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February, 2019
Working Paper 19-01

KDI 국제정책대학원
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When coalition falls apart: Case of solidarity building of two unions

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Abstract

This article examines the external and organizational factors behind the coalition dynamics of two labour unions representing a different mix of employment contract types - temporary and permanent - that led the 2007 Irregular Workers Movement in South Korea. Drawing on semi-structured interview, video, newspapers and internal document data, we find that while political opportunities drove the two unions to come together, broad alliances formed around the coalition on the issue of job security of irregular workers marginalized the union with predominantly regular workers. Organizational differences that seemed complementary at first hindered a collective identity from forming and became a source of resentment as strikes continued on. Varying progression of negotiations not only reduced the benefits of claims coordination and collective action but also invoked otherness among them. Lack of trust and recognition did not allow for even a loose cooperative differentiation relation.

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1. Introduction

Since the 1990s, we have seen a significant increase in atypical employment (part-time, fixed-term, and temporary agency contracts) across European and Asian countries (Salvatori 2009) with growth of global value chains and increased pressure on employers to cut labor costs and to respond to demand fluctuation. (Doellgast, Lillie, and Pulignano 2018; Kalleberg 2003) The varying needs and membership characteristics have resulted in a complex relationship of cooperation and conflict among the workers of different employment contract types. (Lee and Frenkel 2004; Jin 2012) Permanent or regular workers are in general better paid, enjoy better working conditions and are more likely to be unionized than the atypical or the irregular counterparts. Even when the existing permanent worker union pushes to recruit the irregulars for reasons of revitalization, (Heery and Adler 2004; Flecher and Hurd, 1998) protection from labour cost competition, or in pursuit of worker solidarity, equity and justice, (Doellgast, Lillie, and Pulignano 2018: p 1) there exist a fear that its relationship with the management, permanent workers' job security and working conditions will deteriorate if it begins incorporating irregular worker issues (Cervino 1999; Cho 2009; Heery and Abbot 2000; Jin 2012). Since the alliance with regular workers is important for the improvement of the irregular workers' rights (Cho 2009; Jang 2009; Jin 2012; Lee et. al. 2014; Yoon 2010) and exclusive strategies of unions that neglect the interest of precarious workers are rarely sustainable in the long run, (Doellgast, Lillie, and Pulignano 2018: 1) the conditions under which solidarity of different employment contract types emerge and weaken warrant a detailed examination.

This article presents a case study of the coalition dynamics of two South Korean

unions in representation of a different mix of employment contract types. In February 2007, South Korean National Assembly passed an “Act on the Protection, etc. of Fixed-term and Part-time Employees” (also known as the “Irregular¹ Worker Protection Act”, hereafter the Act), which prohibited employers to hire fixed-term employees for a period more than two years. The law enacted to provide protection to the increasing² number of precarious workers aroused much opposition from labour: rather than guaranteeing permanent status to those with more than two years of employment, the firms could fire the fixed-term employees or allow the contracts to lapse before the law was to go into effect on July 1 2007 and outsource the jobs to avoid responsibility over employment and effectively lower the wage. While some firms upgraded the contracts and others chose to lay off, a Group EL, a conglomerate then ranked the 26th in Korea in terms of corporate revenue, took an extreme measure and let go of more than 700 irregular workers from its subsidiary retail companies H and N in April and May of 2007. In response, their respective unions, the EGLU and the NLU, came together to protest against the mass dismissals. The coalition led the “E-N struggle”, which became the backbone of the 2007 Irregular Workers Movement as citizens, interest groups, enterprise unions, and pro-labour political parties joined in.

The E-N struggle was framed as a case of exemplary solidarity building for the represented employment contract types of the respective unions.³ While more than half of the EGLU’s members were temporary, over 90% of the NLU’s members were permanent. Workers of both types had come together in demand for better job security and rights of the irregulars. (Yoon 2010; Young and Broadbent 2015) What was rarely discussed, however, was that in addition to the irregular work related claims that the EGLU was fighting for, the NLU was protesting against forced transfers of the

permanent workers that occurred concurrently: in order to lay off the irregulars, the firm went on to outsource the jobs, from which the permanent workers that were working with the irregulars were also reassigned. For the NLU the strike was against restructuring rather than one that solely focus on irregular workers. (Kwon 2008) They recruited the irregulars only in April 2007. What was also mostly unknown about the coalition was that when the strikes came to an end, the two unions had long grown apart and the members tried to avoid protesting together. The “Joint Strike Headquarters” (hereafter Headquarters) consisting of representatives of the two unions as well as two umbrella organizations, the Korean Federation of Service Workers’ Unions (hereafter KFSWU) and the Korean Confederation of Trade Unions (hereafter KCTU), that was formed at the beginning of the strikes eventually became a venue for information exchange on logistics rather than strategy building and coordination: no meeting were held under the name after April 2008⁴ and when the NLU reached an agreement with the management in August 2008, the EGLU only learned of it from the media.⁵

Based on semi-structured interviews from fieldwork, daily newspaper articles, internal union documents and video footages, the article examines the organizational and external factors behind the coalition formation and dissolution, drawing from the social movement and the workplace politics literatures for a framework of analysis. While the latter help us understand the source of the factors that governed the relations of the two unions, the former guides us in identifying the mechanisms through which the factors affected the coalition. The article contributes to the work on movement decline, which often coincide with the dissolution of coalitions and is relatively unaddressed despite its importance. (Fillieule 2015)

The article argues that in addition to the uncooperative common parent firm and the shared experience of unilateral restructuring at the time of the passage of the Act, “exchange” and “division of labour” (Zald and McCarthy 1987: 164) drew the two unions closer. While the EGLU mostly consisted of irregular workers brought a politically salient cause, a membership supported by the public, and tactical spontaneity and aggressiveness, the NLU predominantly consisted of permanent workers brought structure, bargaining power, and finances. The differences in organization, membership and goals, however, hindered a collective identity from forming and became a source of resentment as strikes continued. Varying progressions of negotiations led to diverging optimal strategies, not only reducing the benefits of claims coordination and collective action but also invoking otherness among the members. Broad alliances around irregular work related claims that initially empowered the E-N struggle ended up marginalizing the NLU and the seeming lack of commitment of the NLU disappointed the EGLU. Mutual resentment did not even allow for “cooperative differentiation” (Hathaway and Meyer 1997; Staggenborg 1986).

