

Building Regional Networks between Labor Unions and Communities in Korea

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This paper examines three case studies to show how labor unions and community organizations, residents, and local governments in Korea built and developed regional networks. Korean labor unions have become aware that they cannot operate in isolation from their communities and have had to involve community organizations in their fights. Each case shows a labor movement's efforts to avoid isolation and broaden union identities and boundaries. These attempts are occurring in many regions, and it is likely that the future will bring greater attention to the building of strategically oriented relationships between labor unions and communities.

Keywords: regional network, labor unions, communities, regional unions, people's house, social movement unionism

Introduction

The idea of the region has been foreign to Korean labor unions for a long period. The weight of the enterprise union has held sway over the labor movement, but with an increase in non-regular workers and a decrease in union membership after the economic crisis in the end of 1990, labor unions have rethought the importance of regions. Recently, the region has become a major focus for union organizing and activity through two strategic developments. The first is the establishment of regional general unions after 2000. Regional general unions organize workers, regardless of their employment status, on a geographical basis. They address livelihood issues such as quality of life in a region as well as workplace issues so that unions can engage in activities across companies.

The second development, which likewise occurred after 2000, is the transformation of some unions from enterprise into industrial unions. Some industrial unions have become aware of the significance of organizing non-regular and non-member workers on a regional basis and connecting the labor movement with community issues.

A survey of union officials from regional councils of the two national centers (the Federation of Korean Trade Unions and the Korean Confederation of Trade Unions) and industrial unions conducted in 2005 by Kim and colleagues found over 80% agreed that the labor movement needed to be supported by regional society. Only a small number of regional councils and industrial unions, however, have been involved in community issues or executed regional projects. Specifically, 28.7 percent of respondents had no experience interacting with “civil society organizations in the region,” 68.6 percent had no experience interacting with “local community organizations,” 41.4 percent had no experience “expressing their opinion about community issues or involving themselves in community issues,” and 66.5 percent had no experience volunteering to clean streets or to help the poor in the region. The majority of union officials thought that the labor movement should develop regional strategies for addressing community issues or forming coalitions with civil society organizations (CSOs) (Kim, Lee, and Jang 2006).

This paper examines three case studies to show how labor unions and community organizations, residents, and local governments in Korea built and developed relationships. The following section looks at the beginning of regional unions and the changes they have undergone. The next section presents my research methods. The third section focuses on how in each of

the three cases a regional network was built between labor unions and community organizations, residents, progressive political parties, and local government. The fourth section compares how two sets of regional relationships, those between labor unions or civil society organizations and local governments and those between labor unions and political parties, were built. The section also discusses the effect activities in each of the three cases have had on worker empowerment and the relationship local residents have with labor unions, civil society organizations, and progressive political parties. The concluding section addresses some theoretical implications that the formation and development of regional networks has for the Korean labor movement and civil society.

The Beginning of Regional Unions and Their Change in the Korean Labor Movement

The 1970s saw the beginning of Korea's first regional unions with the establishment of the Cheonggye Clothes Union. With the revision of the Labor Union Law in 1980, however, regional unions were forced to dissolve themselves or lose legitimacy. The situation changed after the Great Labor Struggles of 1987. The Labor Union Law was revised again, and the article that recognized only enterprise unions as legitimate labor unions was deleted. Regional unions were organized vigorously by workers in small companies including printing workers, shoemakers and leather workers. During 1989 and 1990, about 250 regional unions including industry-wide and occupation-specific unions were established in the regions of Seoul, the area near Seoul, and Busan (Jung 1996). Those unions, including the Cheonggye Clothes Union, which later adopted the name Cheonggye Union, gained legal recognition. Major regional unions included: the Seoul Regional Printing Workers' Union, Seoul Regional Shoemakers' Union, Busan Leather Workers' Union, Seoul Southern Region Metal Workers' Union, Seoul Eastern Region Metal Workers' Union, and Bucheon Regional Metal Workers' Union.

