

## PRESS RELEASE



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### **International delegation of Cort Guitar workers arrive from Korea to challenge their employer and famous American guitarmakers at NAMM Show**

Cort's Business Partners FENDER, GIBSON, IBANEZ, ESP, G&L, WESTHEIMER, should support basic worker rights

LOS ANGELES & ANAHEIM, California

Unknown to most American consumers, the budget lines of famous American guitar brands such as Fender, Squier, Gibson, G&L and ESP were made for decades by Cort and Cor-tek guitar manufacturing workers in Korea in sweatshop-like conditions. On January 8, these workers arrived from Korea just in time for NAMM Show (Jan. 14-17) to challenge their illegal mass dismissal by Cort Guitars and its acoustic guitar production arm, Cor-tek. In Korea, they have been calling on Cort to re-open their Korean factories and restore their livelihoods for more than 1000 days, but at NAMM and in California, they will also ask Cort's business partners like Fender to uphold basic worker rights with contractors like Cort and let the international buying public at NAMM know that Cort Guitars is thriving on the inhumane treatment of guitar manufacturing workers. *See attached for Overview, Attachment 1).*

With performances by musicians such as Tom Morello of Rage Against the Machine and Boots Riley of The Coup, and with support from local unions and organizations such as the AFL-CIO United Steel Workers Local 675, SEIU Latino Caucus, Koreatown Immigrant Workers Alliance (KIWA), ENLACE International, the Cort/ Cor-tek workers will carry out a week of events and concerts (Jan. 11- 17<sup>th</sup>) in LA and Anaheim to call for their jobs to be returned. *(See Schedule, Attachment 2).*

*"There was one worker who worked at the painting process for 25 years and suffered from bronchitis," a Cor-tek worker recalled. "One day, when he lost consciousness while working, the managing staff even demanded that he write a letter of resignation during his hospitalization."*

Both Korea's National Labor Relations Commission and the Seoul Administrative Court (Oct. 2007, Mar. 2008, Aug. 2009, Nov. 2009) judged that Cort's mass dismissal of all Korean factory workers and the sudden closure of its Korean factories was illegal. The Commission and Court also found false the company's claim of financial hardship to justify their action. It is clear that Cort moved operations to China and Indonesia in order to avoid the basic worker rights guaranteed in Korea, where it wasn't even paying minimum wage ([http://www.entrepreneur.com/tradejournals/article/105518626\\_2.html](http://www.entrepreneur.com/tradejournals/article/105518626_2.html)). Since 2007, Cort has used intimidation and violence to secure forced resignations and to retaliate against the union. The case itself is now in Korea's Supreme Court.

The conditions at Cort's factories in Korea, where there was a high occupational injury rate, verbal and sexual harassment from managers, no ventilation or breaks, and forced overtime to meet production deadlines, all call for serious attention from the American guitar companies that rely on Cort for production.

**The press conference to open the week of actions will be held TUESDAY 1/12 at 11am, at KIWA Cultural Education Center, 3471 West 8<sup>th</sup> Street, LA 90005.**

**The press conference at NAMM will be held Thurs. 1/14 at 2pm, the opening day of NAMM Show 2010, in front of Anaheim Convention Center, 800 W. Katella Avenue, Anaheim 92802.**

## **Overview of Cort and Cor-tek Issue**

We are Cort and Cor-tek guitar manufacturing workers who treasure work and music, and the artists, musicians and cultural workers who stand with them. We want to reveal the hidden truth behind Korea's representative guitar-making firm and global guitar giant, Cort Guitars, and its acoustic production arm, Cor-tek. We worked at the factories in Incheon and Daejeon, Korea, for decades, producing guitars for Fender, Ibanez, Gibson, G&L, ESP, Cort, Parkwood and others.

The workers at Cort and Cor-tek long endured poor working conditions, earning pittance wages amounting to less than 24 dollars a day (at 10 years seniority), forced overtime, and facing demeaning treatment on the job such as sexual harassment and being unable to use the restroom as needed. With the construction of a factory in China, the workers became highly concerned about job security. Unable to endure the unsafe, degrading conditions and job insecurity any longer, the Cor-tek workers formed a union on April 2, 2006. At the same time, they were also told the company was undergoing financial hardship, and believing it, they put extra energy into their shifts and saved materials carefully so as not to waste anything.