What first follows is the analytic framework and descriptions of the data, research methodology, and limitations. Analyses of coalition formation and dissolution, and discussions on the impact of the coalition dynamics on the outcome of the strikes as well as what could have sustained the solidarity follow.

2. Analytic framework

When do distinct actors form a coalition and create a “new, visible, and direct

coordination of claims” (Tilly and Tarrow 2007: 216) and when do they decide to go on separate paths? The case introduced in the article is of a coalition of two trade unions representing a different mix of employment contract types leading an irregular workers movement against a newly introduced labor law devised to enhance irregular workers job security. Thus, the structural factors such as political opportunities, availability of resources, managements’ responses as well as organizational factors such as the membership, claims, and the workplace politics of irregular workers and the permanent workers that influence the construction of collective identity are starting points for investigation. Existing research argues that political or environmental opportunities and new threats to organizations’ goals and commonalities in interests and ideology which can serve as a basis for a mutually acceptable coalition frame are conducive to coalition formation (Croteau and Hicks 2003; Levy and Murphy 2006; McCammon and Cambell 2002; Mayer and Brown 2005; Meyer and Corrigan-Brown 2005; Meyer and Whittier 1994; Staggenborg 1986; Van Dyke 2003). Some find that coalitions are more likely to be formed during a period of resource abundance (Staggenborg 1986; Van Dyke 2003; Zald and McCarthy 1987), while others show the opposite (McCammon and Campbell 2002).

Since all the participants have to agree to form a coalition, decision of each counts. From a rational choice perspective, it would join forces with others when the expected benefits exceed the expected costs (Levy and Murphy 2006; Zald and Ash 1986), both of which are derived from the multiplicity and diversity of actors involved. Through increased number of participants and broader coverage of individual characteristics, not only can a coalition give better justification of the goals being pursued and draw more financial and political support (McCammon and Campbell 2002;

Hathaway and Meyer 1997; Tarrow 1994), organizations can exert greater pressure on the target. (Van Dyke 2003) Resources, political opportunities, leadership, and tactics spill over. For a resource-deprived organization, an alliance with a more established partner can ease its financial distress. When claims of an organization gain salience, others can free ride on the endorsement either by framing their issues in similar terms and building a “consonant frame pyramid” (Croteau and Hicks 2003; Meyer and Corrigan-Brown 2005) or by forming an alliance so to be identified with the group. The modularity of tactics (Tilly and Tarrow 2007: 23) leads to division of labour (Zald and McCarthy 1987: 170) and allows organizations an expanded toolbox to work from at various stages of the claims-making process. By forming a coalition, unnecessary competition among organizations to attract financial resources and mass support (Zald and McCarthy 1987: 170; Tarrow 1989: 186) can be saved. There are, however, direct costs involved. When a coalition is formed, the original goals of each organization may be marginalized and they may face new opposition because of their partners (Hula 1995; McCammon and Campbell 2002). When the size of a coalition becomes too big, maintenance can be costly (Staggenborg 1986).

Costs and benefits are not stationary: the environment and objectives of the organizations change over time. It can be optimal to form and break alliances depending on which stage they are at in the claims-making process. In case of trade unions, during the pre-negotiation stage, their immediate interest is getting to the negotiation table. At this stage, because of the sharing of costs, increased justification, and power in collective action, alliances may emerge. Once negotiations begin, however, progression will likely vary depending on the respective claims and the receptiveness of the management. The optimal responses could differ and coordination of claims and

collective action may not worth the effort any more.

Shared identities or absence of significant differences in identity can help the coalition formation process (Van Dyke 2003; Daini and Bison 2004) and are necessary for a sustained partnership (Hathaway and Meyer 1997). Smith (2002) argues that frequent interaction, collective action and public sharing of risks or costs among activists can build trust and promote group identities (507, 508). For workers of different employment contract types, similarity of jobs, compensation and demographic characteristics such as age and sex can also strengthen collective identity. (Jang 2009; Lee et al. 2014; Yoon 2010) If the organizational and membership differences become more prominent to the members during collective activities because the risk or cost sharing is unequal, however, collective identity may be difficult to be constructed.

Collective identity can invoke “class rationality” or the pursuit of interests of the labor class as a whole, which is weighed against the pursuit of worker’s own interests or “individual rationality” (Cho 2009), though the two may be aligned and no conflict arises. Having greater job security, better working conditions and greater bargaining power, it is usually the regular workers and the ideology and determination of the leadership of the regular worker union that determine the relation with their irregular counterparts. (Jang 2009) When economic strains intensify and the collaboration start to hurt one’s financial interests, individual rationality prevails and the alliance can be undermined. (Yoon 2010) Varying degrees of receptiveness of the managements towards the unions may weaken class rationality if it succeeds in instilling “otherness.”

