

# 1987 June Uprising, Great Workers Struggle, and 2008 Candlelight Protests



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## Demonstrations and Number of Participants in 1987

<b>Month</b>	<b>Demonstrations</b>	<b>Participants</b>
January	61	3,400
February	53	1,600
March	131	15,000
April	425	119,400
May	856	200,000
June	3,362	1,000,000
July	427	101,000
August	3,037	566,000

# *Kukbon* Organized: May 27, 1987

Oh Choong-il was elected chairperson of the 33-member Executive Committee, and 14 co-presidents were selected from regions and constituencies.

Significantly, no student groups were formally involved, because of the group's fear they would be suspected of harboring Communists if students were included. Two days after the *Kukbon* formed, the "Student Association in the Seoul Area for Withdrawing the Maintenance of the Present Constitution" was formed—and it immediately set up a preparatory committee for demonstrations on June 10. As we will see, students became the key force starting the uprising.

## NCDC Kukbon Founding Members

Type	Number	Percentage of Total
Religious Groups	683	31%
Regional Leaders/Groups	352	16%
Opposition (Chaeya)	343	16%
Politicians	213	10%
Farmers	171	8%
Workers	39	2%
Urban Poor	18	1%
Others	317	15%
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>2191</b>	<b>100%</b>

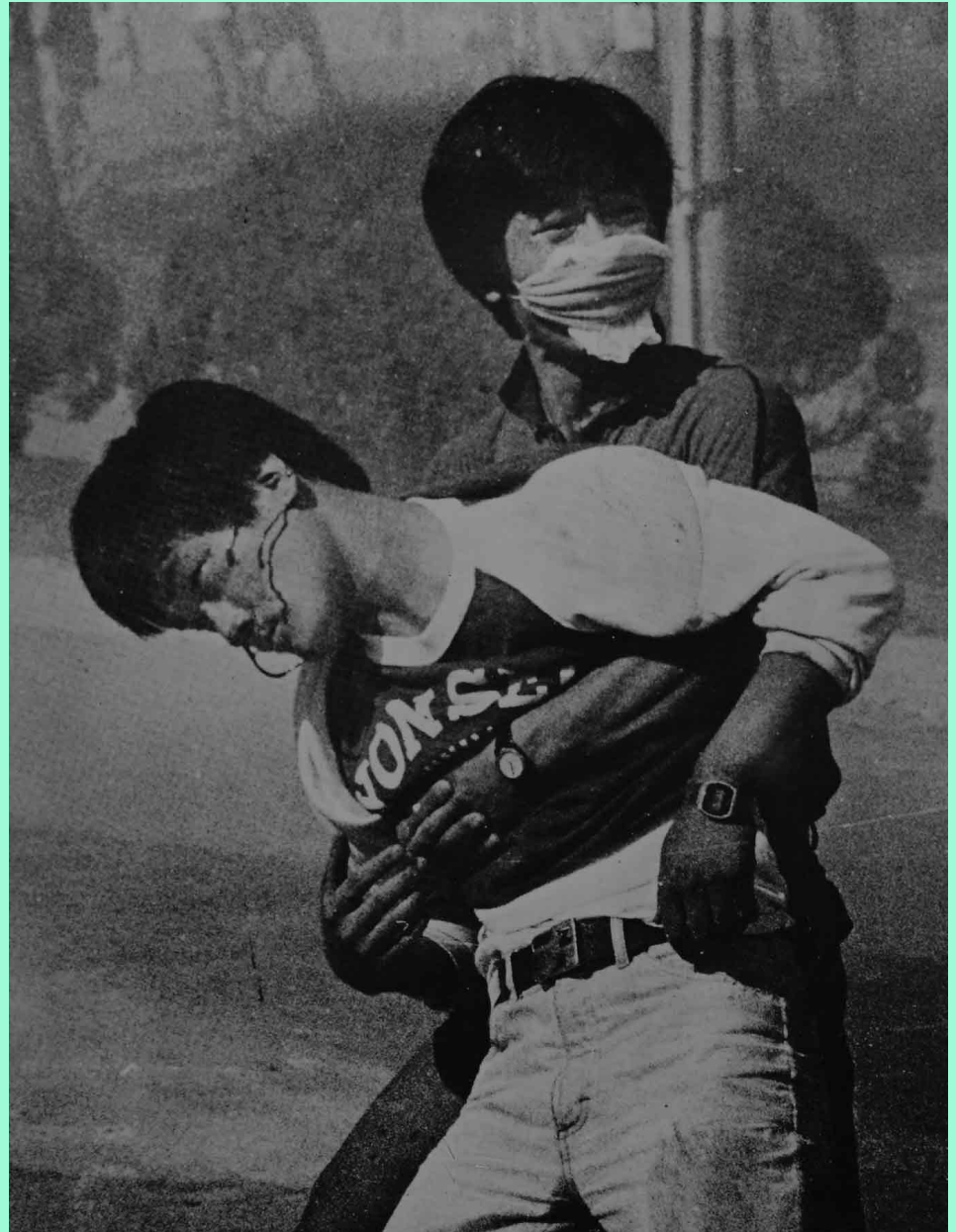
Besides the NCDC's Seoul national headquarters, it had affiliated centers in eight cities, regional offices in counties, and committees in towns and villages—for a total of at least 22 local formations.

Its symbolic central body of 67 representatives encompassed people from all walks of life—Christians, Buddhists, workers, farmers, urban poor, women, youth, artists, writers, professors, lawyers, families of arrested activists group, politicians, regional movements, *Chaeya* (anti-government activists), and the reunification movement.

Altogether, 618 board members included 156 politicians from opposition parties, 65 regional representatives, 10 permanent representatives, and 29 permanent executive commissioners. Eight key advisors kept the group aware of concerns of every constituency. An on-line bank account was set up for donations.

June 9, 1987

Student Lee Han-yol  
Fatally Wounded  
by Tear Gas



From June to September 1987, a nationwide uprising in which “Remember Gwangju!” was one of the most important slogans won democratic reforms and created unions.

## June 10-19, 1987:

Nineteen consecutive days of illegal demonstrations involved millions of people

## July-September:

Largest strikes in South Korean history



“Like volcanoes,  
let us go forward wholeheartedly!”  
—Leaflet, June 1987

Police reported an average of more than 110 demonstrations per day every day during June—some 3362 in all, involving more than a million people. Protest organizers counted more than one million participants on three different days.

