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Proposal to GLU Conference, Mumbai, 2009

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II. Extending rights and collective bargaining to workers in precarious and informal
employment

Precarious Employment in the Trucking Industries of Korea, China, and the United States

In Korea, China and the U.S., truck drivers endure precarious employment. Most are treated as independent businessmen, because they make agreements to haul one load at a time. This leaves them excluded from the protection of labor laws, and without job security, health and pension benefits, and job safety protections. Indecent work in the trucking industry work has serious consequences for the general public – highway deaths, air pollution, urban blight, disease epidemics, and choking traffic congestion. In other words, the trucking industry is not sustainable, and is a drain on the national economy of each of the three countries.

Three scholars, one a recent Ph.D. from Korea, one a Ph.D. candidate from China, and the third, a professor at Rutgers in the U.S., have been investigating and comparing conditions in the trucking industry in the three countries, with an emphasis on the port trucking segment, which is vital to global logistics. They have been finding that in recent years, conditions in port trucking have deteriorated so badly that truckers and some unions have begun to organize and to push for improved standards. In China, rising fuel prices and proposed new taxes have provoked strikes among truckers and taxi drivers, so far without positive results. In the U.S., the Teamsters Union and the Change to Win Federation have attempted to harness the drivers' discontent by pushing for changes in the structure of the port trucking industry in order to make it possible to organize port truckers. This effort has achieved a notable success at the Port of Los Angeles, the nation's largest port, as a result of an alliance between truckers, union activists, environmental organizations, public health advocates, and faith-based community organizations. The national campaign is still in its early stages, however. In Korea, competition among truck drivers increased after the government deregulated the transportation sector following the economic crisis of 1997. As the truckers' working conditions deteriorated and wages dropped, workers began organizing, and the Korean Confederation of Trade Unions lent its support. By 2003, there was a truckers' union affiliated with the KCTU. It struck that year, demanding protection of the labor laws and an amendment to the transportation deregulation act. The strike succeeded in winning for the union a voice in governmental decision-making processes, but to date, the union has not been acknowledged as a workers' labor union, and the drivers still do not enjoy the protection of labor law.