

A Metropolitan City with Respect for Labor: Expanding Universal Labor Rights

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As cities become increasingly relevant and significant, there is a growing social demand for cities to take a leading role in addressing labor issues to protect its workers and transform the lives of its citizens. The Seoul Metropolitan Government (SMG) has shifted the focus of its paradigm to people-oriented city, implementing a series of labor policies within Seoul to address the current labor issues at the city government level, which in the past had been the realm of the national government.

The first step of Seoul was to become "A Metropolitan City with Respect for Labor", aiming to recover the common sense of labor: that is reversing the current trend of temporary or irregular workers increasing in numbers under the name of management efficiency and cost savings. Second step was to eliminate the blind spots of labor rights, which prevented workers from receiving proper legal protection. The goal is to ensure the labor rights just like for the civil rights. The SMG continues to advance towards its vision of becoming a full-fledged 'Metropolitan City with Respect for Labor' where more workers can enjoy more fair labor welfare in a safer working environment.

Ever since the SMG's launch of the said vision in 2012, 10,000 irregular workers in the public sector were converted into regular workers, and in 2015 it adopted a living wage system. Not only that, to address labor issues on the field, the SMG implemented a labor director system in investment institutions and has implemented a large number of policies such as reducing the number

of working hours.

In particular, the SMG has taken a series of measures to help protect workers in the blind spots, being denied the right to protection. The number of platform workers is increasing globally. And in Seoul, where the majority of the platform workers are food delivery workers, designated chauffeurs, and express delivery workers, there are 5 rest areas for these mobility workers in Seoul (Nonhyun, Hapjeong, Bukchang, Sangam, Bulgwang). These workers not only have access to places for a rest but also counseling services or training programs on labor laws and regulations. From the second half of 2019, labor rights protection of platform workers, which has been regarded as a growing source of social conflict, became high on the public agenda, thereby mobilizing citizens, experts, and the workers themselves to seek solutions together. Last November, the platform worker's labor union was granted an approval for establishment.

The SMG is also focused on protecting emotional laborers representing 41% of all wage workers. In March last year, the national government passed a Law on the Protection of Emotional Laborers. However, the SMG, had already begun its efforts in the area two years before that in 2016, by implementing an "Ordinance on the Protection of Emotional Workers". Based on this Ordinance, "Center for Support of Emotional Workers" was opened, providing free and holistic support from psychological counseling to healing clinic helping emotional recovery and incident prevention training programs.

From this year, the SMG is working to ensure fair labor welfare for all workers. Currently 11 "Worker Centers" are running in downtown Seoul, offering labor counseling and welfare services to workers near their home or work. The SMG plans to open 1 worker center per district by 2021. It will also provide legal

counseling in the areas of labor law violations or industrial accidents including non-payment of wages, unfair labor practices and training on labor laws and regulations and job placement, etc.

Furthermore, the SMG is running Seoul Labor Centers and two Labor Welfare Center, and in April this year, opened to the public Korea's first labor complex facility "The Jeon Tae-il Memorial Hall" in memory of the late Jeon Tae-il who was the pioneer of Korea's labor movement.

Other than reaching out in terms of facilities and space, the SMG is operating "Citizen Labor Ombudsman", advising on relief to be granted to workers facing unfair treatment at work and "Labor Rights Protection Officer" dedicated to the underprivileged class, from giving them advice to helping them file complaints and seek administrative litigations, etc.

The SMG continues to provide constant, close-knit support based on its facilities and infrastructures to create a more fair and healthier workplace, where all workers' labor rights are ensured, leaving no one behind.