There were probably two million people in the streets on June 26, as citizens met the threat of military intervention with ever-larger demonstrations.

President Chun Doo-hwan capitulated to the opposition's demands for direct presidential elections and greater civil rights.

The June 1987 uprising was the high point of the national movement for democracy. People's presence in the streets was so massive and militant, it posed the possibility of a genuine revolution.



# June 10: The Uprising Begins

On the afternoon of “D-Day,” many campus gatherings assembled before joining feeder marches to City Hall. At 6 p.m., or “H-Hour” as students called it, the ruling party’s convention opened in Namsun Hotel, but only 4,000 to 5,000 students had made it to nearby City Hall. Immediately, police attacked, and dozens of students were injured in what was described to me as a “real war.” From their offices in high-rise downtown buildings, citizens observed the protests with curiosity.

Around City Hall, cars incessantly honked horns in support of democracy, and thousands of students continually dispersed and regrouped.

Within two hours, as students held out on the streets, their numbers swelled to 40,000 to 45,000 as feeder marches arrived. Protesters got control of streets around City Hall and Shinsegae department store. Police used huge amounts of CN and CS gas, and people responded with Molotov’s.

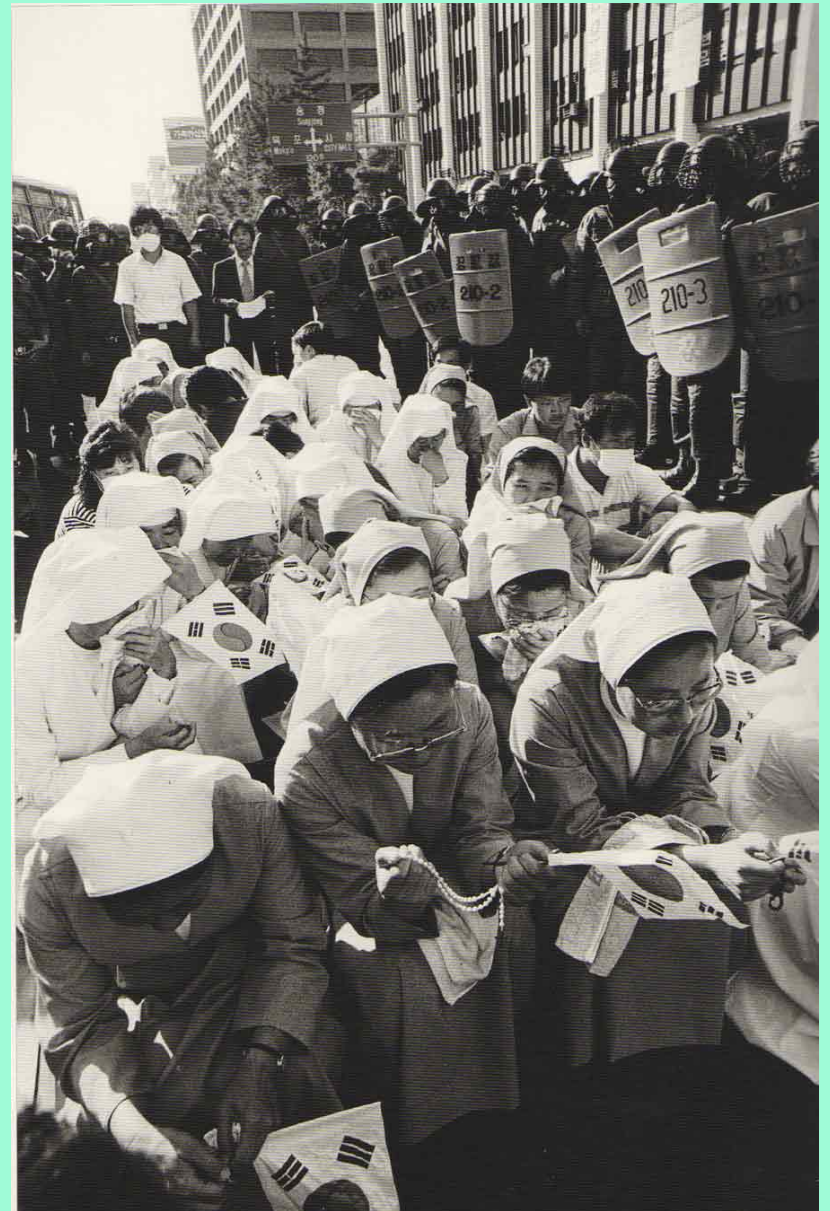
# Students Led the June Uprising

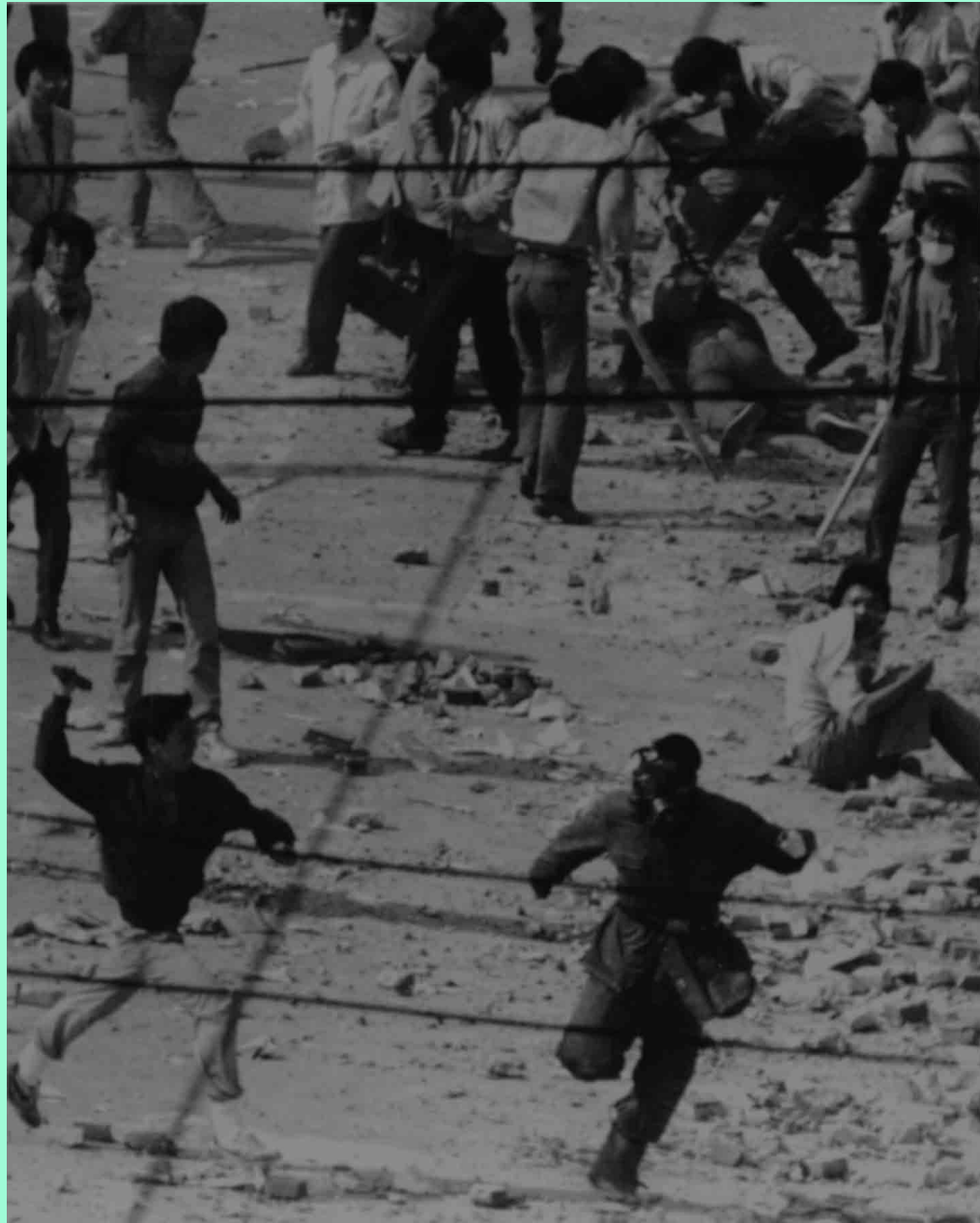






Gwangju  
June 10  
Catholic Center