At that time, union activists and the leadership of regional unions held hopes for two aspects of regional unions. First, regional unions were regarded as a union formation that could overcome enterprise union weaknesses. Union activists who were oriented toward building industrial unions expected that regional unions would change the enterprise consciousness of workers and create the conditions for concerted collective bargaining, including formulating common demands and waging struggles for higher wage and

improved labor conditions. In other word, union activists considered regional unions a stepping-stone towards industrial unions (Kang 1992; Association for memorializing Jun Tae-Il 1988).

Second, regional unions were regarded as a union type suited to organizing workers in small companies. Unions increased rapidly in medium scale companies and large companies after 1987, but efforts to organize workers in companies with less than 100 employees were not going well.¹ Two percent of companies with 10 to 29 employees had unions, while 7.7 percent of companies with 30 to 99 employees were unionized, as of January 1989 (Korean Institute of Labor 1989). Organizing workers in small companies under enterprise unionism proved difficult due to the personal relationships between employers and employees (Association for Memorializing Jun Tae-Il 1988, p.19). Employers and employees were connected through kinship or had other personal ties. Moreover, even when workers in small companies were able to establish a labor union, they had difficulties maintaining it because of its limited power with a small membership. Therefore, regional unions were considered a type of union capable of overcoming the difficulties in organizing and maintaining workers in small companies.

The number of regional unions, however, declined to 40 in the mid-1990s (Jung 1996). It was partly the case that during 1989-1991 the Roh Tae Woo government's tough repression of labor unions held back regional union movement growth (Kang 1992). Internal problems, however, led to the decline of regional unions as well (Jung 1996). First, small memberships weakened the power of regional unions. Second, weak finances made

¹ The following table shows the percentage of unions that were established in medium size and large scale companies after 1987.

TABLE 1.
THE PERCENTAGE OF COMPANIES WITH LABOR UNIONS BY COMPANY SIZE
(Unit: Percent)

Company Size	November 1986	January 1989
10 to 29 employees	1.4	2.0
30 to 99 employees	2.5	7.7
100 to 299 employees	11.0	30.6
300 to 499 employees	25.9	59.4
500 to 999 employees	45.9	77.0
More than 1,000 employees	56.1	79.2

SOURCE.—Korean Institute of Labor (1989)

regional unions too poor to rent offices and hire full-time officials. Third, many workplace branches of regional union dissolved due to employer suppression. Fourth, the activities and operations of regional unions differed little from those of enterprise unions. Consequently, Kang (1992) suggested, as one of the ways to revitalize regional union movement, that regional unions should design and execute projects for all of workers working in a region instead of concentrating on activities solely for their members.

We examine the extent to which regional projects carried out in the 1990s by the Seoul Regional Printing Workers' Union and Seoul Southern Region Metal Workers' Union were oriented toward general regional needs or issues related to all workers in the region. The Seoul Regional Printing Workers' Union was engaged in collective bargaining with several major printing companies, establishing and maintaining workplace branches, labor-issue counseling, distributing union bulletins among workers in the region, operating a free job bank, campaigns to improve laws and institutions (e.g., a drive for the extension of the Labor Standards Law to all companies in the region), small club activities such as climbing, soccer, and *Pungmulpae* playing traditional musical instruments (Tak 1999). The Seoul Southern Region Metal Workers' Union recruited and educated members; carried out cultural activities; organized street festivals; distributed union bulletins among workers; performed labor-issue counseling; campaigned for regional compliance with the Labor Standards Law; sought to secure holidays, gain job security, and reduce working hours; and also operated a credit cooperative for members (Kim 1996; Kim 1999). Judging from the activities of the two regional unions, activities such as counseling activities, campaigns to improve laws and institutions, and the realization of regional demands are activities that target all workers in a region. The activities of the two regional unions, however, were not aimed at addressing livelihood issues for workers in the region. Moreover, the two regional unions sought to transform their organizational structures into industry-based labor unions. Since the late 1990s, discussions about building industry-based labor unions gathered steam among union officials and activists. When the Korean Metal Workers' Federation (KMWF), which was an industry-level federation of enterprise unions, became the Korean Metal Workers' Union (KMWU), a national industrial union in 2006, regional metal workers' unions in Seoul and Bucheon regions put their membership into the KMWU.