In summary, though expected payoffs of spillovers of political opportunities, management response and resources can bring organizations together, the structural

factors change over time and it could be optimal for organizations to go on separate paths. Broad alliances surrounding the coalition can marginalize individual organization's members and goals and invoke resentment. The varying progression of negotiations can not only lead to different optimal responses but also hamper collective identities from being constructed. Frequent interactions can also be an occasion for individuals to realize the otherness between them. Lack of a collective identity can contribute to weakening of class rationality, which can lead to coalition dissolution if individual rationality prevails over it.

3. DATA and METHODS

The article draws from three major sources: the first is semistructured qualitative interview from the fieldwork that was conducted with the two unions in Seoul, South Korea from May 2008 to June 2008 and subsequent interviews conducted from July 2018 to October 2018. During the fieldwork, I participated in the biweekly protests of the both unions and observed the meetings with permission. In total, I have interviewed 16 individuals and held unstructured group talks with members from both unions at protest sites. I interviewed seven people from the leadership of the two unions, three of them twice, in 2008 and 2018. Individuals who actively collaborated with the coalition over the entirety of the strike were interviewed as well: they were three staff members from the KFSWU, two staff members from the KCTU, one labour organizer from the Democratic Labour Party, a certified labour attorney, a documentary film maker, and a journalist from a newspaper specializing in labour. Interviews in general lasted for 90-120 minutes. The content of the meetings and interviews were written

close to word-for-word in notebooks and was later transcribed on computer.

The second source of data is 2612 newspaper articles from the Korean Integrated News and Database System covering 44 major daily newspaper corporations from January 2006 to December 2008 regarding the two unions. After downloading the articles, I used the program package R for analysis.

The third source of data is video footages from May 2007-October 2007 on the sites of both unions' sit-down strikes. A documentary filmmaker Mirae Kim was filming union meetings as well as almost all of the official strikes held, capturing the interactions of union members, leadership, and outside collaborators. Interviews were included as well. I was granted access to all the video footages that amounted to 308 60-minute tapes. In addition, I was granted access to the daily protest activity log and miscellaneous internal documents of the two unions.

The work in essence employs a mix-methods approach. The article uses both grounded theory to process interview, documentary as well as film data and statistical analysis of newspaper articles to strengthen the claims. Though there is limitation in generalizing the conclusions as it is a case study, the work can be a basis for further empirical research on coalition within social movements, trade union dynamics and workplace politics.

4. Case study of two unions

4.1 Coalition formation

4.1.1 History of the unions

Before discussing the 2007 coalition, we first trace the history of the two unions

and their brief interaction in 2006 - a loose alliance that was short-lived. In 2006, there were three labour representations based in the Group EL: the NLU, the ELU and the CLU. Founded in 1998, the NLU represented the workers from N, a department store-turned-outlet bought by the Group EL in Dec 2003. Company N was a union shop of permanent workers from both the shop floor and in managerial positions, strong and well organized having had to live through grueling restructuring, default, and acquisition processes. In 2006, the NLU had more than 1300 members enjoyed a certain preferential treatment within the Group EL having one of its most profitable stores (GN).

Though the ELU, the official labour union of the Group EL, was founded in 1993, the management took four years to recognize it as a valid negotiation partner: only after fifty-seven days of striking in 1997 did they reach a collective bargaining agreement that guaranteed wage payment during leave. In 2000, after two-hundred sixty five days of striking, the first significant irregular workers' struggle in the country, the working conditions of temporary workers improved. Despite the success, the strife left the organization with a mere fifty members at the end of 2001.

The CLU was the labour union of 16 stores of a retail Company C that would be eventually acquired by the Group EL in June 2006 and become Company H. The workers' fear of unemployment in the acquisition process had led to a sharp increase in membership in 2006. About twenty percent of the total workers were union members and more than half of them were temporaries, mostly female and in their thirties, forties, and fifties. The CLU had succeeded in reaching a collective agreement with the management of company C that specified the acquiring firm was to recognize the labour union and guarantee continued employment of all workers. It also included a clause that prohibited terminating the contracts of irregular workers of more than eighteen months.

In May 2006, all three unions were striking against the Group EL. The NLU was in the middle of its annual wage negotiations and was protesting against the firm's proposal of introducing a new wage system. Freedom of union activities was also a concern: the firm had recently called in over 900 union members for "disciplinary" purposes to dissuade them from participating in union activities. For the ELU, the firm's circumvention, distortion, and finally a renege of the collective agreement, evasion of labor regulations and promotion disadvantages imposed on union members fueled the protests. The CLU was in the middle of acquisition turmoil and wanted the Group EL to guarantee that it would respect the collective agreement drawn with Company C.

Faced with an uncooperative parent firm around the same time, the three unions formed a "Joint Strike Headquarters" to coordinate protests. On May 10 2006, a plan for a merger of three unions was declared. (Labor Today, 2006) The coalition, however, was not a strong one: A union leader of EGLU reflected that the common headquarters in 2006 was of a top-down talk driven one pushed mainly by the leaders and had failed to involve their members.⁶ Collective protests were small in size and rare. The NLU reached an agreement in July 2006 and remained in the coalition in name only. There were few attempts of collective action afterwards by the ELU and the CLU with little success.⁷ In December 2006, the ELU and the CLU finally merged and formed the EGLU. The two were both weak and a formal merger was a way of pooling their resources and revitalizing the organization. On the other hand, the gap between the two unions and the NLU in membership characteristics especially the employment contract types and its status within the Group EL was too wide to overcome.⁸

4.2. Coalition formation of 2007

The first union member temporary worker was fired on the 17th of April from H, and on the 2nd of May the N announced that it was going to outsource the cashier positions. In two months, more than 700 workers were laid off. The Headquarters announced a strategy of “collective struggle, collective negotiation, collective agreement,”⁹ a conscious action to counter divide-and-rule strategies of the Group EL. Starting with a collective strike (10th of June), the NLU went on an “indefinite strike” (22nd of June), followed by the EGLU conducting an in-house picketing strike on the 30th of June, the day before the Act was to go into effect, with workers blocking entry and occupying one of the most profitable branches of H. The occupation strike lasted for fifteen consecutive days. The NLU soon joined in at its GN branch store on the 8th of July.