Beyond everyone's expectations, over 400,000 people in more than 22 cities protested on June 10. The widespread participation of people all over the country meant police were stretched too thin to maintain control everywhere.

In Songnam, the police chief was forced by a throng of people to apologize for his previous harsh words. In Daegu, a busload of captured demonstrators was liberated. In Busan, Daejeon, Gwangju, Jeonju, Chuncheon, Suwon, and other cities, the police blocked the rally sites, but people remained in the streets and refused to be intimidated.

By the end of the day, police had arrested a total of 3,831 people. Altogether more than 700 protesters were seriously injured. Police reported attacks on three police substations (one set on fire) and five vehicles destroyed. A soccer match between Egypt and Korea had to be suspended after tear gas drifted over the field.

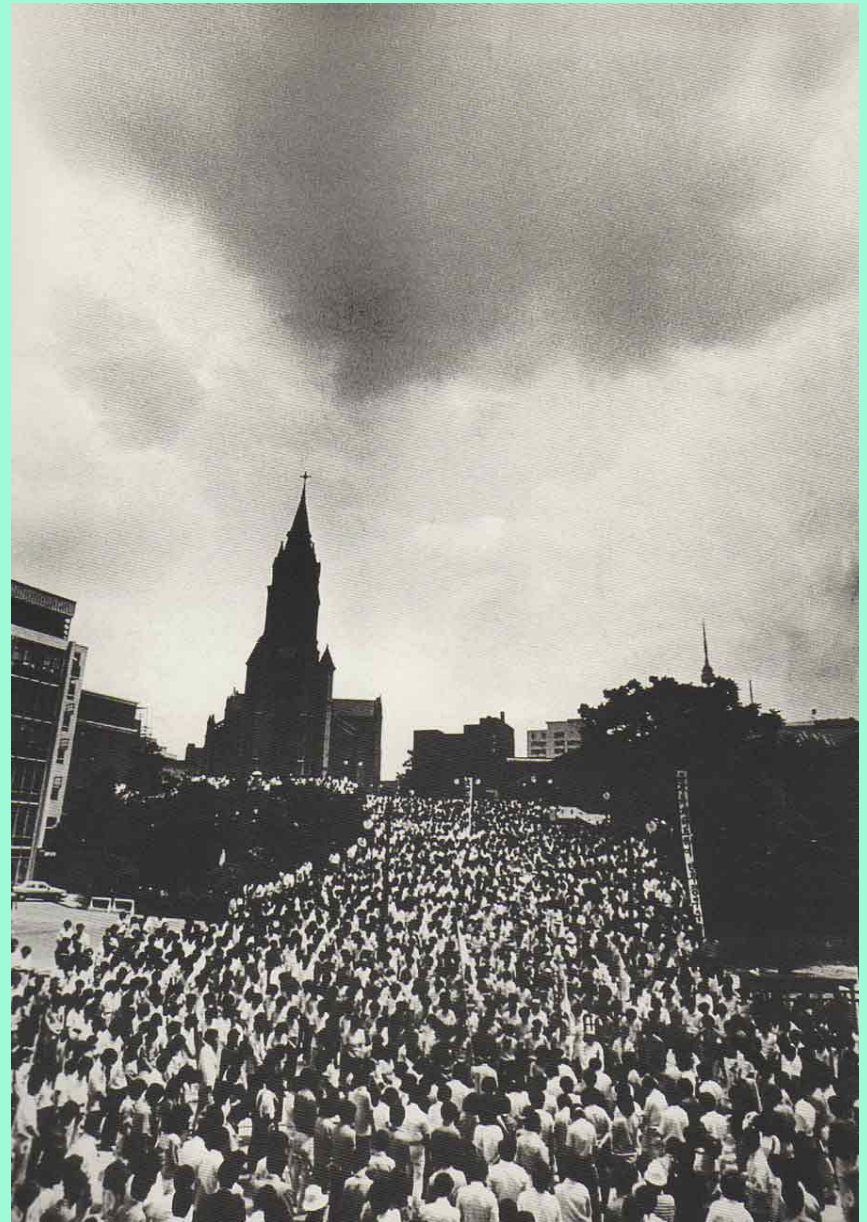
For the first time since 1960,  
police controlled the streets





# Myongdong June 14

On June 10, hundreds of people fleeing from riot squads and tear gas took refuge in Myongdong Cathedral. When the smoke cleared, more than 760 people found themselves inside. Led by students, they spontaneously organized a sit-in, and elected representatives of the various social groups present (workers, urban poor, middle-class, and students). The next day, as 350 demonstrators continued to occupy Myongdong, it became a focal point for the movement, comparable to the occupation of the Sorbonne in Paris in May 1968 or rallies in liberated Gwangju.





