



Korean Metal Workers' Union

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Urgent Appeal for Solidarity

Stop suppression of Ssangyong Motor workers' strike! Lift the blockade! Negotiate!

Ssangyong Motor Management Unilaterally Break off Negotiations, Urge to Riot Police, 'If you don't storm the paintshop, Ssangyong Motor management and employees will enter ourselves' It is Urgent for Government to Step up to Play a Peaceful Role!

2 August 2009 Update

Update Synopsis

- In the situation of management and police denying sit-in strikers fresh food (since 16 July) and water to wash wounds or drink (since 20 July) and the management-controlled private security forces and riot police surrounding the sit-in site, Ssangyong Motor court receivers and Korean Metal Workers' Union Ssangyong Motor branch began bargaining on 30 July inside a container box set up inside the plant.
- Throughout the bargaining, management and police continued blocking water and food and medicine from reaching the sit-in strikers, suppressing about three times a day the medical association, human rights groups, political party members, clergy members, family members and union members efforts to get drinking water and medicine through.
(right: family members carrying tubs of water on their heads trying to get through blockade on 1 August)
- While management and police blocked entry of a dozen doctors on 30 July and a dozen more on 31 July, on the tenth day of the raid (30 July), they did permit one doctor and one alternative medicine doctor to enter the plant on 30 July for about 2 hours to clean and stitch up the open wounds of workers on strike, and diagnose a few of the over 200 people requesting medical care including those with untreated injuries accumulated during the management and police raid and a second visit on 31 July. The doctors allowed in were forced to sign a promise of secrecy and cannot reveal to Korean society the true situation inside the plant, and their bags were searched by management with confiscation of various items (management decided to let them take in mainly some antiseptic and other supplies related to disinfecting and stitching up wounds).
- After 3 days of negotiations, **Ssangyong Motor court receivers unilaterally notify—by holding a press conference on 2 August in front of the plant—that negotiations are over and call on police to handle the sit-in strikers.**
- In the same press conference, management urges the riot police to raid the paintshop, issuing the ultimatum: "If you don't storm [the paintshop], the 4,500 managers and employees of Ssangyong Motor will enter [the paintshop] ourselves."
- On 2 August, the electricity is cut off, impeding KMWU Ssangyong Motor Branch ability to communicate with the outside (cellphones, cameras etc).
- Workers inside the plant sit in pitch-black darkness punctuated by police helicopter searchlights.



(Right: with electricity cut off to the plant, the sit-in site is eerily dark)



Situation on 2 August 2009

- **Management unilaterally breaks off negotiations** and notifies Korean Metal Workers' Union of this through a 4:40 am press release and 10:00 am press conference on 2 August 2009
- Even during negotiations, the management and police continued to block water and food
- Management has also set up a container box and black tarp to block line of sight into the plant
- Today they cut off the electricity, further isolating workers from communicating with the outside world



Outside the plant (left):

Ssangyong Motor court receiver LEE, Yoo-il (on far right),

court receiver PARK, Yeong-tae (center)

Planning and Finance Chair CHOI, Sang-jin (far left)

Announce negotiations are over and urge the police to move in or "4,500 members management and employees of Ssangyong Motor will"

Inside the paintshop building (right):

KMWU Ssangyong Motor Branch officers in front of the union flag try to hold a press conference to respond, but because the electricity has been cut off they are having difficulty getting their voice out to the public.



- Management's position: 290 unpaid leave + transfer 100 people to sales, the rest should accept dismissal. Management counts this as a ratio of 4:6 (out of ten workers, 3 are "saved": 6 are "dead") and proposed this ratio in the 1st negotiation and has not backed one inch since
Note: Company's target, the number the company originally reported on 8 May to the Ministry of Labor that needed to be shed was 2,405 workers.

- But from the union perspective, **already 2,646 workers have been dismissed**, not just the 974 persons the company is counting. If we add the **precarious workers** we failed to protect to the **1670 regular workers** who were dismissed through coerced resignation since the dispute began, then over 2000 people have already been shed by the company. Thus, the union has already lost its original "principle of defending all employment (precarious and regular)."