Regions have again, since 2000, become a major area for union organizing through two strategic moves. The first move was the establishment of regional general unions, which organize workers on a

regional basis regardless of their employment status. They adopted the strategy of organizing an increasing number of non-regular workers across occupations and industries and have tried to connect the labor movement with community-based social movements so that they can combine campaigns to improve working and living spaces (Lee 2012).

The other strategic move was to increase awareness among industrial unions of organizing non-regular and non-member workers on a regional basis and connecting the labor movement with community issues. An example is the Seoul branch of the Korean Healthcare Workers' Union's (KHWU) project to organize non-regular and non-member workers. The Seoul KHWU branch abandoned the strategy of organizing workers on a workplace basis, instead focusing on finding potential activists through a variety of activities. It surveyed workers in about 200 hospitals and clinics located in Eunpyeong-gu, Seoul. It organized mountain climbing clubs, movie viewings, parties, and even hosted a teddy bear making club once a week. It partitioned Eunpyeong-gu into several districts and put full-time union officials in charge of each district where they held parties to meet medical workers. Additionally, the union opened an online café (café.daum.net/h-sokdak) to promote communication with medical workers. The activities produced a visible outcome with medical workers joining and maintaining union membership (Kim and Jung 2013).

Another example of the latter move is a regional project of the Science and Technology Research Union. The union established a committee for regional projects and has been involved in community issues in order to create ties between the union and progressive forces in the region. It opened a summer science class for elementary school students in Yuseong region, where the union's office was located, to heighten its presence in the region and promote exchange between union members and local residents (Kim et al. 2006).

Research Methodology

This paper examines three cases of regional network building between labor unions and communities. These case studies feature a combination of document analysis and interviews conducted between August 2008 and September 2013 with union officials, representatives of CSOs, and the

president of regional party committee.² I conducted interviews with officials of the Seoul General Union three times, in August 2008, September 2010, and March 2013. In March and September 2013, I interviewed the executive director of the Institute of Medical and Welfare Resources and the co-leader of the People's House twice each. An interview with the president of the Dobong-gu Council of the Unified Progressive Party (UPP) was conducted in September 2013.

The Three Cases

The Allotment Project of Seoul General Union

The Seoul General Union was established in January 7, 2001 to organize regular and non-regular workers in Seoul. The union's former organization, which carried out activities in the northern region of Seoul, was a small group of workers called *bukbusarangnodongjahoe* in Korean (meaning a group of workers loving northern Seoul). The group funded itself with money that members had received as a result of successful litigation against former employers that had illegally fired them for union activities in 1990-1995, the period when the *Jeonnohyeop* (Korean Trade Union Congress) suffered from severe government repression and surveillance. The group organized mountain climbing and history study clubs and other activities. It also sought to address labor problems in the workplace and discussed ways to transform itself into a labor union, but it rejected enterprise or industrial union formations because workers in small companies frequently switched jobs across industries – for example, unskilled workers in the metal industry would move to the construction industry and later to the transport industry. The group instead opted for a general union in 2000, following the establishment of the Busan General Union.

Seoul General Union organizes regular and non-regular small firm workers in various industries and occupations, especially targeting non-regular workers in schools, universities, and local governments. The union organizes workers mainly on the basis of workplaces, but it also recruits individually affiliated members, who belong to a Direct Membership Local. Membership increased from about 200 in August 2008 to about 2,600 in March 2013.

² I would like to thank union officials and civil society activists who agreed to be interviewed.

When I started my interviews in 2008, the president of the union told me it would pursue a community of work and life and environment campaigns, but the union had difficulties carrying them out because of a small membership and lack of money. At the time of my second interview in 2010, he spoke of labor unionism that addressed broad issues affecting the lives of workers in the region and sought to act alongside residents.

The union sought to foster local activists among housewives, who made up a large proportion of lunch service workers, and provide them with activities in which they could participate. Accompanying that strategy of strengthening union activities in the region, the union planned to reorganize its organizational structure from workshop branches to district (*gu*) branches and assign a full-time activist to the district branch. It began discussing the plan with members as early as 2011. In March 2013 it assigned a full-time activist to its Dobong-gu branch with plans to assign full-time activists to another six district branches.