# Myongdong Occupation

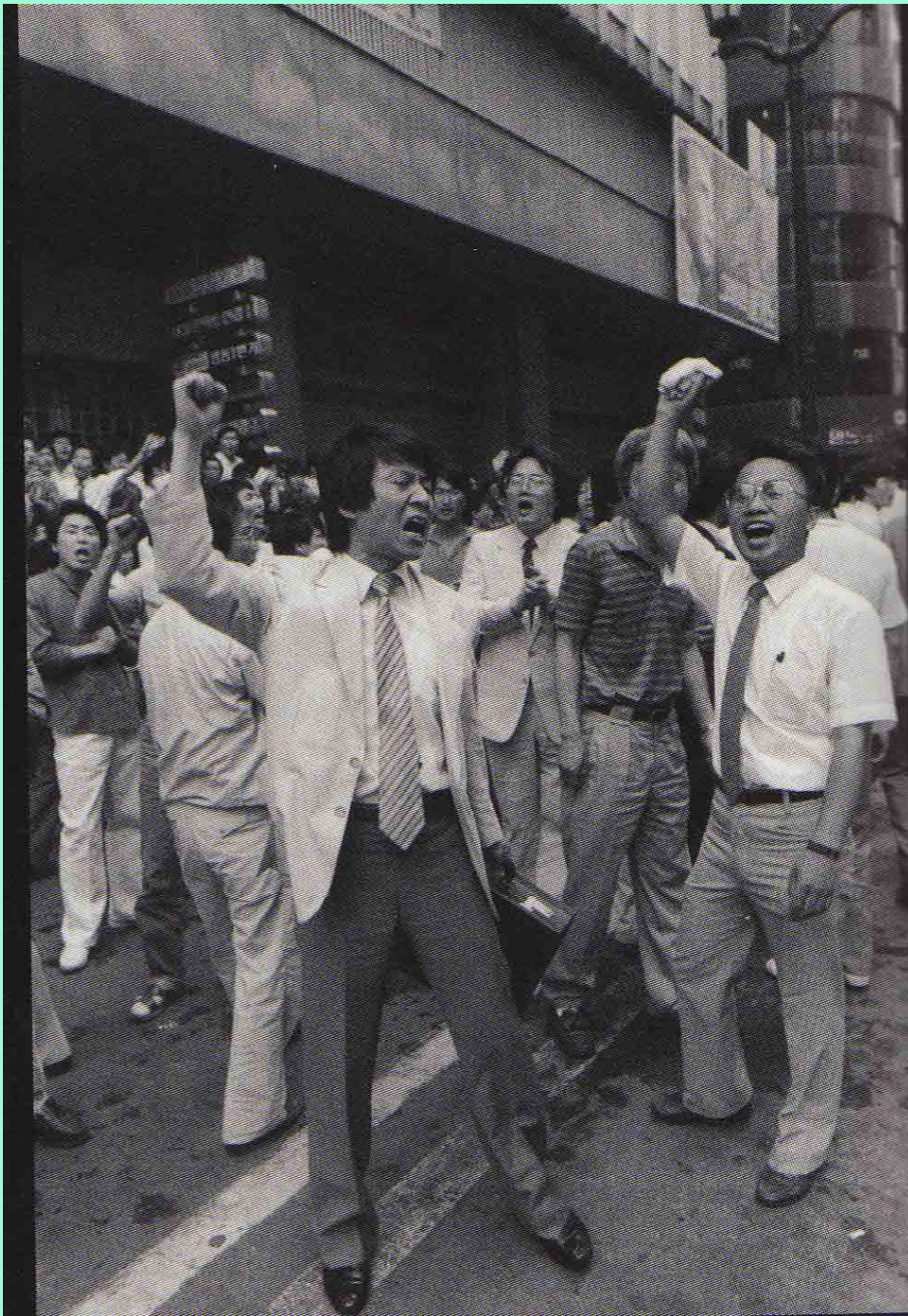
Part energy center, part public forum for strategy development, part dual power, and all public symbol, Myongdong soon attracted wide support.

On June 12, evicted people from the Sangyedong neighborhood (who were living in tents inside the cathedral since their homes had been destroyed) shared food with the Myongdong insurgents; girls from nearby high schools donated their school lunches; and 200 nuns and 100 priests walked through police lines to celebrate the first of their nightly masses. That night 4,000 workers from nearby offices met with students in a public political forum where people traded insights into the possibilities and reasons for action.

On Monday, June 15, as people enjoyed the subversive power of direct democracy in Myongdong, the government promised to let everyone leave peacefully. After prolonged discussion and three votes, the group decided to end their sit-in.

That night, the cathedral was full for Mass. As the rain ended after the service, protesters and worshippers moved outside together, carrying candles—about 10,000 people in all. Young people in the front shoved police out of the way as everyone surged through police lines. Filmed by television, the entire country witnessed the government's failure to evict the protesters from the cathedral.

As they exited, the demonstrators called on all Koreans to rise against the dictatorship. Church Women United called for national protests on June 18.