The passage of the Act and the Group EL’s hostile attitude towards labour unions at its subsidiary firms provided an environment conducive for the unions to overcome the differences in their goals. In order to outsource cashier jobs in response to the Act, N introduced the personal digitized assistant system in December 2006 and let go or let the contracts to lapse of the temporary cashiers and at the same time forcefully transferred the permanent ones that worked together with the temporaries to other jobs. Though the NLU incorporated the issue of irregular work by newly recruiting temporary workers in February, the dispute over irregular contracts was of secondary concern since more than 90% of the union members were regular workers. The NLU framed the goal of the strike as a protest against “restructuring.” All the interviewees from the NLU emphasized that it was not a protest of irregular workers but of both the regular and irregular workers. On the other hand, EGLU’s claims were specifically on the job security of irregular workers. More than half of the union

members were irregular workers whose immediate concerns were employment guarantee and collective bargaining rights.

In addition to the leverage in negotiations that committed collective action provided, protesting with the other had emotional benefits. Interviewed members often talked of feeling less threatened when they were demonstrating together while surrounded by the riot police and violent counter-protest mobs.¹⁰ The coalition also increased the strategic capacity (Ganz 2000; Murphy 2002) by resource spillovers and sharing ‘staff experience and relationships with authorities and allies.’ The NLU brought bargaining power and finances to the coalition. Respected as a model labour union in the KFSWU, the union had a history of standing strong against the management and the members had unquestioned trust towards the leadership.¹¹ During the first days of collective strikes in June 2007, the NLU led the planning and execution of the protests. The relatively wealthy NLU had lent 5million Korean Won (US\$4,000) at the beginning of the strikes and paid more than the EGLU for common expenses. The NLU leadership estimated that about 50 million Korean Won (US\$40,000) in total transfers were made to the EGLU over the entire protest period.¹²

The EGLU brought to the coalition an agenda of political salience as well as membership that garnered unprecedented public support. The activation of the nonregular protection act on 1st of July was an opening of a political opportunity. Being framed and actively framing themselves as “*mothers* in their 30s to 50s who earns approximately 800,000 Korean Won (US\$640) a month (approximately \$4.00 per hour), who sometimes had to work without a single break for six hours,” (Hankyoreh, 2007) protesters succeeded in drawing sympathy from the public that was hostile to labour strikes in general. Politicians talked about “returning our mothers to our homes.” The

NLU, mostly consisting of young, regular workers whose working conditions were significantly better, benefited from such framing of the demonstration as “a struggle for eliminating discrimination of irregular workers,” which was important in garnering external support to pressure the unrelenting firm. Citizens responded with boycotting the Group EL and, interest groups, enterprise unions, and pro-labour political parties joined in the strikes snowballing the E-N struggle to a nationwide Irregular workers movement.

On July 10th, the management finally came out to the negotiation table for both unions. Unions continued to protest ‘to have leverage at the negotiation table.’¹³ The Korean Thanksgiving day (which fell on the third week of September in 2007) is one of the two biggest national holidays of the year, when the greatest proportion of revenue is reaped for retailers such as N and H. If protests ended before Thanksgiving, the firms could partially make up for the loss they have incurred, estimated at fifty to hundred million dollars from sit-down protests and boycotts during previous months. The government had the Annual Inspection of State Administration approaching in October and the presidential election in December. The Labour minister, who was open about wanting to run for the National Assembly the following year, pressured the management for more active negotiations. By now, the strikes evolved into a contention between the labour and the capital on the issue of temporary work, the former back by the KCTU and the latter by the Korea Employers Federation, the KCTU’s enterprise counterpart. The coalition was fighting on behalf of the “8,500,000 irregular workers.”¹⁴ The public was judging the government for the newly enacted Law. All the eyes and ears were on the negotiation table, since whatever the outcome, it was sending out a signal on how unions and firms could navigate the irregular protection Act.

4.3 Coalition Dissolution

In the meantime, signs of tension between the two unions started to emerge. Though the members of the two unions frequently engaged in collective protests, a collective identity did not emerge easily. Differences of the two unions became more evident at the strike sites as well as during the negotiations. Each union was a relatively homogenous group in age, sex, marital and employment statuses. The NLU mainly consisted of young, regularly employed single female workers while the EGLU consisted of older, temporarily-employed married ones. Since the coalition's main activity was protests where all the members physically sat side-by-side for long stretches of time, the lack of sense of unity or solidarity, the 'we-ness,' among members weakened the alliance. Cultural difference was apparent. The younger NLU women were more reserved and quieter. 'Because they are young in their twenties, they will just come and sit there, re-do their make-up, watch TV, send text messages and play video games on their cellular phones.'¹⁵ While from the point of view of the NLU workers, 'the EGLU women were too reckless not thinking about the consequences.'¹⁶ Differences in organizational resource levels displayed in the protest sites distressed the EGLU members as protests continued. An example that came up in multiple interviews was lunch and transportation.¹⁷ 'When the NLU members ate lunch boxes of 5,000 Korean Won (US \$4.00) value, the EGLU members ate a simple sushi roll (kim-bob) of 1,000 Korean Won (US \$0.80) value. This might not seem like a big deal but imagine this happening every day for three months. The NLU members took a rented bus to protest sites while the EGLU members had to take public transportation.'

