The ‘People’s House’ and a New Move to Organize “Resident Workers” in Korea

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Introduction

Recently, there has been an increasing body of research on community unionism. Research has generally defined it in three ways[1]. First is the effort of labor unions to ally with non-labor community groups to organize workers or to raise the wages of low-wage jobs (Tattersall 2009, Holgate and Wills 2007, Luce 2007, Turner and Cornfield 2007). The effort is referred to as a labor-community coalition. A second meaning is the practice of more autonomous community–based labor groups, which include worker centers and other labor groups in America and Canada (Moody 2009, Black 2005, Cranford, Gellatly, Lado and Vosko 2004). The third meaning is the practice of conventional or newly recognized labor unions that organize workers in geographical communities beyond workplaces or industries and develop community links (Lee 2012, Byford 2009, Wills 2001). Jane Wills (2001) includes the Iron and Steel Trades Confederation (ISTC), which has transformed itself into a community union, as one United Kingdom organization that is doing the most to develop community unionism.

Community unionism has attracted much attention from researchers and union leaders who see in it a new model of unionism that organizes and represents “hard-to-organize” workers and has been able to overcome the stagnation labor movements have experienced under the impact of neoliberal globalization. As for the practices of community unionism, however, there seems much to be done. Based on her qualitative research on the ISTC, Wills concludes that “the union had not done as much as it could to fully embrace the spirit of community unionism, and in many ways the community was being used as a means to strengthen workplace organizing efforts. The ISTC did not appear to be a community union that focused on building long term community links in industrial communities” (Wills 2001:479). Moreover, Amanda Tattersall (2009), who explored coalitions between unions and community organizations, suggests that renewing union influence must involve unions embracing a wide net of relationships with community organizations.

In Korea during the late 1990s, when the growth of industrial unions was at its peak, labor unions had little interest in community unionism. In the post-2000 era, a new type of labor union, the regional general union, has put community unionism into practice (Lee 2012). These regional unions organize workers on a geographical basis across occupations and industries and seek to organize non-regular workers that regular workers’ unions have been reluctant to organize. They are concerned not only with improving members’ employment and working conditions, but in reforming social institutions, they hope to boost the livelihood and welfare of local residents. They form coalitions

with community groups, other labor unions, progressive political parties, and local residents in the region when they fight against job losses among members or for institutional reform. Some regional general unions are oriented to "resident labor unions," which serve both residents and workers.

The vast majority of workers employed by small factories, shops, subcontractors, and local government in local regions are both unorganized and precarious workers. One movement that organizes resident workers, the People's House (*minjunguijip* in Korean), provides a space for workers, residents, progressive party members, labor unions, and community organizations. There, groups can meet and communicate with each other and form networks. The Houses were established in several wards of Seoul, in Incheon and in Gwangju after 2008. Leaders of the People's Houses have stressed the necessity of organizing regional workers on the basis of labor and livelihood issues. The People's Houses provide a space for workers who want to study labor law and fight for to improve labor conditions. They hold events for residents to meet and talk about food security, regional environmental problems, labor rights, and current social and economic issues such as the privatization of public corporations. They also support small local labor unions, which often have no offices of their own, by offering a meeting space. They make efforts to organize homecare workers, visiting nurses, and other neighborhood-based workers.

This paper will examine how People's Houses organize resident workers and discuss the implications of their practices for the Korean labor movement. Furthermore, I will compare People's Houses in Korea and American community-based worker centers, "which engage in a combination of service, advocacy, and organizing to provide support to low-wage workers" (Fine 2005:3), in terms of how the two engage in organizing.

Research Methodology and Overviews of People's Houses

I conducted a number of interviews with leaders of five People's Houses from September 2012 to March 2014 and observed activities at People's Houses in March 2014.

There were five People's Houses in Korea as of March 2014. The first, Mapo People's House, opened in Mapo-gu, Seoul, in 2008. According to its leader, it was founded to provide labor unions, progressive parties, and community organizations with space, a forum for communication, and aid in forming networks. Two years later, Jungnang People's House opened in Jungnang-gu, Seoul. Between 2011 and 2013, People's Houses opened in Kuro-gu, Seoul; Kwangsan-gu, Gwangju City; and Seo-gu, Incheon City.