A year earlier in 2012, the union undertook an allotment project together with the Dobong-gu Council (TC) of the Unified Progressive Party (UPP). Dobong-gu³ had declared 2011 “the start year of urban agriculture” and allotted idle lands to residents to plant gardens. The president of UPP’s Dobong-gu Council, who was a part-time school lunch service worker and a member of the Seoul General Union, proposed to coworkers that they take an allotment together. Eight school lunch service workers joined, grew vegetables, and celebrated their harvest. The allotment project promoted friendship and communication among school lunch service workers, who then joined the union. In 2012, the union and the UPP TC together rented a thirteen meter allotment from Dobong-gu. Moreover, members of a community organization, “concerned residents in Dobong-gu,” joined the allotment project. Participants including union members paid 10,000 KRW (approximately 9.00 USD) per month to use the allotment. Once harvested, participants shared vegetables among themselves and local residents. According to the president of the UPP TC, participants benefitted economically from the low-cost and safe vegetables and expressed satisfaction. He reported that residents said “it was an interesting project,” “it went well,” and that “it was a rare activity for a labor union and political party.” The allotment project gave the union and the UPP an ongoing opportunity to make their activities known among local residents.

³ The mayor of Dobong-gu was from the Democratic United Party. This information is from an interview with the president of the TC of the UPP.

The Rest Center for Female Dolbom (Care) Workers by Organizing Center of Korean Healthcare Workers' Union (KHWU)

In Korea, workers who care for patients in hospitals or the disabled and the elderly with dementia are called *Dolbom* workers. Over 90 percent of care workers are female (Eunpyeong-Gu Public Health Center and Institute of Medical & Welfare Resources 2013, p.17). The Institute of Medical & Welfare Resources (IMWR) operates a center for rest and recuperation for female *Dolbom* workers. The IMWR was established by the Organizing Center of KHWU in March 2008 to do research on the health of *Dolbom* workers. The KHWU (*Uiryoyeondae* in Korean), which is an industrial union for medical workers established in 2006, set up the Organizing Center, *Huimangteo* in Korean, and has been organizing non-regular and non-member workers in hospitals or clinics. In the organizing process, the KHWU found out that many *Dolbom* workers were in poor health physically and mentally. This was the backdrop against which IMWR was established. The executive director of the IMWR is also the chief director of the Organizing Center.

In 2011, the IMWR surveyed 150 care workers in 50 nursing facilities for the elderly in Eunpyeong-gu about musculoskeletal diseases. According to the survey, most care workers complained of lower back pain. More than half of them responded that they strained themselves in positioning or transferring the elderly. More than half of those surveyed responded that they repeatedly used their wrist and shoulder for over two hours. Yet 90 percent reported working without a break, and less than 20 percent noted that there was a place to rest in their workplace (Eunpyeong-Gu Public Health Center and Institute of Medical & Welfare Resources 2013, pp.21-22). The IMWR realized the significance of initiating a health project in the region. In the beginning of 2012, it worked with Eunpyeong-Gu Public Health Center to put in place the Female Health Promotion Project, which the Seoul local government had financed. The Eunpyeong-Gu Public Health Center was assigned to an institution that was executing a model project to support the health of female *Dolbom* workers. For the model project, 200 million KRW (approximately 181,000 USD) was provided by Seoul local government.

In June 2012, the IMWR and Eunpyeong-Gu Public Health Center agreed to collaborate and developed health support programs for female *Dolbom* workers. The collaboration developed programs to relieve musculoskeletal pain and mental stress and implemented health checkups and counseling, programs to prevent musculoskeletal diseases, mental health

management, safety and health education and other kinds of health support programs for *Dolbom* workers residing in Eunpyeong-gu. Eighteen hundred *Dolbom* workers participated in the programs. The team also operated a program to train *Dolbom* health supporters. In 2012, forty *Dolbom* workers completed the program, 35 of whom the Eunpyeong-Gu Public Health Center certified as “health supporters” who would meet periodically and counsel colleagues about workplace accidents, report violations of the Labor Standards Law in workplace, and inform female *Dolbom* workers about the rest center.

