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Work Organization Change & Labor Union Policy

This study is an attempt to find out the lessons for the work organization policy of the labor union in Korea through the research about the work organization change and labor union policy in the foreign countries. We will situate the work organization change on the 'humanization of labor' and suggest how labor movements should respond to this question in Korea.

Here we deal with the automobile company, famous for the work organization change and the democratization of workplace. For this, we discuss the German and Swedish cases(especially, Volkswagen and Volvo motor company) and the Korean companies(Hyundai, Kia, Daewoo). Also we think significantly the work organization policy of the metal workers union in Germany, Sweden and Korea.

In Germany, the employers promoted the 'flexible automation' strategy since 1980s. They attempted the expansion of automation facilities and the increase of the labor flexibility. Labor unions formed the policy of the 'worker's participation'. Workers insisted on the autonomous group work, co-determination of the management issues. In result, the semi-autonomous group work has been generalized and been concluded on the 'agreement for the employment security and industrial location protection'.

In Sweden, the metal union promoted the 'solidaristic work policy' from 1985. The metal union experimented the socio-technical work organization at Kalmar and Uddevalla plants in Volvo company. Employers also concerned with the job satisfaction of workers and proceeded the joint work organization projects. But since 1990s they faced the globalization and flexibility in production and management. So the workplace innovation experiments and co-determination degree have been weakened. Metal union responded to these neo-liberalism situation with job education expansion and employment protection policy.

In Korea there were the work organization debates about wage system and employment protection. Recently employers promoted the rationalization strategy and labor unions responded to this new management strategy with the labor intensity weakening and the working hour shortening etc. But labor unions still don't participate in the decision making process of company, so it's difficult to respond to the rationalization process(for instance, the modularization and irregular employment). Korean labor unions feel the need of co-determination rights like Germany and Sweden.

We could learn three lessons from this investigation for the democratic work organization.

Firstly, labor unions should make a grand work organization policy. We have to establish the synthetic policy in the metal union level, as the work organization issues(team work, modularization, shift work, labor intensity) are related to each other closely

Secondly, labor unions should institutionalize the workplace negotiations for the minimization of uncertainty and instability of industrial relations. The institutionalization of workplace negotiations cover the union representatives right, negotiation scope, negotiation process.

Thirdly, labor unions should develop the participative work organization and skill promotion. Especially we need make the alternative work organization and job education institutions for the workplace innovation in the worker's position.