Mostly, the fact that NLU members were mostly regular workers when we were not ... The clear difference of status lessened our spirits.’ (Lee Kyung Ok, interview 26 July 2018)

Organizational differences meant varying goals, which determined the relative receptiveness of firms towards the two unions at the negotiation table. In September right before the thanksgiving holidays, the NLU talks progressed at a fast pace because the management was willing to compromise on the permanent worker issues. Table 1 and 2 shows the claims of the two unions and responses of the firms. Reckoning that the firm was not willing to yield on the irregular worker issues, which was basically all of their claims, the EGLU cancelled the scheduled meeting to go on to another sit-down strike on the September 16th despite warnings from the firm and the government. The NLU, in the process of drafting its agreement with the firm, declined to join the EGLU. Multiple interviewees point to this period as the time when the coalition was seriously shaken.¹⁸ Though the unions had concurred that the negotiation was a separate process and that any organization that came to an agreement first should leave the strike site, there were pressures within as well as outside the coalition to coordinate the protests, negotiation and agreement. The understanding was now breached with the NLU choosing to negotiate while the EGLU chose to protest.

<Insert Table 1 about here>

<Insert Table 2 about here>

The NLU further retracted from the coalition as they realized that being a part of the coalition as well as the temporary workers movement was hampering the

progression of their negotiations. First, the coalition put the NLU on a weaker footing with the firm. KHJ, one of the leaders of the NLU reflected that the negotiation per se would have progressed more smoothly if the union had operated by itself. “We were a union of permanent workers, in any case. If we had ignored the EGLU’s (request to join forces) and had compromised with the firm, I think we could have ended up with a better agreement even on the temporary workers’ claims”¹⁹ Though it was true that the broader social alliance and presence of the major interest parties such as the KCTU led the firm to the negotiation table, they at the same time restricted the options of the firm and the union. An KCTU staff member that collaborated closely with the NLU, recalled that “the firm at first was not so adamant against the union when the negotiation began, but slowly became more so (influenced by the positions of the KEF).”²⁰ The management tried to play the media to appease the public rather than to talk to the union, holding press conferences on what they were willing to offer to the union before the actual negotiations, and presenting alternatives to the unions.²¹

Coordinating claims as well the tactics retrospectively seemed to have been unhelpful to the NLU as well.²² Even though the negotiations were agreed to be a separate process, the alignment of the claims of the two unions especially of the irregular work related ones were apparent during the first months as shown in Table 1 and Table 2, which had restricted the NLU’s options in the negotiation processes. On the tactical front, the NLU was led into a sit-down strike by the EGLU, from which the raised charges haunted the organization for years to come without much positive outcome: the sit-down strike succeeded in drawing national attention to the coalition, but the NLU may not have needed it to get themselves to the negotiation table. Lack of recognition and representation also frustrated the members of the NLU.²³

Though the organization's foremost concern was the permanent workers' forced transfers, it was rarely mentioned in the media. Table 3 show the number of articles that mention the NLU's key regular worker related claim, "forced transfers" out of all the articles from daily newspapers. During the period of January 2007 to August 2008, out of 2248 articles that covered both the NLU and EGLU, only 50 of them (2.22%) mentioned forced transfers. Even during July 2007 with most media coverage, it was only 14 out of 907 articles that mentioned the phrase. Part of it was strategic. Though in the formal statements of the NLU included issues of restructuring and forced transfers, in order to advertise their strikes to the public, the union promoted the irregular workers issues.²⁴ Though the members recognized that the regular workers' forced transfers would not be solved without solving the irregular worker's problem, the framing of their strike as "irregular workers struggle" "constantly haunted the leadership as well as the members."²⁵ The issue frames to take advantage of the opening of the political opportunity structure in the end contributed in marginalizing the NLU's objectives and naturally the members started to question why they were on strike. The EGLU members mentioned that the "meaning finding" through external solidarity building and media attention helped them think about the significance of their work and encouraged them to continue.²⁶ The NLU on the other hand did not have much opportunity to "see their work in a larger context" because their efforts and the role they were playing in the irregular workers' movement was not paid much attention to. (Cole and Luna 2010: 85)

<table 3 insert here>

The order of the names of the unions featured in newspaper articles was also a pointed issue. Originally named the “N-E” struggle in July, the strike was mainly referred to “E-N” struggle from August 2017 as we can see in the Picture 1.

<Insert Picture 1 about here>

The picture 2 compares the frequency that the leaders of each union was mentioned during the period of June and July. Comparing the week beginning on the July 9th when the EGLU and the NLU were both on occupation strike, KGW the leader of the EGLU, was mentioned twice as more than PYS, the leader of the NLU.