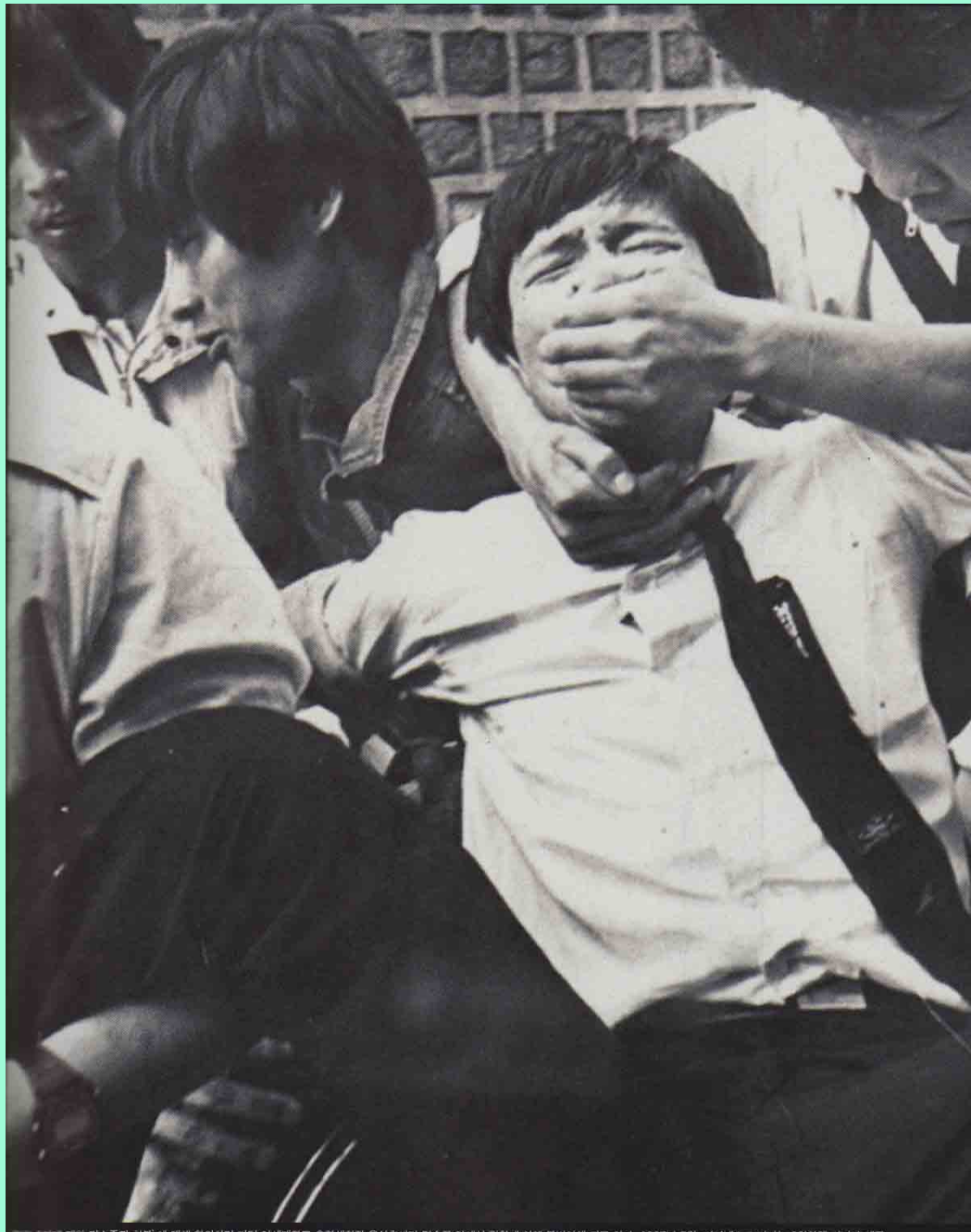
# Necktie Brigade



# Necktie Brigade

Thousands of ordinary office workers whom students dubbed the “necktie brigade” joined the protests. Concentrated in Seoul office buildings near where students were demonstrating, they initially remained aloof.

After a few days of watching the fights between students and police just outside their buildings, they began to join the protests. Whether out of shame or desire for democracy, their entry propelled the movement to new levels beyond what anyone thought was possible.





# June 18

- Although the day had begun peacefully, street battles erupted across the country, as police were ordered to attack the protesters. A turning point was reached that day—no longer could police control the crowds.
- At about 7 p.m., about 300,000 citizens assembled peacefully in Busan. So many people were there that they covered about four kilometers of roadway. As in Seoul, people were able to disarm riot police and burn their protective gear and tear gas guns. At least 12 police substations were attacked, and many police vehicles were burnt, including three buses used for transporting riot police. As the fighting around Busan train station intensified, citizens commandeered 10 trucks. Led by 200 taxis, they drove to City Hall in a procession of thousands. Demonstrations continued throughout the night, and taxi drivers used their fuel to make Molotov's when heavy fighting there broke out. At dawn, cab drivers lined the streets with their cars to protect demonstrators from the police.

# June 18: Chun Prepares the Military

- The street victories won by protesters clearly alarmed Chun. He ordered the Army, Air Force, and Navy to be ready to mobilize, and reviewed plans to implement martial law. Chun sent his figurehead Prime Minister, Lee Han-key, onto the airwaves on the night of June 19. Lee spoke of “extraordinary” means to be employed if demonstrations did not cease.
- Top US officials were plainly worried. On June 18, Reagan sent Chun a letter cautioning him not to use the military. He urged a resumption of negotiations with opposition parties. The next day at 4:30 in the afternoon, only a few hours before troops were scheduled to deploy, Chun suspended the mobilization plan.
- Interviewed in his home by a sympathetic analyst in 1998, Chun maintained that US pressure, evident in Reagan’s letter and in a personal meeting he had with US Ambassador James Lilley on June 19, was the key reason for his cancellation of his order to deploy army units to urban areas. In his meeting with Chun, Lilley warned that martial law might provoke another Gwangju Uprising.



# Police Director-General

The Director-General of the National Police, Kwon Bok-kyung, might be thought to have favored use of the army since his police were outnumbered and often defeated in the streets. He later recalled, “If the army intervened, a bloody incident was expected. It was also plausible that military authorities might decide to support the citizens. In either way, a situation of anarchy seemed unavoidable. I could not find any other way but to depend on the police to the end.”

- Kwan, et al. 1989, p. 115 (기록.해설 金聲翊; 월간조선 1989년 12월호 p 115. 군 3개 사단을 투입하라. 權榮基) as quoted in Kim Yong-cheol, The Kwangju Uprising and Demilitarization of Korean Politics, in Essays, p. 88.