The New Progressive Party, which later changed its name to Labor Party, was involved in founding the People's Houses. Most People's House leaders have been presidents or members of the Party's regional committees. Many members of the Party joined People's Houses, but the Labor Party and the People's House work independently of each other.

To found People's Houses, leaders issued bonds[2] or raised a brick fund for renting and decorating an office or house and for initial operating expenses. While the Mapo People's House issued bonds, the other four People's Houses raised brick funds. Many Labor Party

members and labor unions bought bonds or contributed money. Some labor unions officially contributed considerable money.

People's houses each reflect different regional characteristics. Mapo-gu, located in the middle-west of the Hangang river of Seoul, is a middle-class region where many civil society organizations have their offices. Jungnang-gu, in the northeast region of Seoul, is a bedroom suburb and one of the poorer regions of Seoul. Kuro-gu, located in the southwest of Seoul, is a large industrial complex, which has changed from a center of labor-intensive industry to a cutting edge IT technology sector. Kwangsan-gu of Gwangju City has five industrial complexes in an urban-rural complex with 1,300 companies engaged in automobile, electric parts, textile, chemical, tire, food, and leather businesses. Seo-gu, a part of northwest Incheon City, is a region where about 5,000 small-to medium-sized companies are in machinery, chemical, metal, electronics, and IT fields.

People's Houses aim to be meeting and communicating spaces, *saranbang* in Korean, for unions, community organizations, political parties, and residents. To achieve the aim, they operate programs such as informal cooking and eating dinner (*bapsang* in Korean), cultivating vegetable gardens (*teotpat* in Korean), and public lectures, as well as providing meeting rooms and workshop spaces to labor unions and community organizations. All the Houses share the above activities in common, but Seo-gu and Gwangju Houses provide services to foreign workers who work or live in the regions. Services include Korean language classes and counselling on labor problems, and organizing campaigns to make back pay claims. Kuro People's House set up Kuro FM, a community radio podcast service, through which area workers broadcast stories about their lives and jobs.

Membership Structures and Activities of the Five People's Houses

1. Mapo People's House was established in 2008. As of March 2014 it had nine organizational members (six labor unions, one retailers' association and two civil society organizations) and about four hundred individual members. The steering committee consists of eleven members including three co-leaders. One staff member works fulltime. The monthly budget is about 5 million won (approximately 500,000 yen), which goes to pay a monthly rent of 2.7 million won (approximately 270,000 yen), a modest staff salary, maintenance expenses, and so on. The monthly budget revenue comes mainly from members' dues, but the dues fail to cover the entire monthly budget. It runs a pub for one night at the end of year to fill its budget deficit[3]. The People's House does not take any money from the Mapo-gu local government.

Mapo House operates several programs of its own. First, it operates free after-school-study programs for elementary school and middle school students from low-income families in the Mapo region. Second, it delivers two kinds of lecture. One is a "lecture for living" to provide practical day-to-day knowledge; the other is a "lecture for citizens" on the liberal arts and social sciences. Third, it is building a regional welfare network of which the poor, including non-regular workers, in the region make use. The network includes a clinic, psychological counselor, lawyer, and labor attorney.

In 2012, it, together with civil society organizations, provided support to small shop

owners who undertook a campaign against the opening of a large supermarket near an old regional market. People's House members and civil society organizations cooperated in collecting signatures from local residents and small-shop owner demonstrations that shut down their shops five times against the opening of a large supermarket. Even conservatively oriented shop owners admitted that they could not have achieved anything without the help of the People's House.

2. Jungnang People's House was established in August 2010, but it was hardly active in 2011. It restarted in 2012 when Park Won-Soon, mayor of Seoul, initiated the Village Community Project (*maeulkongdongchesaeop*, in Korean).

Jungnang's People's House had one labor union and fifty-five individual members as of March 2014. The steering committee consists of seven members including two co-leaders. There is no fulltime staff. One of the co-leaders works without pay after work and on weekends. The monthly budget is about 600,000 won (approximately 60,000 yen), which pays a monthly rent of 450,000 won (approximately 45,000 yen) and maintenance expenses. Member fees barely cover the monthly budget.