<Insert Picture 2 about here>

For the EGLU, the seeming lack of commitment inferred from the NLU’s reluctance in employing more aggressive tactics as well as the NLU’s shown willingness to negotiate with the firm generated resentment, which eventually led it to consider the NLU as unreliable. Difference in the organizational goal and situational differences led to different preferred tactics. A week before the planned sit-down strike on the day that the Act was to go on effect, the NLU leadership announced to the Joint Strike Headquarters that they were not going to join the EGLU: the NLU had not come to an internal agreement regarding the occupation strike. One of the leaders of the EGLU recalls it as a shock and a disappointment. When the sit-down strike of the EGLU became the focus of all media, the NLU started to feel pressure internally and externally,²⁷ which in the end led them to follow suit eight days later. In October, when

KGW, then released from jail requested to come to its meeting to persuade the NLU members to participate in more active protests, it was declined for reasons of internal regulation. Throughout the strike, the NLU was embittered that the EGLU constantly demanded that the NLU do more.²⁸

“The NLU had never lost a fight. Did not have a long term striking experience. The NLU were mainly regular workers that had their employment contracts guaranteed, always trying to seek a way to leave the strike. ... NLU fought because it was resentful towards the firm, we fought because we were desperate.” (Gyung Wook Kim, interview)

5. Discussion

Despite active negotiations in September 2007, the NLU failed to come to an agreement in the end because its management was unwilling to meet the demands related to irregular workers and insisted on punishing the union leadership. For the EGLU, there was no negotiation proper: neither side relented from their original positions the few times the firm and the union actually got together. By the end of 2007, the media and the public had lost interest, and protests once participated by over a thousand people shrank rapidly in size as strikers crossed the picket-line or moved on to other jobs. By June 2008, there were only fifty to sixty strikers at each union’s protests. The NLU, after 434 days of strike, reached an agreement with the Group EL early September of 2008 with significantly worse terms than what could have been possible the year before. The NLU not only gave up on all clauses in order to avoid

legal charges (which surmounted to approximately 10 million US dollars) and the re-employment of the regular workers that were on strike, the union agreed to giving up its rights to protest till the end of 2010. The 36 cashiers with lapsed contracts were rehired with brand-new contracts with no employment guarantee.

In June 2008, the Group announced its plan to sell H (the EGLU's base firm) to a SHT, another retailing conglomerate. The EGLU drew out a collective agreement with SHT in November 2008 after 510 days of strike. Unlike the Collective Agreement of the NLU and the Group EL, they agreed on directly employing temporary workers (i.e., no outsourcing) and increasing their wages as well as granting paid leaves. The union members that were fired because of the strike were also re-employed and the legal charges were settled. The labour union in turn withdrew its rights to protest till the end of 2010 and agreed upon delegating the wage increases to the firm for a certain period of time. The union representatives retired voluntarily.

It is not easy to see how a sustained coalition could have helped in the negotiation process: the Group EL lost willingness to negotiate after September 2007 and more so after December 2007 when a business-friendly government came to power. The negotiation outcomes of the NLU that remained under the Group EL were dismal and according to the members of the EGLU their relatively favorable collective agreement was drawn because the new management at SHT was more willing to compromise.²⁹

Diani (1997) proposes that we look at a social movements' capacity to produce social capital, which is based on mutual trust and recognition among movement actors, as one of the outcomes. Though the weakening of the coalition may not have affected the immediate strike outcomes for the respective unions, if the coalition was sustained,

it could have positively influenced subsequent trade union politics, labour market policy, and cultural norms and codes of collective action of workers of different contract types. (Diani 1997 p135) The NLU never recovered and in 2011 left the KFCU. It could have provided a peace of mind to the protesters during the strike and the after. The second round of interviews on the union leadership in 2018 revealed that there were still unresolved emotional issues towards each other.³⁰

What extends the longevity of a coalition? In the case of the NLU and the EGLU, the coalition failed to foster a collective identity as otherness became more apparent in the protest sites as well as during the negotiations. Though they have collectively engaged in a risk taking behavior – sit in strike – (Smith 2002), the decision making process up to it and subsequent discordance of coordination afterwards seem to have weakened the collective identity. A more heartfelt communication within each organization as well as across the two unions could have helped the relationship. Recognition of each other’s positive role in the movement and accepting that one was doing one’s best would have provided peace of mind.

6. Conclusion

Building a coalition against a common unrelenting firm not only enabled the EGLU and NLU to exert greater pressure but also helped to draw more financial and political support. The political opportunities, memberships, and resources of the two parties were complementary at the beginning of the collective strike. Though as negotiation began, benefits of maintaining a coalition lessened, the otherness that became more apparent with the varying negotiation progression and collective activities hampered a

collective identity from forming and weakened the coalition. The NLU members realized that being involved in the coalition as well as the temporary workers' movement as a symbol of solidarity was not helping the progression of its negotiations. Broader social alliance around temporary work alienated the NLU members and goals, and the lack of recognition of its contributions withdrew them further. For the EGLU members, the seeming lack of commitment of the NLU to the strikes as well as to the coalition led it to consider the NLU as unreliable.

The temporary and permanent labour in South Korea has often failed to cooperate with one another. Permanent workers have been often quoted as saying that they consider the temporary workers as buffers of their job security. The upgrade of temporary workers has resulted in tension between the temporaries and the permanents because it was framed such that the benefits will be shared with those who are not as qualified. From that light, the collaborative work of the EGLU and the NLU, though it was not able to sustain itself, was a valiant attempt to bridge the divide.

This is a vast area that could be subject to future research. An empirical research on unions in terms of their coalition patterns regarding the structural as well as organizational factors could be performed to test the conclusions drawn. From the trade union's perspective, building mutual trust and recognition between workers and unions representing different employment types is also a topic that should be investigated further.

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Table 1. NLU Demand and Management Response (by when?? DATE??)

NLU Demand	Management Response
elimination of outsourcing with respect to the adoption of the PDA system (not in EGLU's demands)	Elimination of outsourcing after ten months
Re-installment of regular workers who were involuntarily transferred to a different branch the previous year (not in EGLU's demands)	Re-installment of involuntarily transferred regular workers after individual consultation with administrators
Employment guarantee for irregular workers of three months or more	Employment guarantee for one more contractual term for irregular workers of three months or more
Rehiring all the workers that were fired or faced contract lapse after January 2007 and guarantee their employment	Rehiring of the workers that were laid off for one more term and "try" to employ them continuously
Withdrawal of all charges initiated by the firm to the union members from sit-in protests	withdrawal of all charges for the workers but not of the union leadership.

