

KPTU EDUCATION WORKERS SOLIDARITY DIVISION: PRECARIOUS EDUCATION SUPPORT WORKERS ORGANIZING

I. KPTU Education Workers Solidarity Division

■ Overview

- Membership: roughly 20,000
- Organization: Central office and 14 regional branches in central areas around the country
- Carried out first general strike on November 9, 2012 (roughly 16,000 workers participated), followed by a second and third strike last year.

II. Precarious Education Workers in South Korea: Statistics and Conditions

■ Precarious Education Workforce

- 150,000 education support workers employed by individual schools (referred to as ‘school precarious workers’ in Korea) + 160,000 precariously-employed instructors (afterschool, art, music, English immersion, etc.) + 50,000 temporarily-employed (precarious) teachers (substitute teachers, currently not organized by KPTU EdSol) + indirectly-employed (outsourced) workers (security, janitorial, etc.) = roughly 500,000 in total.
 - 400,000 regularly-employed instructors + 60,000 administrators with the legal status of civil servant
 - Precarious education workers = roughly close to half of the school workforce
 - Government statistics currently claim 360,000 precariously-employed workers in the public sector. In fact, the number is greater than this in the public education system alone.

■ School Support Occupational Diversity

- Including those with only a small number of workers, some 80 occupations
 - Lunchroom workers (nutritionists, cooks, cook assistants) equal roughly 50% of the total
 - Other main job categories include administrative assistant, teaching assistant, systems manager, librarian, after-school instructor, etc.

■ Continued Increase in Number of Education Support Workers

	2008	2009	2010	2011	2012
education support workers employed by	88,689	96,937	118,052	130,456	152,609

individual schools					
administrators (municipal public servants)	63,905	61,546	62,385	62,616	63,000

- Over the last eight years the number of education support workers employed by individual schools has increased from 88,689 in 2008 to 152,609 in 2012. This represents an increase of 63,920 workers or 72% percent.

■ **Severe Job Insecurity**

- Roughly 10,000 education support face non-renewal of their annual contracts and are thus laid off every year. (According to government reports, 6,475 contracts were terminated in February 2013).

■ **Low Wages, Severe Wage Discrimination**

- The majority of education support workers receive a monthly salary of roughly 1 million KRW (roughly USD 1,000).

- This is only roughly 80% of what a non-skilled production worker in a small (subcontracting) factory receives in South Korea

- Education support workers receive no pay increase for years of experience/increase in skill level. This means that the gap between their wages and the wages of regularly-employed school employees increases continuously over time.

- Education support workers make roughly 70% of what regularly-employed workers make when they first start working. After 10 years on the job the proportion falls to less than 50%)

- An education support worker in his/her 10th year of work makes the same amount as someone in the same occupation in his/her first year.

■ **Current Debate on Designation of Employer**

- Currently, education support workers sign contracts with the principals of individual schools

- In reality, however, employment-related issues and working conditions are decided by the National Ministry of Education or municipal Offices of Education. For this reason, the courts, the Ministry of Employment and Labor and the Labor Relations Commission have all ruled that the national government or related municipal government should be considered education support workers' real employer.

- Some municipalities are enacting ordinances designating the municipal government as the employer.

- Until recently, the national and municipal governments had refused unions' request for collective bargaining (made May 2012) based on the assertion that they were not education support workers' employers. After court decisions finding otherwise in early 2013 and a successful national protest on June 22, however, bargaining has begun in all 17 school

districts, as well as with the Ministry of Education.

- Collective bargaining agreements have been signed with the Seoul, Gangwon Province, Northern Jeolla Province and Southern Jeolla Province). Workers in these areas now sign contracts with education authorities, rather than individual schools giving them greater employment security. Their legal status, however, is still as precarious workers, and continued refusal on the part of the government to allocate funds means that their working conditions have not improved.

■ **Other Characteristics**

- Roughly 95% of education support workers are women.
- Working conditions (number of annual workdays, work hours, etc.) vary across occupations.

III. Unions and Membership

■ **Other Unions**

- In addition to the KPTU Education Workers Solidarity Division (KPTU EdSol), the Korean Women's Trade Union (KWTU), Korean School Precarious Workers Union (no official English name) and local general unions are also organizing education support workers. The total union membership of all unions combined is roughly 50,000. (This makes for a union density of roughly 25% when including indirectly-employed (outsourced) workers, 30% when referring only to education support workers on employment contracts signed with individual school principals.)

- KPTU EdSol, KWTU and the Korean School Precarious Workers Union have formed the National School Precarious Workers Alliance (no official English name) to carry out joint struggle and collective bargaining.

- * Under South Korean labor law, the formation of multiple unions in the same workplace is permitted, but the unions must go through bargaining channel unification procedures.

IV. Main Challenges/Tasks for 2013

■ **Main Demands**

- Recognition as members of/actors in the education community
- Confirmation of status of government (municipal governments) as employer and direct employment
- Reform of wage structure (introduction of a pay scale, wage increase for years of experience)
- Rectification of discrimination and improvement in conditions
- Job security

- Conclusion of collective bargaining agreements
- Enactment of a law (act on public employees in the education sector) and ordinances (direct employment by superintendents of education) to ensure job security and improvement in conditions

■ **Main Struggle (Campaign) Plan**

- Successful national protest held in June 22
- Sit-in protest at government complex building in Gwanghwamun
- KPTU-EdSol Pre strike rallies, October 31 to November 2.
- KPTU-EdSol Full membership strike, November 15.
- Education Support Workers general strike (KPTU-EdSol and other unions), End of November