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## Korea's National Assembly Passes Regressive Contract and Agency Labour Regulations

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[摘要] 11 December 2006. In a display of political manoeuvring that will have a devastating effect on millions of contract workers, South Korea's Grand National Party (GNP) and Uri Party combined to pass a series of bills in the final days of the most current National Assembly session. Included among those bills were three so-called "irregular workers' bills," which will give Korean employers a virtual unlimited license to use and discard contract and agency workers.

[关键词] Labour Regulation; legislative

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called "irregular workers' bills," which will give Korean employers a virtual unlimited license to use and discard contract and agency workers.

The contract workers' bills, along with hundreds of other bills, had been held up by the GNP throughout the current 100-

day legislative session over opposition to South Korean President Roh Moo-

hyun's choice for president of the country's highest court, the Constitutional Court. But in mid-

November, Roh withdrew the nomination of his close friend, Chon Hyo-

suk, and two weeks later, on 30 November, GNP members inside the Assembly sided with Roh's Uri Party members to push into law the liberalisation of contract workers.

GNP support for the measures meant that the Uri Party's 139 members had the necessary majority in the 297-

seat Assembly for passage. But passage did not come without controversy. The Uri Party Speaker of the Assembly bypassed a key committee and took the bills straight to a plenary session for final vote. Passage occurred despite vehement opposition from South Korea's two labour federations.

The new irregular workers' law will, beginning in July 2007, allow employers with 300 workers or more to utilise contract or agency workers for up to two years before they must be made permanent. The same policy becomes effective in July 2008 for companies with 100 to 299 workers. For companies with fewer than 100 workers, the new law takes effect in September 2008.

"South Korea has effectively opened a revolving door for the use of contract and agency workers," said ICEM General Secretary Fred Higgs. "Employers can now use, abuse, and then discard contract workers within a two-

-year time period, which certainly will prove to be detrimental to sustainable and family-supporting full-time direct employment inside the country."

South Korea currently is one of the highest ranking OECD countries in terms of contract workers, with estimates of up to 50%, or 8.5 million workers, engaged in work in part-

-time or temporary status.

In another legislative action before the National Assembly, a committee late last week passed a controversial labour reform measure which includes the three-

-year suspension of a pay ban for full-

-time union members, as well as allowing multiple unions to take hold inside a workplace, effective in December 2009.

The reform bill, passed by the labour committee on 8 December, must now go before the judiciary committee before it is expected to be voted on in plenary session this week.

