

South Korea car workers strike ends after vicious repression

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The 77 day stand-off between workers at the Ssangyong Motors plant and police ended on 5 August after police special units assaulted the roof, beating union members and arresting 96 of the strikers.

In the aftermath of the strike the union which represented the strikers, the Korean Metal Workers Union negotiated a deal with the company management which allowed 48 per cent of the sacked workers to be placed on unpaid leave or transferred to sales, 52 per cent voluntarily resigned or were transferred to spin off companies.

The deal is supposedly meant that workers who were on unpaid leave would be given priority if more jobs opened up at the company again. But whether this happens is, of course, up to the bosses and we can be certain leading militants will never be allowed to work for the company again.

After the incredible level of militancy and workers' struggle, including a one-day general strike of a South Korean union federation in solidarity with the occupation, the deal struck by the union officials is plainly a defeat for the rank and file.

The union leaders were clearly cowed by the massive level of state repression. Once mass self defense squads and solidarity strike action across the whole working class was posed by the vicious repression, the union leaders beat a retreat rather than taking the struggle forward to the next level.

The violence of the state in the face of the occupation is a lesson to workers everywhere: the capitalist state will stop at nothing to defend the property of the rich. The police are not impartial upholders of justice but in fact brutal thugs who beat and arrest workers that dare to fight back.

One worker fell from the roof during the assault and damaged his back, while photos have emerged on the Korean Trade Union websites of teams of police pinning strikers down and beating them with batons. This is after over 2 months of siege like conditions, tear gassings and psychological warfare using sound trucks and intimidation of strikers families.

The Ssangyong motor plant workers waged a heroic and exemplary struggle for their jobs. Their struggle is rich with lessons:

- ? the importance of solidarity with other sections of workers
- ? spreading the action - one out, all out
- ? militant defense against police repression
- ? rank and file control of the strike negotiations

This struggle has been historic and South Korean workers will not forget it in a hurry. Now we must discuss

the lessons to prepare for the titanic battles ahead.

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