The model project was implemented in cooperation with hospitals, associations and community organizations in Eunpyeong region. Seoul Rehabilitation Hospital sent physical therapists to give lectures on preventive program of musculoskeletal diseases. The Korean Care Workers’ Association and Association of Long Term Care Centers also cooperated by identifying target groups for the programs. Thirteen community organizations including the Eunpyeong Regional Society Network and the Living and Medical Cooperative were coalition partners on a public relations campaign for the model project.

This model project was going well, in contrast with previous health projects of the Public Health Center, which had not gone well even though they enjoyed large-scale advertising campaigns. The success was, according to the executive director of IMWR, due to the Korean Care Workers’ Association (KCWA), the *Dolbom* branch, and community organizations in the region.

The rest center opened in August 2012. When the model project started, there was no exercise equipment at the rest center. The mayor of Eunpyeong-gu, a member of the Democratic United Party (*Minjudang* in Korean), recognized the importance of supporting the health of female *Dolbom* workers and decided to provide an additional budget item of 53 million KRW (almost 48,000 USD) for the project. Exercise equipment and texts are at the rest center, and female *Dolbom* workers can exercise, stretch their bodies, and rest during the operating hours of 4:00 to 9:00 pm. According to the executive director of the IMWR, the rest center has a variety of spaces: an education space, an exercising space, a space for resting, a space for eating meals and drinking tea, and a meeting space. In 2013, the Seoul local government allocated a budget of 50 million KRW to the model project. It expanded the target group into female workers who are the most vulnerable including *Dolbom* workers and keeps operating the above-mentioned health support and preventive programs.

The continuity of the project remains uncertain because the Seoul local government selects projects to fund every year. Moreover, it seems troublesome to work with the public sector. According to the IMWR executive director, the staff of the Public Health Center complained that IMWR always brought up issues of labor unions.

The KHWU sought to protect not only the health rights of female *Dolbom* workers but also their labor rights. Union activists working for the Organizing Center, *Huimangteo*, initially thought that because many of the women workers were in their fifties and sixties a familiar organization would be more popular association than a labor union. Union activists and care workers together established the Korean Care Workers' Association (KCWA) in July 2008. KCWA activists, however, felt it necessary to establish a union to protect labor rights of care workers. They set up a *Dolbom* branch of the KHWU in October 2012; its membership was about 1,000 in March 2013. Among the health supporters mentioned above, 24 joined the *Dolbom* branch. The fee for members working for nursing facilities and members working in private homes is 10,000 KRW (9.00 USD) and 5,000 KRW per month, respectively. According to the president of the KHWU Organizing Center, a strategy to combine health rights with labor rights was effective in empowering care workers. Employers complain that care workers come to have a keen awareness of industrial accidents in workplace and are quick to file claims.

The People's House

The People's House, which provides a space for labor unions, progressive parties, and community organizations to communicate with each other and form networks among themselves, was first established in Mapo-gu, Seoul in 2008. Founding organizations were the Democratic Labor Party's (DLP) Mapo-gu Council and the culture organization *Munhwayeondae* (Cultural Solidarity), which had an office in Mapo-gu. Jung Kyung-Sup, who was the then-president of the DLP's Mapo-gu Council and is one of co-leaders of the People's House, wrote about the founding of the People's House:

I had worked on regional activities in Mapo-gu Council for the DLP for 10 years. I became aware that coalitions between labor unions and civil society organizations in community were formed only when issues such as strikes or movements against regional development projects occurred. I felt it was strange that there were few opportunities for community organizations to

meet and communicate with each other routinely. In 2006, *Munhwa Yeondae* proposed collaborative research on new community movements. We examined overseas cases of community movements and found People's Houses in Sweden and Italy. Not only labor unions but progressive parties had strong commitments to them. We decided to try to start something like them in Korea. We prepared for two years and opened the first People's House on November 1st, 2008 (Jung 2012, pp.5-6).