One of its main activities is broadcasting "Jungnang Star Radio," which features "Happy Radio," a program with three local mothers who talk about their lives and current topics such as the Olympic Winter Games, and "Chungkunanbang," which delivers a show of three guys talking about whatever topic excites them. The House operates a monthly forum, which is cohosted by a community organization Jungnang Huimang Yeondae. It publishes a bimonthly web magazine reporting on regional issues and spreading progressive political idea. Moreover, it works to build Jungnang Maeul Net, a network of community organizations, and it provides labor law advice and counselling services on labor and youth problems at the train station near the office.

3. Kuro People's House opened its doors in August 2011. It had two organizational members (two labor unions) and about two hundred individual members as of March 2014. It employs a fulltime staffer. The leader works without pay. The monthly budget is about 3 million won (approximately 300,000 yen), which pays for monthly rent, modest staff salary, and maintenance expenses. Member dues cannot cover the monthly budget, and it goes into the red, but the deficit was below 200,000 won (approximately 20,000 yen) per month as of March 2014.

Kuro People's House organizes non-regular workers in the region and operates programs through which labor unions in the region meet and communicate with residents, and it provides a space for union members to meet. Through its organizing, it supported visiting nurses employed at Kuro-gu Public Health Center in their fight to transform an unstable ten-month contract to an unlimited contract. Visiting nurses gathered and studied labor laws at the People's House. They staged a sit-in for ten days at an office of the head of Kuro Ward, but they failed to acquire the unlimited contract because Kuro-gu local government introduced a test selecting a few unlimited contractors from among them instead of employing all of visiting nurses as unlimited contractors. While making efforts to organize care workers in Kuro-gu together with the Care Workers branch of the Korean Healthcare Workers' Union (KHWU), it ran a stretching class for care workers. Moreover, it runs a program of lectures by labor unions on

current issues including the privatization of a public corporation, the national pension system, and so on. The Union of Korea Gas Corporation Workers held a lecture on the privatization of the Korea Gas Corporation and the gas price system. Local residents had a positive response to the lecture. It also created a project in which labor union members painted murals on the shutters of small shops in the region. It asked labor unions to recruit volunteers to participate in the project. Union members who volunteered for the project met shopkeepers and listened to their life stories and dreams and painted murals on shutters. The lectures and project seek to give local residents and shopkeepers a broader perspective of labor unions and their members. Moreover, Kuro People's House and the general union Huimang Yeondae have designed programs to educate youth about labor laws.

Kuro People's House was involved in advocating for an ordinance to measure the radiation levels of school lunches. It recruited volunteer residents to collect eight thousand signatures, more than the seven thousand (two percent) residents in Kuro-gu who were needed to qualify an ordinance proposal to go before the Kuro-gu ward assembly.

4. Seo-gu People's House was established in April 2013. It has three organizational members (two labor unions and the Seo-gu Council of the Labor Party) and about one hundred fifty individual members as of February 2014. The steering committee consists of thirteen members including four co-leaders who work without pay. A secretary-general works fulltime. The monthly budget is about 3.5 million won (approximately 350,000 yen), which goes to paying a modest staff salary, the monthly rent, maintenance expenses, and operating expenses for programs. Member dues do not cover the whole of the monthly budget. Seo-gu House raises money to fill the gap through sales of foodstuffs or contributions.

The Seo-gu House conducts several projects. First, to gain a footing in organizing workers, it conducts bi-weekly labor counselling services and opens a labor law class for workers residing in the region. It supports non-regular workers and unorganized workers to fight for their labor rights and better working conditions. Currently, it hosts a press briefing to address care workers' poor working conditions. It also has waged a campaign to provide migrant workers with labor counselling and information about the minimum wage system. It opened Korean language classes for migrant workers and foreign wives from multicultural families. Six volunteers teach Korean to about forty migrant workers and foreign wives in beginner and advanced courses. Moreover, it plays a bridge role to connect labor unions with residents. For example, it farms vegetable gardens and prepares a large amount of kimchi with members of the KM&I branch of the Metal Workers Union and shares vegetable crops and kimchi with local residents. Through an arrangement made by the Seo-gu People's House, the Union of Facilities Management Workers offers scholarships to students from poor families, and the Union of Korea Gas Technology Corporation Workers volunteers to repair gas and electric facilities at local residents' houses.

