: What sort of solidarity is being received from others in Korea?

KMWU: In the beginning of the struggle, we all tried to stick together, to have everybody survive together. Just because the economy is in a difficult situation, that doesn't mean the needs of people should be ignored. A lot of groups are giving solidarity.

Lawyers for a Democratic Society are giving legal help. Many ordinary Koreans are signing a petition to the Government for the release of the prisoners. There is also a collection being made for money to support the workers.

AAWL: What solidarity do you need from unions overseas (eg: Australia)?

KMWU: This is a good time to reiterate our strong thanks for the solidarity shown by Australian unions.

We would hope for continued solidarity through forceful questions to the Government about the release of prisoners and the recognition of the Union.

APWSL: The Government wants to break the Union. There is an election being organised to attempt to withdraw from the KMWU. This is a difficult situation, with many workers still injured in hospital.

The conditions of the workers in the Ssangyong factory are not good. The management have thrown out all the seating and the workers now cannot sit down or rest.

AAWL: What is the level of support from other Korean unions?

KMWU: Solidarity is not as high as it was during the strike. When the occupation was occurring, the KMWU went on sympathy strikes and held demonstrations. Now, many workers in Korea think the struggle is over.

We are trying to spread the awareness that, though the occupation is over, the struggle is not.

AAWL: What is the position of the KCTU leadership concerning the dispute?

KMWU: The KCTU is very concerned about the implications of the situation. If the company can intimidate the workers to withdraw from the KMWU and thus the KCTU, there will be a ripple effect. All the employers are eager for the Ssangyong company to succeed.

AAWL: Thank you, Kim Bong-Min.

KMWU: We also thank you. Workers' solidarity has to cross international borders. For workers to win the space to survive, it can only come through struggle. We hope to build the struggle against oppression and for workers' rights.

More information:

Korean Metal Workers Union:
metal.nodong.org

Korean Confederation of Trade Unions:
kctu.org

International Metalworkers Federation:
imfmetal.org

Australian Manufacturing Workers Union:
amwu.org.au



Ssangyong Solidarity Rally Melbourne, 11 August

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international industrial action & solidarity

Latin America Solidarity Conference 09
Trades Hall Melbourne - 29 August 2009

Workshop: Trade Union struggles in Latin America
Presentation by Manrico Moro for AAWL

Winning disputes

The ability of capital to move the site of production makes it very hard for workers to win disputes for jobs, wages or conditions.

Winning against internationally mobile and internationally coordinated capital requires workers to coordinate their actions internationally.

Two important elements are required: internationalist consciousness and international coordinating structures.

International coordination of workers struggle

International coordinating structures are of two types: unions and labour movement NGOs.

International unions include the ITUC & WFTU and the Global Union Federations (BWI, EI, ICEM, IFJ, IMF, ITF, ITGLWF, IUF, PSI).

Unfortunately international union structures are deeply compromised by the presence of some affiliates that are not genuine. This makes international coordination difficult.

Labour movement NGOs are dependant on funders - their focus, level of activity and direction can be changed by changes in funding.

Many labour movement NGOs have members who have poor knowledge of the genuine unions present in their area of activity and little connection with them.

Achieving effective coordination of international industrial action and solidarity today may require the combined resources and potential of genuine unions and genuine labour movement organisations.

Developing a global labour movement charter

The first step in developing international coordination is the achievement of some agreement on why we are organising together, and what kind of campaigns we will organise internationally.

In AAWL we have begun a process of discussion towards a global labour movement charter, and we have published some proposals based on discussions with our solidarity partners.

Of course we don't need not wait for an agreed global labour movement charter to begin coordinating international industrial action and solidarity.

Target companies

"Target companies" are defined as companies with five important characteristics:

1. They are strategic in the global industrial process.
2. They are large transnational corporations.
3. They have a history of union-busting activities.
4. There are sizeable genuine unions already present inside these companies.
5. They are already the target of campaigns for workers' rights.

We have identified four target companies so far: Posco, Toyota, Unilever and Nestle.

We would like to discuss improving the coordination of international industrial action and solidarity focused on target companies, and we would like to discuss with comrades the possibility of identifying additional target companies.

Industry-focused solidarity

When supporting international industrial solidarity we promote the concept of company-focused solidarity upstream and downstream, as well as industry-focused solidarity.

Upstream and downstream solidarity focuses on the company's own production process: Upstream we find deliveries of raw material, parts, and energy supplies; downstream products that are shipped to distribution and retail companies. In many cases upstream and downstream solidarity puts the focus on workers in the same company, but in a different country.

Industry solidarity means focusing on workers in the same industry and in similar companies. Workers in similar companies will benefit from industry solidarity because they have a direct interest in the dispute. If the workers win, better wages and conditions can be demanded as industry standards.



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fight for a global labour movement charter



The right of all workers to organise collectively without being subjected to violence, intimidation or legal harassment

The right to organise unions and take collective action including industrial action and solidarity actions

Secure employment

Health & Safety at work, compensation, rehabilitation

A global living wage, based on purchasing power, as the minimum wage for each industry

Decent work, with appropriate hours of work proposed by workers, paid leave and paid holidays

Full rights for women workers

Indigenous workers' rights & Land Rights

Permanent residence with full employment rights for all refugees and all migrant workers in all countries

No child labour

Education, housing, health and childcare provisions

Social security and adequate welfare benefits

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