Table 2. EGLU Demand and Management Response

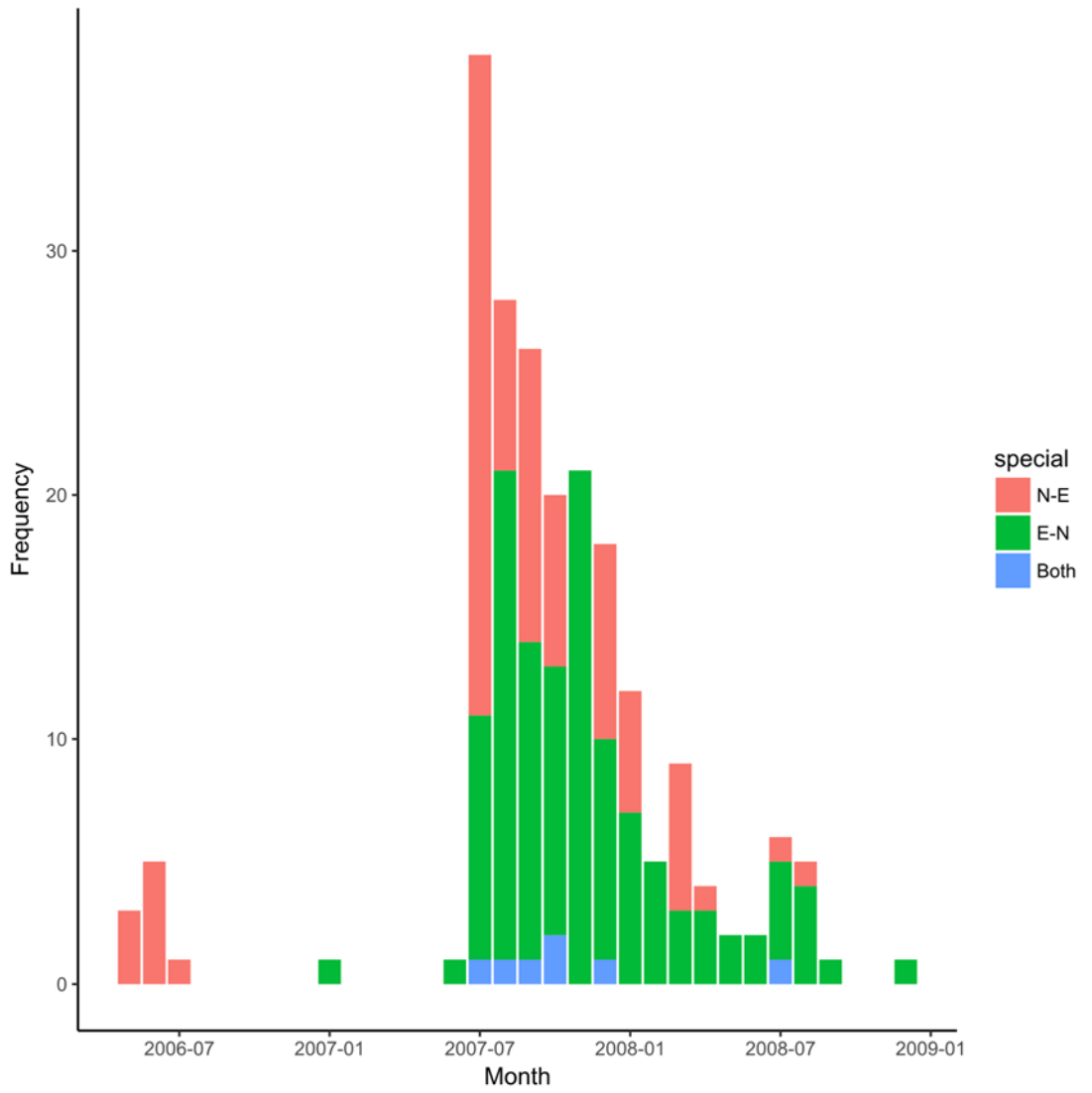
EGLU Demand	Management
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Re-employment of workers that have been fired from January 2007	Re-employment of fired workers for another contractual period
Upgrading the irregular contract to regular ones for workers of 18 months or more	Employment guarantee of workers of 18 months or more but with a different pay schedule than the regular workers
Employment guarantee of irregular workers of three months and more	One more contractual period for workers of three months and more
Withdraw all charges against the union members initiated by the firm from sit-in protests	Withdrawal of all charges of the workers but not of the union leadership

Table 3. Number of articles that mention “forced transfers”