Second, Seo-gu People's House has been building a network of local labor unions and community organizations that makes regional issues known to local residents. Along with several community organizations it is waging a campaign to reform ordinances related to

resident involvement in the local government budget committee system. And it is engaged in a signature collection campaign against building a factory that will produce dangerous materials in residential area.

Third, Seo-gu People's House operates programs in which residents, especially children and youth engage. It operates classes that encourage children's creative thinking through cooking, movie viewing, Korean *Tal* mask-making, drumming, experiencing ecosystems, and it provides guitar classes for youths and residents. Members run the programs. The People's House also operates programs for residents to cook healthy foods and make eco-friendly soaps.

5. Gwangju People's House was established in July 2012. It had two organizational members (two labor unions) and one hundred eighty individual members as of March 2014. It has six co-leaders and one executive officer. The senior leader and the executive officer, both fulltime union officers, work without pay. A secretary-general works fulltime. The monthly budget is about 2 million won (approximately 200,000 yen), which goes toward a modest staff salary, monthly rent, maintenance expenses, and operating expenses for programs. As in the other cases, the monthly budget is not covered by members' dues, which are about 1.8 million won (approximately 180,000 yen). It raises money by running a one-night pub.

The Gwangju House provides workers labor counselling services on the street once a week. It currently offers advice about unpaid wages to ethnically Korean migrant workers from China and operates a labor education course together with a labor education organization. Moreover, it engages in providing support to migrant workers. It opened a Korean language class for foreign workers from Myanmar and Nepal and launched a campaign for foreign workers to recover back wages after several foreign construction workers visited the People's House in March 2014 to consult about unpaid wages. It offered rooms for sleeping and meals to about 70 migrant workers from Myanmar and Vietnam. To reclaim unpaid wages, it formed the Regional Committee for Countermeasures with the Gwangju Regional Council Law Center of the Korean Confederation of Trade Union (KCTU), the Gwangju/Jeonnam Regional Branch of the Korean Metal Workers' Union (KMWU), the Gwangju Support Center for Migrant Women, and civil society organizations. The Committee called for the president of a subcontracting firm that employed migrant workers to pay back wages. The subcontractor, however, went into court receivership. Therefore, the Committee negotiated over back wages with construction companies that contracted construction orders to the subcontractor. It publicized the migrant workers' unpaid wage claims through the media and appealed for financial and material support from citizens, labor unions, and civic organizations. The efforts were successful. The construction companies paid back wages to migrant workers, who all found their new jobs in several regions by June 2014 through job searching assistance provided by regional job centers of the Ministry of Employment and Labor.

The People's House opened classes in philosophy, book club activities for teenagers, and a small library for residents. It hosts a festival in spring and autumn for local residents and its members grow a variety of vegetables on the House's roof. Its home-grown Chinese

cabbage is used to make a large batch of kimchi to greet the onset of winter. Members distribute the kimchi to local elderly who live alone. Its volunteers also provide haircuts to the disabled and elderly.

Characteristics of Worker Centers in the United States

Because they represent new forms of worker organization and challenge traditional unionism worker centers have garnered much attention. Kim Moody considers them to be an "important addition to working class organization in the US" (Moody 2009:155). They play "an indispensable role in helping immigrants navigate the world of work in the United States" and provide "low-wage workers a range of opportunities for expressing their 'collective voice' as well as for taking collective action" (Fine 2005:1-2). Moreover, worker centers share the common goal of building solidarities across workplaces and jobs and linking labor issues to other dimensions of social justice (Cranford, C.J., Gellatly, M., Lado, D. and Vosko, L.F. 2004).

I will summarize the organizational characteristics, activities, membership, staff, budget, and networks of worker centers on the basis of the findings from Janice Fine's (2005) survey of 40 worker centers and nine case studies and the exploration by Fine (2011) of the ways that worker centers since 2006 have matured and built on their strengths.

The vast majority of worker centers emerged in the United States in the 1990s. They grew from five centers in 1992 to at least 139 in 2005. Estimates stood at more than 200 in 2011. Although worker centers are far from homogeneous, centers are defined as community-based and community-led organizations that engage in a combination of service, advocacy, and organizing to provide support to low-wage workers[4]. The majority have grown to serve predominantly or exclusively immigrant populations. Their organizing and advocacy work, particularly, set worker centers apart from immigrant service organizations.