The money for founding the People's House was raised by selling bonds.⁴ Many people, most of whom were members of political parties, labor unions, or CSOs, bought bonds worth 20 million KRW (about 18,000 USD).

The membership of the People's House consists of organizational and individual members. At its inception, many individual members also belonged to the New Progressive Party (NPP).⁵ Later, individuals from various occupations, including housewives, joined the People's House; as of March 2013 members numbered about 400. Organizational members included: six labor unions, a retailers association, and two CSOs. Organizational members hold meetings or programs in the People's House. For example, the World-Cup branch of the Home-Plus-Tesco Workers Union has official meetings in the People's House because it has no union office in the workplace. Through these activities, organizational members meet and communicate with each other in the People's House.

Among labor organizations, there was a union involved in the planning and operation of People's House programs, and the Mapo Garden Hotel Workers Union sent several member chefs to cook meals for the "Tuesday Dinner Table" (*hwayobapsang* in Korean) that aimed at encouraging free and relaxed communication among members. Moreover, the Union joined the People's House steering committee.⁶ The steering committee consists of eleven members including three co-leaders. One member of staff works fulltime. The monthly budget is about 5 million KRW, which pays for monthly rent (2.7 million KRW), a modest staff salary, and so on. The

⁴ Jung Kyung-Sup, the co-leader of the People's House, told me in an interview that the price of each bond was 100,000 KRW (about 90 USD). The bond was a three-year bond, but no one who bought the bonds demanded a refund. When they bought the bonds, they never expected to redeem them. They are proud of having the bonds.

⁵ In 2008, the DLP divided into the DLP and the NPP. Jung Kyung-Sup changed his party membership from DLP to NPP.

⁶ As of September 2013, there was not any labor union on the steering committee (interview with Jung Kyung-Sup, the co-leader of the People's House).

monthly budget is covered by members' fees, which usually cannot cover all expenses. The House runs a pub one night at the end of the year to fill its budget deficit.⁷ The People's House does not take any money from Mapo-gu local government.

The Mapo People's House operates several programs of its own. First, it operates free after-school study programs for elementary and middle school students from low-income families in the Mapo region. Teachers, who have expressed interest in implementing alternative education in place of current public education and who are from the Korean Teachers and Education Workers Union (*Jeongyojo* in Korean), are in charge of operating the after-school study program for elementary school students. The after-school study programs for middle school students include weekly liberal arts discussions and special classes that students want to take, such as essay writing.

Second, it delivers two kinds of lectures, one is a "lecture for living" that provides practical day-to-day knowledge, the other is a "lecture for citizens" that provides knowledge about the liberal arts and social sciences. Lectures are conducted by members who offer their talents or through their networks recruit persons with particular skills. For example, a member who can speak Chinese holds a Chinese language lecture. Members who volunteer their talents take part in other lectures for free. Most of the lectures are offered for free or at a low fee. The lectures are advertised to local residents as "1,000 KRW lectures." Jung Kyung-Sup, the co-leader of the People's House noted during the interview that "in the age of neo-liberal capitalism, even hobbies require lots of money." He went on to say: "We want the People's House to be a space where people acquire knowledge about society and the world and heighten their cultural level without spending a lot of money"; "in other word, we want the People's House to become a space different from those places in the world in which people feel as though they are being suffocated."

Moreover, the People's House is building a regional welfare network of which the poor, including non-regular workers in the region, can make use. The network includes a clinic, a psychological counselor, lawyer, and labor attorney. Jung Kyung-Sup commented during the interview that "we should not approach the non-regular worker problem only from a point of view of labor issues. We should also deal with it from a point of view of livelihood issues. We should consider what infrastructure in the region is needed so that

⁷ The pub operated under the name of "Support for the People's House." Revenues amounted to 6 million KRW (about 5,400 USD) (interview with Jung Kyung-Sup, the co-leader of the People's House).

non-regular workers can lead a decent life. We will make efforts to offer that infrastructure.”