On June 19, 46,000 students from 79 universities mobilized in 225 places, attacking and destroying at least 31 police substations. On June 20, a large contingent of Buddhist monks were prevented from peacefully marching in Seoul, but when they dispersed, thousands of people joined them, chanting “Yankee Go Home!” and “Down with Chun Doo Hwan!” After 80 students took refuge in a market, about 1500 sat together in a spontaneous forum.

In Gwangju, more than 200,000 people went into the streets; at 10 p.m. more than 80,000 remained, and at midnight, there were still at least 20,000. In Jeonju, Daejeon, and Incheon, police were unable to disperse demonstrators, and thousands of people held impromptu street forums to discuss the situation and plan future actions. Thousands protested in Chunju, Daegu, and Incheon.













A fierce debate broke out inside NCDC. Kim Young-sam strongly opposed new demonstrations, arguing that martial law would be declared—and as many insisted—that he would pay with his life. Younger activists were convinced that the movement was powerful enough to defeat even martial law. They succeeded in convincing the group that, unless the government agreed to accept four basic points, a “People’s Peaceful March” should be organized for June 26. The four points were:

- 1. Withdrawal of the April 13 Measure halting constitutional revision.
- 2. Release of all political prisoners of conscience.
- 3. Guarantee of freedoms of assembly, demonstration, and press.
- 4. End to the use of tear gas.



# June 26: Showdown

For the third time during the remarkable June Uprising, a national mobilization brought more than one million people into the streets. In fact, NCDC organizers counted more than twice that number in 34 cities and 4 counties. Across the country, 100,000 riot police blocked rally points, but even the full mobilization of all the regime's repressive powers—with the notable exception of the military—was no match for Korean people's determination to have a democratic system of government.

# Cancel Olympics?

On June 27 and 28, as demonstrations continued, few could guess when and how it would end.

Most people were unaware that on June 27, a letter was hand-carried to Korea from the International Olympic Committee “expressing the IOC’s concern at the civil unrest.”

Pusan

June 27, 1987



# The Junta's June 29 Capitulation

To everyone's surprise, on June 29, Roh Tae-woo, speaking on behalf of the government, issued a sweeping declaration, in which he capitulated to all of the opposition's demands.

Roh announced the ruling party's endorsement of amending the presidential election law to direct elections, freedom of the press, improvement of basic human rights, release of many political prisoners (but not for Communists), restoration of the civil rights of Kim Dae-Jung and others, autonomy for universities, and the introduction of local autonomy—but nothing about the rights of labor.

# Lee Han-yol

On July 5, student Lee Han-yol, in a coma during the entire uprising, died of his injuries. Lee had come to symbolize the virtuous youth who sacrificed for their people. The next day, among the prisoners released was NCDC leader Oh Choong-il. On July 9, more than one million people gathered solemnly for Han-yol's funeral in Seoul. (Some estimates were double that.) In his eulogy, Oh Choong-il compared Lee Han-yol to Jesus for having given his life for his people. Dancer Lee Ae-ju added shamanistic ritual to the ceremony.



More than 1 million people attended  
Lee Han-yol's funeral in Seoul July 5, 1987



He was buried in old Mangwoldong Cemetery in Gwangju.



Gwanghwamun, July 5, 1987











# Gwangju July 9, 1987



# **The Great Workers' Struggle**

Few countries have witnessed the kind of massive outpouring of grievances experienced by Korea in 1987.

The June Uprising won civil liberties and elections, but the daily lives of workers were still miserably dictated by poverty and drudgery. Encouraged by the success of the democracy movement, wildcat strikes broke out in the country's large factories emerged at a dizzying pace and with prolonged intensity.

Built up by decades of frustration and silent suffering, two weeks after the government's acceptance of opposition demands for direct elections, labor unrest erupted throughout the whole country.



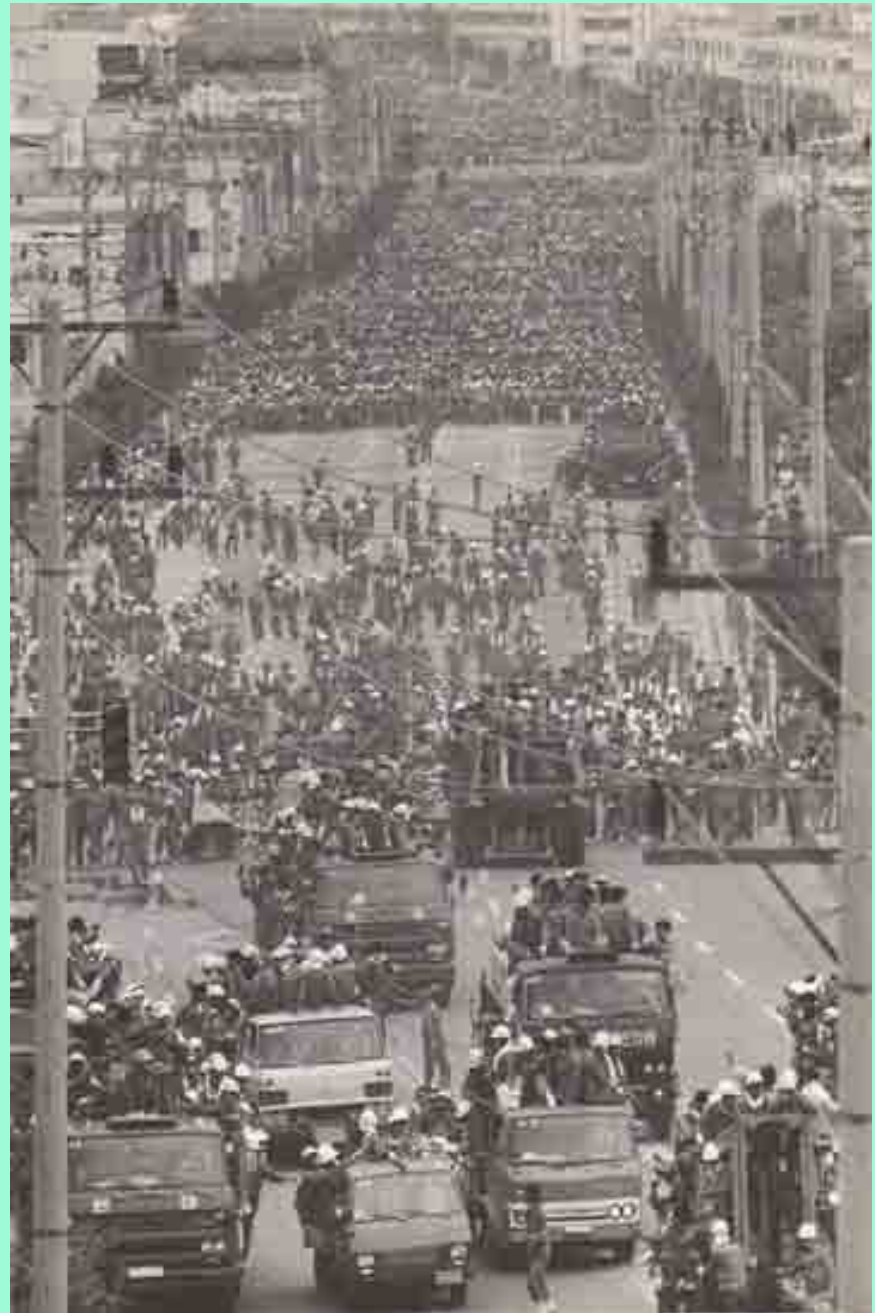
In July and August, more than three million workers in over 3000 workplaces rose up in unison, demanding substantial wage increases, improved working conditions and, most importantly, autonomous trade unions. Without warning and in the absence of any central organization, wildcat work stoppages, street actions, plant closures and marches spontaneously broke out.