Organizing and advocacy

Worker centers organize and advocate in three areas:

1. Raising wages and improving working conditions in low-wage industries.
2. Responding to attacks on immigrants in their communities and fighting for immigration reform.
3. Addressing issues of immigrant civic integration and political incorporation.

Centers apply a variety of strategic approaches to their organizing and advocacy work, including direct economic action organizing strategies that target single employers, large corporations, and entire industries. Centers deploy a broad range of approaches to compel employers to treat workers better and to push industries to improve conditions on the job. These include personal calls to employers demanding they pay back wages, and picketing when they don't, filing wage claims, boycotts, and publicizing examples of non-payment of wages.

Besides economic action, another strategic priority of worker centers involves public policy organizing and advocacy work. The public policy work of centers includes partnering with or targeting government agencies to ensure enforcement of existing laws and regulations, building political and community support for

the passage of reforms that require behavioral changes on the part of employers and industries, and fighting for immigrant reform and immigrant rights.

Service Provision

The range of services provided by centers is extensive. They include direct services such as help with filing wage claims, English as a second language (ESL) classes, and other immigration-related assistance. They also include referrals for health care and connecting workers with services provided by other agencies. While legal assistance and ESL classes are the most common services provided, individual centers tailor their offerings to local area needs. In offering ESL classes, most combine teaching English with presenting information and fostering discussions that encourage participants to think critically and analytically about society and their places within it.

Leadership development

For many worker centers, leadership development is critical to their mission. The orientation of worker centers toward long-term change makes centers view leadership development, political education, and membership empowerment among the most important "products" of their work. They strive to involve, train, and promote organizational leaders and activists from within the ranks of the low-wage immigrant worker community. In addition, many worker centers work to create a culture of democratic governance and decision-making that promotes leadership development. Most centers offer a workers' rights course that provides basic information about how U.S. employment and social welfare laws work. The organizations consciously follow a Freirian pedagogy aimed at developing students' critical analytical skills. Another component of developing members' critical skills and capacity to act is political education. Centers work to develop a curriculum that provides members with tools to talk about globalization, trade policies, and other complex issues.

Membership

Many centers do not view membership size as a central measurement of organizational strength or power. Most worker centers have small membership bases of 500 persons or less. Many centers do not view dues as an important measure of worker commitment. Moreover, most centers have enormous trouble collecting dues because they have not yet figured out mechanisms for reliable dues collection[5]. Centers themselves have much looser structures than the more established organizational bureaucracies of labor unions.

Staff, budgets, and fundraising

Staffs are usually quite small, with most centers employing five or fewer employees. Worker centers have small budgets, and the vast majority of their funds go to paying modest staff salaries and covering center overhead. Most funds come from foundations. The balance comes from government, earned income, and grassroots fundraising, with tiny amounts also coming from dues. Worker centers have a problem of over-reliance on foundation funding. The unpredictability of foundation support year-to-year and the lack of funding source diversification make centers financially vulnerable and unstable.

Networks

Worker centers overall were under-networked at every level in the mid-2000s with the exception of local networks in Los Angeles. Organizations elsewhere were unable to aggregate power and support each other's campaigns. At the statewide and regional levels, the same vacuum existed; organizations might come together on some campaigns, but they were not working together on an ongoing basis. At the national level, day laborer centers aligned with the National Day Laborer Organizing Network (NDLON)[6] were the notable exception.

Many centers were also isolated, unaware not only what other worker centers were doing but also unacquainted with the activities of other organizations beyond their immediate networks. Moreover, most had no relationships with unions and knew little about what they were doing.

Since 2006, there has been a growing trend toward federation[7] in which strong individual centers have joined existing national networks or formed new ones. In the worker center world there have been institutional partnerships with unions[8] and government[9].

To sum up, worker centers and their networks have been playing increasingly important roles in a variety of new national formations around global worker justice, immigrant rights, the right to organize for workers historically excluded from collective bargaining rights and the right to decent work and living conditions in America's cities (Fine 2011).

