# South Korean unions prepare sell-out of striking truck drivers

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Thousands of truck drivers in South Korea remain on strike this week. The drivers increasingly face government threats as well as being deliberately isolated by their trade union from other sections of workers facing worsening pay and conditions.

Drivers belonging to the Cargo Truckers Solidarity (CTS) union are calling for the expansion of the Safe Trucking Freight Rates System before it expires at the end of the year to ensure a minimum wage amid rising fuel costs and inflation. The drivers, who began their walk-out on November 24, hope the system ends the pressure to drive dangerously to increase deliveries in order to make ends meet.

The right-wing government of President Yoon Suk-yeol, however, has denounced the drivers as criminals while preparing to issue back-to-work orders. Yoon reportedly told a meeting of his cabinet ministers on Sunday to "prepare to immediately issue an administrative order for industries, such as oil and steel, that are feared to incur additional damage," and branded the strike as a "serious threat to the rule of law."

The administration issued a similar order on November 29 for some 2,500 cement truck drivers, utilizing the anti-democratic Trucking Transport Business Act that allows the government to order drivers back to work if the national economy is at risk. It was the first time such an order had been issued under the law since it went into effect in 2004. As a result, cement shipments have risen to 84 percent of the average.

The Yoon government is undoubtedly under pressure to put an end to the strike, not just from big business at home, but internationally. The strike in the world's tenth largest economy has had a significant impact on imports and exports, with the movement of shipping containers in and out of the country's 12 major ports curtailed. As of Monday, the movement of containers at the ports was just 54 percent of the average.

With the preparation of additional back-to-work orders, Seoul is planning to step up its repression of the strikers and the working class as a whole. Officials in the presidential office told the Yonhap News Agency on Monday that Yoon had claimed the strike was "similar to the North Korean nuclear threat." In other words, the government considers workers who strike in defence of their working conditions and social rights as national security threats, paving the way for mass arrests under South Korea's draconian National Security Act.

The 1948 law made socialism and opposition to the South Korean government in general illegal and was used to crush opponents of the Syngman Rhee puppet government installed by the United States. Under successive dictatorships, the law was used to arrest and execute political opponents and continues to be used today.

Workers have demonstrated they are willing to fight for their interests. Numerous sections of the working class have either gone on strike in recent months or voted to strike. This includes shipbuilding workers, healthcare workers, railway workers, bus drivers, airport workers, and education workers.

However, the unions have strangled and limited workers' struggles to either brief walkouts to let off steam or shut them down through sell-out agreements with the companies and the government. This has left the striking truck drivers isolated from other sections of the working class, despite the empty claims of support from the so-called "militant" Korean Confederation of Trade Unions (KCTU).

The response of the trade unions to the increased

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threats of repression demonstrates that they will not wage any genuine defence of workers. A planned strike by railway workers last Friday was called off at the last minute while a strike by subway workers in Seoul was shut down after only one day last Wednesday. The truckers, railway and metro workers all belong to the Korean Public Service and Transport Workers' Union (KPTU), which itself is affiliated to the KCTU.

Yesterday the CTS filed a lawsuit at the Seoul Administrative Court against the Ministry of Land, Infrastructure, and Transport on behalf of a cement truck driver who received a back-to-work order. Such actions are designed to encourage illusions in the courts, while blocking a genuine campaign against such repression by mobilizing other sections of workers and subordinating any struggle to the opposition Democratic Party of Korea.

To this end, the KCTU held a demonstration on Saturday near the National Assembly to denounce the Yoon government, calling on workers to "Judge the Yoon Suk-yeol administration," and thus implicitly turn to the Democrats for support. Rallies such as these, including the additional demonstrations being held around the country today, are used to burnish the unions' phony militant image to more easily enforce a sell-out deal being worked out behind the scenes.

Yang Gyeong-su, the head of the KCTU, told the rally, "The Yoon administration and Yoon's People Power Party regard the KCTU as an eyesore, and they are pouring out all sorts of hateful remarks that are hard to believe were made by ministers and lawmakers." He continued: "What must be dissolved is the PPP, the vestige of longstanding evils. We must judge the Yoon Suk-yeol administration, which is driving people to death. Let's open up a new world through our struggle."

This is a conscious obfuscation of the real political issues with moralistic appeals to more "respectable" capitalist politicians—that is, the Democrats—with whom the KCTU and CTS hope they can strike a bargain.

Workers must oppose any attempt by CTS and the KCTU to shut down the truckers' strike. Drivers should take the conduct of the strike out of the hands of the unions by forming independent rank-and-file committees and reach out to all sections of the working class on the basis of a socialist perspective. This includes workers in other countries who face the similar assaults under capitalism on their own working and living conditions.

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