Discussion

These three cases offer a comparative lens on how regional relationships were created between labor unions and community organizations and residents, between labor union or CSOs and progressive parties, and between civil society organizations and local government.

The first case, the Seoul General Union's allotment project, is an example of a union that aimed to increase communications among residents and workers in the region through an environmentally friendly agriculture campaign. Dobong-gu, in which Seoul General Union has been involved for years, is the region where the union campaigned against hospital lay-offs of non-regular worker members and formed a coalition with the UPP's district committee and community organizations. The UPP district committee and the union took advantage of the allotment project, which Dobong-gu started. Through the project, the union encouraged non-regular workers to become members and made its activities known among local residents. The union put a full-time official in its Dobong-gu branch to form a continuous relationship with the community. The Dobong-gu branch of the union and the UPP district committee share an office and have worked together investigating conditions among non-regular workers in Dobong-gu and in organizing. The two organizations joined in a regional coalition, Dobong People's Power (*Dobongminjunguihim*, in Korean), which was established in April 2013. When there are differences regarding activities among participating organizations, Dobong People's Power discusses them and makes a decision.

The second case, the rest center for female *Dolbom* workers, is an example of how the Organizing Center of KHWU approached the health rights of female *Dolbom* workers and how networks were built through that approach. The health support project for female *Dolbom* workers was executed in alliance with the local government, local public health center, hospitals, care workers' associations, and community organizations. Eunpyeong-gu, where the health support project has been conducted, is also where a branch union of the KHWU, the Cheongu Seongsim Hospital Union, formed the Committee for Countermeasures, a coalition of residents, university students, and other unions that challenged Cheongu Seongsim Hospital's dismissal of staff members. It is in an area where CSOs have been

active and the head district administrator is from the main opposition party, the Democratic United Party. The rest center contributes to building a network of female *Dolbom* workers.

In the third case, the People's House, labor unions were not directly involved in its establishment, but it is an example of a network of labor unions, residents, and community organizations. Labor unions that join the People's House have their meetings there or voluntarily take part in programs there. The People's House approaches problems of non-regular workers from a point of livelihood issues and is building a regional welfare network to provide the underprivileged, including non-regular workers, with the social infrastructure needed to lead decent lives. In Mapo-gu, where the People's House is located, a coalition between the E-Land General Union, the district council of the DLP, CSOs, and other labor unions fought against lay-offs of non-regular workers in 2007.

The first and the third cases illustrate the utility of cooperative relationships between labor unions and progressive parties such as the UPP or the NPP. Particularly in the first case, the relationship is close. Regarding relationships with local governments, the three cases vary. In the first case, the union is a user taking advantage of a local government project, while in the second case the CSO is a recipient of funds from a local government and a partner working with a local government. In the third case, the local government actively works with the civil society organization, but it keeps a distance from the local government because it thinks that the local government is purpose-oriented and aims for a short-term effect. The second case, the rest center, indicates the difficulties that can arise between CSOs and local governments: over-reliance on local government funding; breaks in program continuity; and the unfavorable attitude of public officials toward labor unions.

The three cases have common features. First, the issues the three cases approached are related to the quality of life of resident workers, such as environmentally-friendly food, health issues, and culture. Second, the three cases took place in regions where labor unions, progressive political parties, community organizations, and local residents had formed coalitions to address labor disputes. Third, they demonstrate how workers can become empowered and how labor unions, progressive parties and CSOs have been able to communicate their missions. In the first case, school lunch service workers became union members through the allotment project. The union and the UPP became better known among local residents. In the second case, female *Dolbom* workers became more aware of industrial accidents and have

worked to support the health of other *Dolbom* workers. They joined labor unions, and the rest center became familiar among *Dolbom* workers in the region. In the third case, small shop owners with the support of civil society organizations, including the People's House, campaigned against opening a large retail shop at the old regional market. They shut their shops down five times and collected signatures from local residents. Even conservatively oriented shop owners admitted they owed their success in part to the help of the People's House. The campaign increased knowledge about the People's House among small shop owners in the region.