Comparing People's Houses in Korea with worker centers in the United States

I will compare the People's House in Korea with the worker center in the United States in terms of how the two engage in organizing. I define organizing as a means through which workers can take action for economic and political change. Organizing means more than organizing workers into unions. It includes supporting workers to take direct economic action, fighting for public policy reform, engaging in worker leadership development, and promoting popular education to develop workers' critical thinking skills.

1. Membership structure

The People's House and the worker center are similar in focusing their work geographically. The two, however, are different in their organizing targets and their membership structure. The People's House organizes residents including non-regular workers, low-wage workers, and migrant workers, while the worker center organizes predominantly immigrant workers. The People's Houses are composed of members with a variety of affiliations such as political parties, labor unions, and civil society organizations, as well as local workers and residents. Membership in the People's House ranges from 55 to 400 persons somewhat fewer than worker centers, which peak at about 500 members. Many worker centers do not view membership size as a central measurement of organizational strength or power[10]. People's Houses, however, rely on member dues for financial sustainability and make efforts to increase members. While most worker centers have enormous trouble

collecting dues, People's Houses have arrangements to take monthly dues out of member bank accounts automatically.

2. Organizing direct economic action

Worker centers have carried out successful campaigns to compel individual employers to pay back wages to workers or to win economic improvements for low wage workers. They have called attention to exploitative industry practices and pioneered creative strategies, especially in circumstances of widespread subcontracting. Campaigns to intervene in labor markets through direct economic action, however, have had their greatest impact on labor markets and industries only through catalyzing government action or through local and state public policy initiatives.

For the most part People's Houses have not organized direct economic action, though, Kuro People's House and visiting nurses conducted campaigns to push the local government to create a stable labor contract for the nurses. Gwangju People's House organized a campaign to pressure construction companies that subcontracted construction work to pay back wages to migrant workers. Of the two campaigns, only the second was successful.

While worker centers share a common commitment to organizing direct economic action, People's Houses do not necessarily put a top priority on that. Most People's Houses apply a long-term approach to organizing direct economic action, so they conduct labor counselling for workers in the region.

3. Engaging in popular education

People's Houses and worker centers commonly view education as integral to organizing. Most worker centers offer a workers' rights course that provides basic information about how US employment and social welfare laws work. And many centers aim at developing workers' critical analytical skills and have worked to develop a curriculum of political education that provides members with tools to talk about complex issues other than labor and immigration laws. Therefore, even in offering ESL classes, most combine teaching English with fostering discussions that encourages participants to think critically and analytically about society and their places within it. People's Houses provide courses on labor laws and functions of unions to workers in the region. They also offer lectures on current economic, political, and social issues like privatization of public corporations and hospitals, the national pension system, innovative education systems and so on.

The two encourage workers to develop both critical thinking skills and capacity to take action, but People's Houses target more than workers. They also engage in developing critical thinking of residents, children, and teenagers because they consider it central to organizing and mobilizing local residents. And because People's Houses view organizing as a long-term project, they focus on popular education for children and teenagers.

4. Fighting for public policy reform

People's Houses and worker centers organize for public policy, but the two have contrasting approaches. Worker centers focus mainly on organizing to reform labor and immigration policies, whereas the People's Houses focus on organizing to reform or create ordinances about residents' rights at the local level.

Worker centers and their networks have

successfully placed labor standards enforcement on the public policy agenda at the state and national levels. They have established dynamic partnerships with government agencies, and they have won victories for workers long excluded from Wagner Act coverage. In 2010, after many years of publicizing abuses of nannies and domestic workers, Domestic Workers United (DWU) won passage in New York State of a Domestic Workers Bill of Rights[11]. Moreover, most worker centers are active participants in national and state immigration reform coalitions. They and their networks have been the building blocks of the immigrant rights movement at the federal, state, and local levels and, more recently, played a lead role in countering the right-wing efforts at the state and local levels to enforce aggressively punitive immigration laws.

Meanwhile, People's Houses have waged campaigns to create or reform regulations and laws that affect everyday life, for example for safe foods, resident participation in local administration, or campaigns against local environmental deterioration. The Kuro People's House organized a campaign to mandate school lunch radiation level measurements, and Seo-gu People's House waged a campaign to reform resident involvement in municipal budgeting and against the construction of a factory producing dangerous materials.