- **Although the union made deep compromises to try to work out a solution through dialogue, such as compromising to levels below those needed to maintain basic livelihood** (six months unpaid leave, hold on welfare, transferring staff to sales and even some outsourcing), management would not move one inch from the original 13 July managerial statement of "saving" 390 workers (390 is the "4" in management-calculated 4:6 ratio) and would not stop clinging to management's original "principle of having the workers accept dismissals" despite already rendering the workers' original "principle of defending all employment" meaningless

- We got the impression in negotiations, that **management's goal was not reducing costs to save the company but a gratuitous "taming labor by enforcing management's original principle on them,"** ie the company was not as strongly interested in bringing the company to normalcy by coming to terms with the union, rather, it wanted the union to wave the white flag of surrender. Possibly the company also felt confident that it could call on the riot police to resolve the strike for it, thereby not feeling great pressure to come to agreement and genuinely negotiate

- As of 3 August, riot police forces increased to 4000 persons and the riot police's "warrant for search and seizure" expires on 3 August. Riot police are now dropping plastic bags of pink chemicals by helicopter. Management has brought 2000 employees with steel pipes etc Tensions run high.

2 August 2009 Electricity cut off ! Paintshop enveloped in darkness with occasional police helicopter searchlights



Sit-in strikers atop paintshop building enveloped in pitch black

Photos : media Chungcheong

Inside people resort to candlelight.



Generally, riot police raids at dawn create the most terror but also are the most dangerous.

Here, because the electricity doesn't work anyway and because the people are already faint from lack of food, water, sleep and medicine, the raid does not need to be at dawn for disorientation but any raid in the dark could be quite dangerous

Already we cannot understand how the riot police and management justify to themselves cutting off the water, including the fire hydrants in the plant in this extremely dangerous situation.



(right) Management's unilateral withdrawal from talks makes family members all the more desperate to deliver drinking water to the loved ones inside.



How can they justify even to their own conscience cutting off the lights (electricity) to make this an even more dangerous raid when they know already how dangerous it is?

We believe they are putting our union members lives in danger.



Police are now dropping reddish pink chemicals from helicopters.

Police forces increased to 4000 persons.



Management-organized employees wielding steel pipes await the signal

= 1200 managerial employees + 800 production employees
Organized by management to be there for the raid



Detailed update by day:

Situation on 29 July 2009

- 1) (morning) Korea's 4 Opposition Parties, the "Association of physicians for humanitarianism" and "Lawyers for a Democratic Society" hold a joint press conference



- reminding the government that impeding emergency medical treatment is unlawful,
- that the cutting off of water to fire hydrants inside the plant is dangerous and unlawful,
- that current usage of taser guns and tear gas (chemicalized for chemical burns) is unlawful
- that private security forces are not permitted to use physical force in the law, and
- that riot police loaning shields and riot police uniform to private security forces is unlawful and point out that joint operation carried out by state (police) and non-State forces (management controlled private security forces) is wrongful
- as well as other due process issues and humanitarian issues relating to the handling of the sit-in strike.
- After the press conference, in a meeting between National Police Agency representative and member of Parliament, NPA representative changed the police position of the blockade on food, water and medical supplies to, "we tried but the management refused so we haven't been able to take measures regarding humanitarian dimensions"; when member of parliament LEE Jeong-hee pointed out that it was written on the police instruction card that police should block water and food from entering the plant, the NPA representative gave ambivalent answers. When member of parliament YOO, Won-il loaded up drinking water on a truck and requested police escort into the plant, police replied they could not be responsible for gaining the water/his entry into the plant.

- 2) (afternoon) Korean Confederation of Trade Unions hold a rally in Pyeongtaek in support of striking Ssangyong Motor workers



Rally participants carry bottles of drinking water in hopes of getting water to the KMWU Ssangyong Motor Branch union members

Wind from low-altitude flying police helicopters is so strong it flattens rally banners and lift up rocks and debris



Water from water cannons is sprayed on rally participants to deflect their attempts to deliver drinking water to the workers on strike (Water cannon spray also includes fluorescent paint marker so police can track down rally participants later)



Not fire, but a yellow-colored tear gas concentrate is used on rally participants. Here a rally participant helps another rinse off the tear gas concentrate (right).
(below) Police moving in to arrest participants.



Police begin tear gassing and arresting people. Not only do they arrest rally participants suspected of trying to convey water to sit-in strikers at Ssangyong, but they even arrest a reporter covering the rally



Right:
file photo
from arrests
at 25 July
rally



Police land anti-terrorist forces SWAT team MI-172 helicopter (made in Russia, can seat 28 persons) inside the plant next to the TRE factory (which is next to the paintshop building), but person seated inside discussing something with police is wearing a Ssangyong Motor manager uniform



Meanwhile Catholic priest, Father MUN, Jeong-hyeon points out that people can survive some time without food but that only a few days without water can kill people during mass outside the plant.