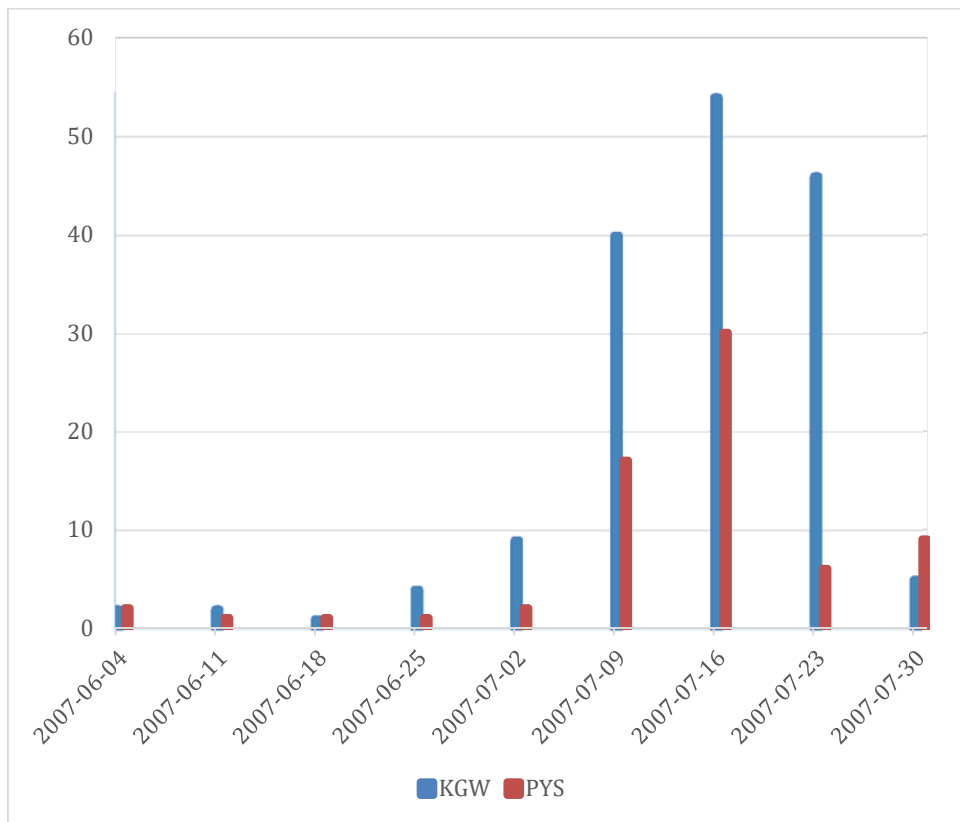
	Month in 2007							Month in 2008								Total
	6	7	8	9	10	11	12	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	
No	45	893	272	152	92	99	81	41	30	107	49	108	47	86	59	2161
Yes	3	14	6	5	2	1	3	2	0	0	0	0	0	4	4	44
Total	48	907	278	157	94	100	84	43	30	107	49	108	47	90	63	2205
%	6.3	1.5	2.2	3.2	2.1	1.0	3.6	4.7	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	4.4	6.3	2.0

Picture 1



Picture 2. Mention of KGW (leader of the EGLU) and PYS (leader of the NLU)

in the newspaper articles



Endnotes:

- ¹ There is no consensus in drawing the boundary of irregular work: depending on the definition used, the percentage of irregular workers in South Korea in 2005 ranged from 29.1% to 47%. I use the definition that is consistent with the OECD definition of irregular employees which results in the figure 29.1%: “workers under fixed-term contracts, those who do not expect their jobs to last for involuntary and non-economic reasons, temporary agency workers, and on-call workers.” (Grubb, Lee, and Tergeist 2007: 16-17) Controlling for job characteristics, the estimated wage gap between regular and irregular workers can range from 5% (Nam et al., 2005) to 19% (Ahn, 2004). I use the term temporary and irregular workers interchangeably in this article.
- ² The number of irregular workers increased from 17% in 2001 to 29% in 2005 of the total employment, which was the second highest rate in all OECD countries (Grubb, Lee, and Tergeist 2007: 16).
- ³ Speech of Shim Sang Jung (23 July 2007) from tape 085
- ⁴ Interview with Ho Jin Kim (10 October 2018)
- ⁵ Interview with Gyung Wook Kim (23 June 2018)
- ⁶ Interview with Nam Shin Lee (3 October 2018)
- ⁷ Interview with Kyong Ok Lee (26 July 2018) and Nam Shin Lee (3 October 2018)
- ⁸ Interview with Ho Jin Kim (10 October 2018) and
- ⁹ Interviews with Yoon Gak Jung (3 June 2008) and Chun Ho Lee (5 June 2008)
- ¹⁰ EGLU group interview (30 May 2007)
- ¹¹ Interview with Kim Seok Won (12 September 2018) and Gyung Wook Kim (6 June 2018)
- ¹² Interview with Ho Jin Kim (29 May 2007)
- ¹³ Interview with Chun Ho Lee (5 June 2008)
- ¹⁴ Speech of Shim Sang Jung (23 July 2007) from tape 085
- ¹⁵ EGLU group interview (30 May 2007)
- ¹⁶ NLU group interview (XX June 2007)
- ¹⁷ Interview with Kyong Ok Lee (26 July 2018) and Koo Eun Hoe (15 July 2008)
Jung Kyung Seop (5 June 2008)
- ¹⁸ interview Kim Ho Jin 2008, Kim Seok Won, Jung YoonKak Hur YooGyung Lee
ChunHo
- ¹⁹ Interview with Ho Jin Kim (10 October 2018)
- ²⁰ Interview with Kwon Mi Jung (10 October 2018)
- ²¹ Interview with Ho Jin Kim (10 October 2018) and Gyung Wook Kim (23 June 2018)
- ²² Interview with Ho Jin Kim (10 October 2018) and Seok Won Kim (12 September
2018)
- ²³ Interview with Chun Ho Lee (5 June 2008)
- ²⁴ Interview with Kwon Mi Jung (10 October 2018)
- ²⁵ Interview with Ho Jin Kim (10 October 2018)
- ²⁶ Interview with Mi Rae Kim (22 June 2018)
- ²⁷ Interview with Ho Jin Kim (10 October 2018), Seok Won Kim (12 September 2018), KGW
(23 June 2018)
- ²⁸ Interview KGW LNS KHJ KSW
- ²⁹ Interview with KGW (23 June 2018)
- ³⁰ Interview with KGW, KSW, LNS, LKO