5. Partnerships with labor unions

People's Houses and worker centers organize alongside labor unions. Some worker centers, when they have been approached by a group of workers that would like to organize their workplaces, have contacted a union that is interested and handed the workers off to them. Other centers in similar circumstances have tried to maintain some level of involvement over the course of the organizing campaigns run by the union. A small number of centers have participated in joint organizing campaigns with unions.

People's Houses work with labor unions to organize workers or to broaden understanding of labor unions among local residents. Kuro People's House worked with the Care Workers branch of the KHWU to organize care workers residing in Kuro-gu and co-operated in a stretching class for care workers. It also works with unions in conducting a project painting murals on the shutters of small shops in Kuro-gu. The People's House in Seo-gu cooperates on regional projects by unions such as offering scholarships to students from the poor and disadvantaged families or repairing gas/electric facilities at local residents' houses.

Experiences cooperating with national unions have differed in the United States and Korea. Worker centers have joined forces with the AFL-CIO. For example, in August 2006, the AFL-CIO reached an agreement with the NDLON that would allow worker centers to affiliate with the state and local labor councils (Moody 2009). Meanwhile, People's Houses have not worked closely with the KCTU, but in 2013, KCTU signaled interest in the People's Houses by inviting the Mapo House co-leader to its education program as a lecturer.

6. Forming networks and coalitions

People's Houses and worker centers are embedded in a variety of networks and coalitions. Worker centers favor alliances with religious institutions and government agencies and seek to work closely with other worker centers,

nonprofit agencies, community organizations, and activist groups by participating in both formal and informal coalitions. People's Houses also build networks with labor unions, community organizations, professionals, progressive parties, and civil society organizations, and they form coalitions with the above organizations when they need to publicize the issues or when they organize campaigns against big companies. People's Houses, however, have few relations with religious institutions or local governments.

Conclusion

People's Houses do not resemble labor unions as much as worker centers do. Unlike worker centers, however, they do not focus predominantly on labor. In this regard, they are community-based social movement organizations, not labor groups. Even though People's Houses place a lower priority on organizing workers into unions or on organizing direct economic actions by workers, most of them are involved in a wide range of organizing: fighting for public policy reform and engaging in popular education for the development of critical thinking skills. What is characteristic of the People's House is that the organizing is targeted at residents as well as workers. Moreover, it seeks spaces for labor-community coalitions and hopes to bring about regional progressive politics among workers and minorities like migrant workers and the disadvantaged.

The birth of People's Houses and their activities have significance for the Korean labor movement in two respects. First, regional general unions were established after 2000 to seek to organize workers on a geographically local basis. They have been organizing non-regular workers employed directly or indirectly by local governments or schools, low-wage service sector workers, and small-firm workers. These precarious workers also reside in specific local regions. Some regional general unions, such as the Seoul General Union (founded in 2001), have oriented themselves to "resident labor unions" that serve both residents and workers. Seven years after its establishment, the Seoul General Union had a membership of just 200[12]. It decided in 2011 that to increase its membership it should act more like a resident labor union. To do so, it planned to reorganize into branches based on wards and assign full-time activists to ward branches. Because of financial difficulties, however, it was able to put a full-time activist in only one ward. Seoul is a city with 25 wards, and the Seoul General Union has a long way to go before it can stake a claim to being a resident labor union.

People's Houses are located in wards and therefore have the geographical advantage of having more contact with local workers and residents than regional general unions. Union density in Korea, which increased slightly from 10.1 percent in 2011 to 10.3 percent in 2012, is lower than that of the US (11.3 percent). Moreover, union density among non-regular workers is extremely low at 3.0 percent in 2012[13]. There has been an increasing number of workers for whom the labor market is based on the locality in which they live, for example, non-regular workers who are employed either directly or indirectly by local government or schools, care workers working at special or private homes or hospitals in the region, and low wage service or sales workers in small shops in the region. To organize these workers, forms of representation and organizational structures at the local

market level are much needed. These forms and structures can be based on administrative districts like wards.