Representatives from Buddhist, Won Buddhist, Protestant, Catholic faith communities call on management and police to stop blocking food, water and medical care.



Mayor of Pyeongtaek City and leaders of Pyeongtaek City civil society also hold press conference to say that they do not support a violent end to the strike and urge negotiations toward a peaceful resolution (left)



(photo on right) Part of the psychological assault on the sit-in strikers, Management hangs a banner inside the factory facing the paintshop, to tell the isolated union members inside in large yellow letters: "Even the Korean Confederation of Trade Unions has also abandoned you"

Situation on 30 July

- In the last scheduled negotiations, scheduled for 25 July, parliamentary mediators and the union showed up but the management did not.
- However, after much effort, management agrees to come to the negotiating table on 30 July



Finally the "peace zone" the union has been requesting for talks is made. A container box is set up inside the factory between the paintshop building (where the sit-in strikers are) and the headquarters building

It has taken 70 days of strike and there has been no fresh food and water and medical supplies for the sit-in strikers since the police raid began on 20 July. In these circumstances, KMWU Ssangyong Motor Branch chair HAN, Sang-gyun and bargaining representatives emerge from the paintshop with a tragic expression on his face and pen in hand (left)

(below left) KMWU Ssangyong Motor Branch chair and Ssangyong Motor court receiver PARK, Yeong-tae meet



(Above right) Negotiations begin. At right side of table is Court Receiver PARK, Yeong-tae

- Outside, family members ask management to show their genuine effort to resolve through negotiation by allowing basic human necessities (water, food etc) to reach the sit-in participants, but efforts to get drinking water through the management and police barricade fail

Photo below: Academics and intellectuals stand in front of the factory gates and call on management to let humanitarian aid through but their calls fall on deaf ears



- But one doctor and one alternative medicine doctor are allowed inside the plant for 2 hours (though the company blocks entry of 13 other doctors and nurses): 2nd exception to urgent medical care blockade (first exception was on 22 July to allow two doctors inside to perform urgent surgery on union member with taser-gun injury)

(left) sewing together the ear of the union member whose ear was grazed by a flying bolt fired at him by management-controlled private security contractors (outcome of case that was reported in the last update).

(right photo) sewing shut an open wound on another union member's hand also caused by a bolt aimed at the union member by management-controlled private security forces



Even though negotiations are going on, riot police carry out practice raid exercises nearby (in the photo, they are practicing water cannon shooting)



Situation on 31 July

- Negotiations continue but management and police block efforts to get water through to the Ssangyong Motor workers on strike



(left) Management sets up a tall container box (grey) at front gate, puts barbed wire on top of the container box and hangs dark tarp.

We can no longer see what is happening in the factory ; line of sight is obscured

(in front of the gates there is a pile of drinking water that failed to get into the factory)

Among a dozen doctors, nurses and medical staff, three are let in for a period of 2 hours to deal with urgent injuries (3rd exception to urgent medical care blockade)

- Member of Parliament HONG, Hui-deok obtains police notes planning out the raid: 'management at the fore, police equipped with walkie-talkies follow in twos. Or set the time to a dawn raid at 5 am, use searchlights and drop forces from the sky.' 'Use BTX searchlight helicopters at 11 pm the night before, 1 am, 2:30 am ...' Member of Parliament HONG asks why are police planning out a raid of the paintshop while negotiations are ongoing

Situation on 1 August

- Negotiations continue but still management and police will not allow water, food through and spreads distorting information
- Women try to carry water in tubs on their heads but are blocked



- Also management-controlled private security forces amass inside the plant and in front of the plant



Photos: Media Chungcheong

URGENT REQUEST FOR ACTION : WHAT YOU CAN DO

- Send protest letters to President LEE, Myung Bak through your local South Korean embassy (please cc Korean Metal Workers' Union and e-mail us a copy)
- Organize a protest in front of your local South Korean embassy or delegation visit (Please take photos and e-mail them to KMWU)
- People have also inquired if it possible to send solidarity funds and messages to the striking Ssangyong Motor workers and their families. *We welcome both!*
If you make a collection in your shopfloor or at your hometown, please contact Korean Metal Workers' Union for bank account information for wiring and send a solidarity message with the contribution ([inter@metal<dot>nodong<dot>org](mailto:inter@metal.nodong.org)) .