In a ten-week period, the number of labor disputes was double the number in the previous ten *years*. Schooled in the streets of June, inspired by the victories of the democratic movement, and protected by its continuing mobilizations, workers claimed their part of the country's expanding liberties.

Their capacity for self-organization in this period is a major indication of the ability of ordinary people to take control of their lives—to articulate their own needs and autonomously take action to make sure they are met.



Ulsan  
1987



- On July 5, the same day Lee Han-yol passed away from his wounds, a small group of Hyundai workers met in an Ulsan disco. The simultaneity of these dates indicates how intimately related the workers uprising and the democracy struggle were—and reveals how close South Korea was to a revolutionary situation in 1987.

Workers organized autonomous unions that would represent their real needs. Within one year, some 4,000 new unions representing 700,000 workers were brought into existence.

In four years, nearly one million people joined unions, as union memberships increased from 1,040,000 in 1986 to 1,980,000 in 1990; in *chaebols*, the unionization rate went from 38.9% in 1986 to 72.9% in 1989. In the same period, the total number of local unions trebled from 2,658 to 7,861.

In effect, the summation of these actions in the Hot Summer of 1987 amounted to a spontaneous wildcat general strike for wage increases, better working conditions, and basic rights of labor.



With police called to duty against the democratization movement in big cities, factories—specifically constructed in marginal areas to isolate workers—found new space for actions previously thought impossible.

Without the overwhelming police presence, factory workers quickly mobilized, conducting an average of 44 actions a day from June 29 to September 15. Of a total of 3,492 disputes recorded by the government in this period, the main concentration was in manufacturing (1802 cases) and transportation (1248 cases). In 342 factories with more than 1,000 workers, 65% experienced struggles.

In August alone, there were 2,577 conflicts recorded. This rapidly expanding “eros effect” peaked on August 28, when 200 new struggles emerged on one day.

# Results

Of 3,343 disputes, 2,448 were about wages.  
Workers clearly won their struggles.

From 1987 to 1993, working hours decreased from 51.9 per week to 47.5 and wages increases averaged 11.6% in 1987, 19.6% in 1988, and 25.3% in 1989.

A literal sea of blood created South Korea's economic "miracle". For years, activists counted "six truckloads of fingers cut off every year." More than 15,000 workers were killed or injured in industrial accidents every year; in 1978 alone, 1397 workers were killed on the job, and 13,013 were totally or partially disabled.

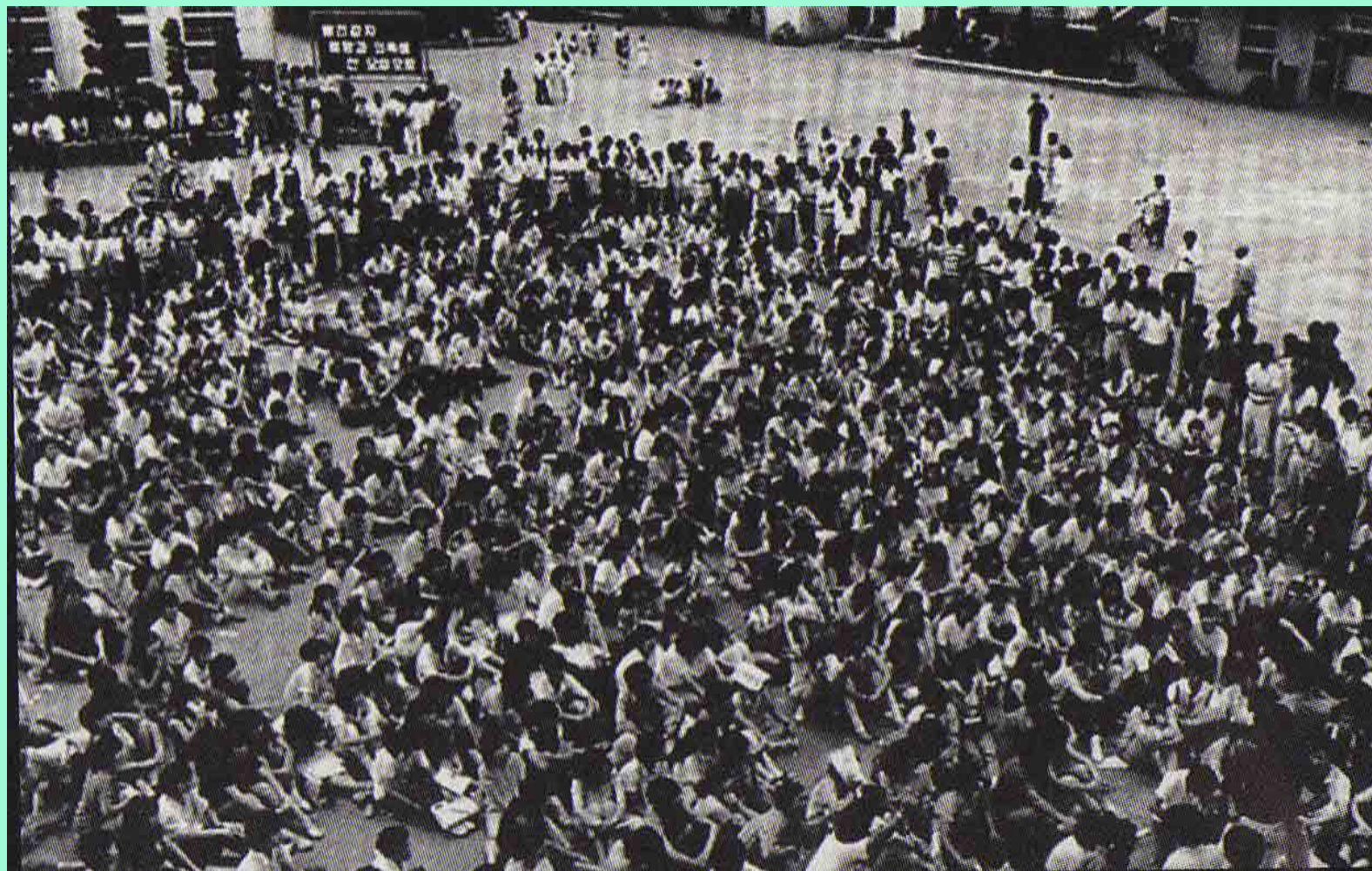
There was an average of four fatalities per day. In 1986, 21,923 workers were physically disabled in accidents. As the workers upsurge brought to the fore long-repressed needs of the class, a National league for Victimized Workers formed on September 27 during a rally. The group noted that under Chun, at least 10,295 workers were killed in workplace accidents and an additional 969,304 were injured.



