

Beware of the the Travelling Circus (of paid activists.)

A lesson in Korean activism ... be against anything that smells of progress. This is interesting writing. Who pays for these people?

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Daechu-ri, a small village of 150 households in Pyeongtaek, Gyeonggi Province has turned into a focal point for **anti-American activists**. It is here, the proposed new home of the U.S. Forces Korea's Yongsan garrison, that outside forces are waging their war over the rights and wrongs of the U.S. military base, with the villagers perform swept up in the debate.

Conflicts between land owners and the authorities over compensation for expropriated land are nothing new. But in the village, it is outsiders who purport to be fighting the righteous battle on behalf of the villagers for reasons of their own. In the latest standoff, staff from the Defense Ministry, armed with a court decision, attempted last Monday to commandeer the building of a disused primary school as their local base but were rebuffed by members of a group calling itself the **National Committee to Deter the Expansion of U.S. Bases**, who chained themselves to the school gates.

Moon Jung-hyun, a priest and chairman of the committee, appears at nearly all such protest sites under grand titles like "executive chairman" or "joint representative." He has led a vigil to remember two schoolgirls killed by a USFK armoured vehicle in 2002, and protests against the Saemangum reclamation project in North Jeolla province, a bullet-train tunnel under Mt. Cheonseong and a nuclear waste dump in Buan. Having moved his registered residence to Daechu-ri in February last year, the padre is now bent on turning the villagers into anti-U.S. fighters, with their new fellow resident at the helm.

The committee is an affiliation of the usual suspects: the Korean Confederation of Trade Unions, Lawyers for a Democratic Society, the Korean Peasants League and the Korean Federation of University Student Councils. A manifesto for the committee says it has been set up to "focus the struggle on the Pyeongtaek U.S. military base" on account of all the other struggles members are engaged in: the abolition of the National Security Law, against troop dispatch to Iraq, against opening of the rice market, for the protection of non-regular workers...

In other words, they went to the village looking for a fight. Their activities can hardly benefit the villagers. "Since the relocation of the USFK aims to set up a forward base favorable to launch a preemptive strike on North Korea and a blockade of China, the expansion of the Pyeongtaek base must be prevented," the manifesto says.

The websites of various organizations have lately been sprouting a banner that says, "Let's Go to Daechu-ri." It will be remembered that protesters from across the nation also descended on the town of Buan to stop the nuclear waste dump being built there, with the result that the project and its attendant benefits simply went elsewhere. Then they left. History records no apology from the protest tourists to the town's frustrated residents.