It is difficult to know which labor and social issue activities were more effective in empowering workers or citizens or acquiring support from local residents. The Seoul General Union's allotment project and the rest center, however, show that workers can be organized via food and health issues. Labor unions and CSOs have added allotment and health support projects to their organizing tool kits. In addition, the People's House appears to empower—in a broad sense—the next generation, working people, and small employers.

How do we evaluate labor union efforts to connect with communities? Is social movement unionism a sign that unions are abandoning their labor identity and becoming movements of civil society? Or is it that social movement unionism is an attempt to align civil society approaches to its identity? According to Hwang (2012), social movement unionism corresponds to the latter rather than the former because the main activities of labor unions remain negotiating with management to deal with labor conditions in the workplace.

The same view applies to the cases in this paper. The leadership of the Seoul General Union thinks that basing the union in a region will orient its interest toward workplace and residential living conditions and involve it in the community which, in turn, will have a positive effect on organizing workers in the region. The leadership of the KHWU pursues a form of industrial union organizing on a regional basis, regardless of employment status or workplace size. It believes that a labor movement based on workers residential area, especially for non-regular workers in precarious employment, is needed. Attempts to build regional networks between labor unions and communities are intended to broaden union identities and boundaries.

Conclusion

Labor unions, which have faced demise in many industrialized countries, have searched for new methods of securing union growth and renewal (Wills 2001). New methods focus on organizing workers beyond the workplace, developing shared agendas with wider communities, and forging alliances with community organizations. This new unionism has been dubbed “community unionism,” or “social movement unionism.” As the above-mentioned survey of union officials indicates, Korean labor unions have become aware that they cannot operate in isolation from their communities and have had to involve community organizations in their fights. Accordingly, many union officials agree that the labor movement should have its own regional strategy. They have noted that the labor movement faces isolation and decline unless it becomes involved in regional society (Kim et al. 2006). Therefore, this paper’s analysis of the three cases is an attempt to highlight regional relationships between labor and community forces. They each show labor movement’s efforts to avoid isolation.

What implications do these efforts have for the Korean labor movement and Korean civil society? Jung Kyung-Sup, the co-leader of the People’s House, had a critical view about coalitions between labor unions and CSOs in Korean labor and civil society movements: the coalitions have been formed on an ad hoc basis and labor unions have waged campaigns appealing for support from community only when labor disputes such as lay-offs take place. Therefore, we expect these efforts have significance for the Korean labor movement in two respects: first, these ad hoc coalitions between labor unions and communities will naturally develop day-to-day ties of solidarity; and second, the Korean labor movement will broaden its support among the community as the community gets to know better what unions do and aspire to do.

Moreover, these efforts also have significance for the Korean civil society in that they will encourage regional collaborative planning by labor unions, community organizations, residents, and local governments. Specifically, in 2013 the Seoul local government increased district financing for health support projects for female workers. For example, the Dobong-gu local government provided funding to a team from Dongbuk Women Link and the Dobong-gu branch of the Seoul General Union to conduct a yoga class in September 2013. Mapo-gu proposed collaborative projects to the People’s House whose co-leader judged a Mapo-gu policy contest between

departments. Local governments have begun to emphasize civil governance and want to form a network with regional CSOs.

This paper examined just three attempts at building regional relationships between labor unions and communities. The attempts, however, are occurring in many regions. For example, as of 2013, People's Houses had already been established in Jungrang-gu and Guro-gu of Seoul, in the Seo-gu of Incheon, and in Kwangju. Additional People's Houses will open soon in Seoul's Gangseo-gu⁸ and in the Yuseong-gu of Taejeon. Likewise, many districts of Seoul have created female worker health project collaborations between labor unions and CSOs. According to the above-mentioned survey of union officials, the majority favored systematic and strategic involvement in communities rather than ad hoc or selective involvement (Kim et al. 2006). It is likely that the future will bring a greater focus on building strategically oriented relationships between labor unions and communities. It remains to be seen whether attempts to strengthen labor-community ties will reverse the decline in the labor movement that has occurred since the economic crisis in Korean society of the late 1990s.

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⁸ The People's House that was going to open in Seoul's Gangseo-gu was established in April 2004.

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