# Ulsan

- On August 8, the second wave of struggle was signaled 40,000 Hyundai workers who took to the streets. After Lee Sok-gyu, Daewoo shipyard worker, was killed by a tear gas, militancy intensified. In the third week of August, there were 880 strikes and 113 new unions formed. By the end of the month, some 2552 labor struggles had occurred, out of a total of 3749 in 1987—after only 276 in all of 1986.
- On August 8, insurgents organized a Council of Labor Unions in Hyundai, consisting of 12 insurgent unions that demanded negotiations. Chung's response was to lock out six factories on August 17, declaring he would never negotiate with an illegal organization. Workers responded immediately, marching tens of thousands strong downtown and occupying the city for two days. They easily defeated the riot police, who were no match for workers' forklifts, dump trucks, cranes, graders, and steamrollers—to say nothing of their unity. Something like 40,000 workers in gray overalls marched triumphantly downtown. After several hours, the assembly converged on Ulsan Sports Stadium, where 30,000 family members joined.









# Limits

Although workers often overwhelmed the government forces arrayed against them, they never contested political power. Many of their handmade signs read: “Head of the Company, Submit to Negotiations.” This slogan was itself a concession that the company head was in charge, that the paternalism of the executives would be allowed to continue albeit under more humane conditions.

While hundreds of new unions formed and won significant improvements in the lives of their members, theirs was not a movement for revolution.

Even when workers occupied Ulsan, the signs on their banners called for independent trade unions, radical enough in its context, but they asked the mayor to help them achieve this goal.

Like millions of Koreans who accepted Roh Tae-woo’s June 29 declaration as proof of his benign character, Confucian patriarchy militated against the formulation of revolutionary aspirations that broke with the existing system.

# Workers' Culture

Workers' culture developed into a diverse and significant source for class consciousness. Workers now addressed each other using the term, "Nodongcha," while the government continued to use the more antiquated, "Kunrocha."

Newspapers, magazines, night schools, dance, and theater all stimulated new self-confidence and encouraged participation in struggles for better working conditions and improvements in people's standard of living.

Many workers lived in inadequate housing. As available housing was 40% below the number of households, it was estimated that 20% of the urban poor were squatters.

The cultural shift nourished  
a continuing struggle.





RIOT POLICE CONFRONT STRIKING UNION MEMBERS FROM HYUNDAI ENGINE AND MACHINERY CO. AND HYUNDAI HEAVY INDUSTRIES IN ULSAN ON APRIL 1, 1990. (*Yon Hap News Agency*)





STUDENT DEMONSTRATORS IN SEOUL, APRIL 4, 1990. (*Yon Hap News Agency*)





STRIKING WORKERS AT THE HYUNDAI MOTOR CO., MAY 4, 1990. (*Yon Hap News Agency*)





Riot police  
attack students  
May 1990

Along with a revival of May First gatherings, Korean workers began assembling at annual commemoration of Chun Tae-il in November. Tens of thousands of workers gathered on both occasions, giving movement activists an opportunity to exchange experiences and renew friendships, and for various groups to distribute materials and recruit new members.



# November 1991 Seoul



Chun Tae-il remembered



IMF Crisis 1997





# Jobless 1997



Today more than half of all Korean workers are part-time employees with no benefits and low wages.



# Foreign Investors Smile





# Candlelight Protests in 2008



# 2008 South Korea

Recent protests against American beef began with high school and middle-school students.



Beginning on May 2, a new wave of youth protests have swept South Korea.

On May 2, 10,000 people gathered at Cheonggye Stream to protest against the importing of American beef to South Korea



# An anonymous high school student called for the impeachment of Lee MB



The protests quickly led to an on-line petition to impeach newly-inaugurated president Lee Myung-bak. More than one million people signed the petition in the first week.

- Youth protests expanded to include their harsh conditions of compulsory education lasting long into the night, a system that robs young people of their childhoods and free time.
- President Lee Myung-bak has already intensified the severe conditions of everyday life for young people in South Korea
- The families of many youth joined the protests
- Complaints against President Lee include:
  - Making poor people suffer more
  - The huge canal project he wants industry to profit from
  - Giving more privileges to the rich
  - Educational reforms that enhance competition and stress





The struggle against Mad Cow Beef questions neoliberalism. Neoliberalism is the opening of nations' economies to penetration by large corporations and banks in the name of "free markets."

















# June 13













June 10









# June 13 Seoul



















# June 30 Catholics against crackdown





June 30



June 30







<http://cafe.daum.net/candlegirls>





<http://cafe.daum.net/candlegirls>



<http://cafe.daum.net/candlegirls>