Secondly, the Korean labor movement has had a tendency to mobilize resources through coalition-building with civic movement organizations (Eun 2005). Coalitions between labor unions and civil society organizations have been frequently observed. Regional general unions have formed coalitions, which are issue-based coalitions with formal decision-making structures, with community groups and civil society organizations when they struggled against member layoffs or waged campaigns to reform mismanaged community social institutions (Lee 2012). There is, however, a critical view about labor-community coalitions: The coalitions have been formed on an ad hoc basis and both labor unions and civic society organizations have not routinely communicated with each other[14]. The problem is that Korean labor unions have formed ad hoc coalitions with civil society organizations and waged campaigns appealing for support from community only when labor disputes such as layoffs take place. Labor union officials have begun to express an awareness that the labor movement faces a crisis, that it is isolated and in decline, and that a solution requires involvement in regional society (Kim, H., Lee, S. and Chang, W. 2006). People's Houses aim to serve as spaces for labor unions, civil society organizations, community groups, and workers and residents to meet and communicate. In other words, they encourage labor unions to go outside workplaces and to get involved in the community to overcome isolation from the community and local workers. From a long-term perspective, they will contribute to a development of labor-community coalitions and an understanding of labor unions among local workers and residents.

It will take time to see whether People's Houses can develop as "free spaces of experimentation" within the Korean labor movement as Fine (2011) contends is the case with US worker centers. In the United States, it took more than a decade after they first appeared for worker centers to evolve and mature to their present state.

1) Akira Suzuki addresses that "previous studies assign two meanings to community unionism: coalition between labour unions and community-based organizations and community based non-union organizations representing the interests of immigrant workers and other low-wage workers" (Suzuki 2008: 495-496). Some studies, however, assign the third meaning referred to in this paper to community unionism. For further understanding about meanings of community unionism, see Paul Stewart et al. (2009).
2) The price per bond is a hundred thousand won (approximately 10,000 yen). The bond is a three-year bond, but any people who bought the bond have not demanded a refund. According to the co-leader of the Mapo People's House, people who bought the bond did not have a refund in mind. And they are proud of having bonds.
3) The pub was run under the name of support for the People's House. The revenue amounts to 6 million won (approximately 600,000 yen). This information is from an interview with the co-leader of the Mapo People's House.
4) Minkoff (2002) discusses the development of a hybrid organizational form that combines advocacy and service provision as its core identity.
5) Fine (2005) has concerns about membership and dues collection and argues that the modest

size of formal membership becomes a significant weakness.

6) NDLON, which has 29 day-labor organizations as affiliates, is one of the larger networks of worker centers. Since their founding in 2001, NDLON has brought together day-labor centers from all over the country to share experiences, increase the participation of day laborers in the operation of the centers and organizing work, and help set up new centers (Fine 2005:17).

7) For example, the Restaurant Opportunities Center of New York (ROC-NY), Domestic Workers United, and the NY Taxi Workers Alliance created national structures: ROC-United, the National Domestic Workers Alliance and the International Taxi Workers Alliance, respectively (Fine 2011:615-616).

8) NDLON and the AFL-CIO announced a national partnership agreement in August 2006. And the most extensive union/worker center partnership has been between NDLON and the Laborers International Union of North America to organize day-labor centers and unions in residential construction (Fine 2011:617-619).

9) When Eliot Spitzer was elected governor of New York, he appointed veterans of his office as attorney general to top positions at the state Department of Labor where they expanded their work with worker centers and unions. At the national level, the Occupational Safety and Health Administration (OSHA) under President Obama has developed a strong collaboration with the Workers Defense Project/Proyecta Defensa Laboral (PDL). In July 2010 PDL signed a far-reaching formal agreement with the Wage and Hour Division and OSHA (Fine 2011:619-620).

10) Fine argues low membership numbers have implications for organizational legitimacy and power as well as financial sustainability. Dues are one important way that organizations are accountable to a base and members demonstrate a strong commitment to an organization (Fine 2011:610).

11) This bill, the first of its kind in the nation, requires a minimum of one day of rest per week, overtime pay, a minimum of three paid days off per year, anti-discrimination and harassment protections, and a study commission to explore collective bargaining for domestic workers (Fine 2011:614).

12) Its membership increased to 2,600 as of March 2013.

13) The union density data are from Employment and Labor Statistics of Korea. labor stat. moel. go.kr/

14) The co-leader of the Mapo People's House expressed this view in an interview with the author.

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