At dawn on April 9, 2007, without notice to the workers, Cor-tek posted an announcement of temporary closure at the Daejeon factory, chained the gates shut and physically closed down the local union office by nailing in screws. With the factory idle, the company paid nonunion workers their full wage and bonus while paying only half of the wages to union members. The company continued to pressure the union members to submit resignation papers while reassuring the non-union workers that the factory would return to normal production after the union was gone. On April 12, just 3 days later, Cort claimed that the Cort workers in the Incheon factory were all redundant and dismissed all of them. In July, Cor-tek then issued notice of permanent factory closure of the Cor-tek plant, after it had secured resignation papers under false premises.

The National Labor Relations Commission ruled that Cor-tek's disciplinary dismissal of the union officers was illegal, and that the mass redundancy dismissal of all the Cort workers also did not fulfill legal prerequisites and found those dismissals unfair and illegal as well (Oct. 2007, Mar. 2008). The Seoul Administrative Court also found that both Cort and Cor-tek mass dismissals were illegal, finding that Cort's claim of financial hardship false since the company had posted profits amounting to 78 billion for a decade straight until 2006, and since managerial and office staff salaries even increased after the mass firing (Aug. 2009, Nov. 2009). Cor-tek was also found to have violated the Equal Opportunity Act with its discriminatory treatment of its women workers (July 2008), while Cort's dismissal of five workers who were industrial injury victims while on the job was ruled by the courts in favor of the workers as well (February 2008).

The company, which claimed financial hardship as a reason for mass dismissal, remains extremely profitable, raking in sales of \$1.3 Billion (Cort, 2007) and \$5.1 Billion (Cor-tek, 2007), with a net profit of \$14 Million dollars and \$700 Million dollars respectively for 2007 alone, based on operations in China and Indonesia. It commands 30% of the global guitar market, and makes 95% of its sales abroad, with only 5% of its sales coming from Korea.

This is not a case of a company in genuine difficulty. It is a clearcut case where a highly profitable company acted to avoid unions, to avoid basic worker protections like the minimum wage, and turned to production in China and Indonesia without any regard for the Korean workers who had been with the company for decades. There is no doubt that the workers in China and Indonesia are facing the same, if not worse, treatment, all for the sake of maximum profit.

With nowhere else to go, the illegally fired workers have protested for over 1000 days by protecting and occupying the closed factories, by hunger strike, by self-immolation, and by street rallies. Last year, they protested through a hunger strike on a high-wattage electricity tower at Seoul's riverside for 30 days. They tried to squat in the head office of Cort but all were arrested by specially trained police officers soon after.

Musicians and artists in Seoul and at other music fairs, such as Musikmesse 2009 and Yokohama Music Fair, have held concerts, exhibits, and creative actions to make the issue known to the public. In LA and Anaheim as well, the Cort and Cor-tek workers will carry out a week of actions. See blog for more details. <http://cortaction.wordpress.com>.



**"No workers! No music!---- No music! No Life!"**

## **Cort Action Schedule (LA, Anaheim)**

Cort and Cor-tek guitar workers from Korea have arrived from Korea Jan. 8th to struggle for their jobs and justice from Cort Guitars, a Korea-based global guitar giant.

For more details, see blog: [cortaction.wordpress.com](http://cortaction.wordpress.com)  
Contact: Sukjong Hong @ 646-567-9607  
Email: [cortguitar.action@gmail.com](mailto:cortguitar.action@gmail.com)

**January 12 (Tues.) 11am - noon**  
**L.A. : Opening Press conference**  
@ KIWA Cultural Education Center, 1st flr.  
3471 West 8th St. , LA 90005

Cort Guitar workers present their demands for Cort Guitars and companies like Fender, Gibson, Ibanez, G&L, Cort's business partners.

**January 13 (Wed.) 7pm - 10pm**  
**Cort Action Solidarity Concert: A Night of Guitars**  
@ KIWA Cultural Education Center  
3471 W. 8th St., LA 90005

Hear the workers' testimony about Cort Guitars + listen to Tom Morello, Boots Riley, Skim, Shin Kawasaki, and more! perform live. Donations Welcome.

**January 14 (Thurs.) 2pm - 3pm**  
**NAMM Show Press Conference (Anaheim)**  
@ Anaheim Convention Center, NAMM Show  
800 West Katella Avenue, Anaheim 92802

**January 16 (Sat.) 2pm - 5pm**  
**Musical Marathon for Cort Action**  
@ Anaheim Convention Center, NAMM Show  
800 West Katella Avenue, Anaheim 92802



Musicians and music lovers perform to let NAMM attendees know about the ugly truth behind Cort Guitars & Bases.