

Korea: Workers Resurgent

The summer of 1994 was a hot one for the South Korean ruling class. Rice farmers about to be ruined by cheap imports, students fighting for national liberation and unification, and even Buddhist monks opposed to corruption within their order took to the streets to confront the regime. Most importantly, almost 100,000 industrial workers engaged in mass strikes, which combined economic demands with the fight for independent trade unions. When the Korean state responded to these struggles with massive deployments of riot police, the hollowness of the Kim Young Sam regime's democratic pretensions was revealed, along with the social fault lines that underlie the Korean "economic miracle."

During his 1992 election campaign, Kim Young Sam promised to eliminate the corruption which had been standard practice under the former military rulers. When Rev. Suh Ui Hyon arbitrarily decided to extend his tenure as General Secretary of the Chogye-Sa Temple in Seoul, he met resistance from the younger monks of the Chogye Order, the dominant Buddhist sect in South Korea. They had discovered that their "supreme patriarch" had been using the temple to enrich himself and funnel money to the ruling Democratic Liberal Party, including a \$9.7 million "donation" to Kim Young Sam's presidential campaign (*AP Online*, 14 April 1994). When the reform-minded monks decided to oust the corrupt Suh Ui Hyon, the government responded with brute force. Monks and riot police engaged in pitched battles for control of the temple. When 300 of their followers were arrested, the elders of the Chogye Order decided to kick out the corrupt Suh Ui Hyon. The scandal exposed Kim Young Sam's fraudulent promises of "reform."

Farmers took to the streets to protest the government's attempt to scrap supports for rice production, in compliance with the Uruguay Round of the GATT negotiations. This is no small matter in a country where rice is *the* basic staple, yet the cost of production is more than *three times* that in the United States. The removal of the rice tariff will devastate the six million South Koreans who live on farms. Most farmers are poorly educated and live in substandard conditions. They were especially outraged because during the 1992 presidential race, Kim Young Sam had campaigned hard *against* allowing foreign rice to enter the Korean market. When 7,000 students and farmers assembled at the Democratic Liberal Party's headquarters in Yoido Plaza, Seoul, on 18 June to demand that Kim Young Sam keep his election promise, the president called in 14,000 riot police to disperse them. However, recognizing the depth of the anger at the government's plan, he decided to "postpone" passage of the bill.

A few months later, in mid-August, students organized the fifth "pan-national unification rally" at Seoul National University (SNU). The rally, organized by *Han-*

chongnyon (Federation of Korean Student Councils), called on the government to sign a peace treaty with the People's Democratic Republic of Korea (North Korea) as a step toward the peaceful reunification of the two Koreas. The conservative rulers of the South view this demand as communist inspired. Several hundred militant students commandeered a train and took it from Kwangju to the SNU rally (*Korea Times*, 14 August 1994). The government reacted with brutal force. Eight thousand riot police attacked the demonstrators with helicopters, tear gas and truncheons. The students actively defended themselves with clubs and Molotov cocktails. Several hundred people (both students and riot police) were hospitalized and 2,400 students were arrested.

South Korean Workers Take the Offensive

Yet it was the working class that proved to be the most militant sector of society last summer. Not since the "Great Workers' Struggle" in the summer of 1987, which toppled the Chun Doo Hwan dictatorship, had there been such an impressive show of force by labor. Subway workers in Pusan and Seoul, hospital workers, Korean National Rail workers, Hyundai Heavy Industry workers, Kia Motor workers, Daewoo autoworkers and Kumho Tire workers—almost 100,000 in total—walked off the job. These strikes were particularly significant because the workers raised *political* as well as economic demands. Many of the striking unions were affiliated to the illegal *Chonnoda*e (Korean Council of Trade Unions—which recently launched the Preparatory Committee for a Democratic Trade Union Federation). The *Chonnoda*e has been struggling for two years to displace the government-controlled Federation of Korean Trade Unions.

The focus of the government's counterattack was the rail union, *Chongihyop*, which was engaged in one of the most militant strikes. On 26 June, 5,000 riot police attacked the Kyunghee and Dongduk Women's Universities, where rail workers were holding a sit-in, and arrested 357 unionists. The strike forced the government to operate the national rail system with the army.

In the city of Ulsan, headquarters for most of Hyundai's industrial empire, locked-out shipbuilders were able to force the company to negotiate. The hundreds of company thugs guarding the premises proved no match for the determined assault of 3,000 workers, who stormed the gates and seized control of the massive shipyard. A thousand shipbuilders immediately commandeered a multi-million dollar natural gas supertanker and the heavy cranes in the yard, and stockpiled food and implements for self-defense. Although police boats surrounded the occupied supertanker, Hyundai management understood that an all-out assault on the yard would mean substantial property damage, and so instructed the government not to risk an attack. After 61 days, the company finally blinked and offered an 11

percent wage increase (plus bonuses), and dropped all charges against 41 union leaders.

Kim Young Sam's Response: Anti-Communist Witchhunt

For all its democratic pretenses, President Kim Young Sam's civilian administration reacted to the recent struggles of the workers, farmers and students much as its military predecessors did in the past. Seizing on the ravings of Park Hong, a deranged Jesuit priest, the government attributed the wave of social unrest to a handful of conspirators directed by North Korea. This absurd allegation in turn provided justification for invoking the draconian National Security Law (NSL) which was introduced by the dictatorship of Syngman Rhee in December 1948 to criminalize dissent. When Kim Young Sam was a bourgeois opponent of the military, he used to call for abolishing the NSL. Today he finds it well suited to his purposes.

The South Korean government used the death of North Korea's "Great Leader," Kim Il Sung, to launch a witchhunt against the left. Declaring Kim Il Sung a "war criminal," the regime invoked the NSL to declare illegal all expressions of remorse at his passing. Riot police were dispatched to campuses around the country to arrest students who allegedly set up mourning shrines to burn incense in honor of Kim Il Sung. Scores of students were detained, interrogated and charged with various offenses. One law student, Kim Song Ok, was charged under the NSL. If convicted, he could face the death penalty.

The Prosecutor General's Office also announced that nine university professors were under investigation for violations of the NSL. Their "crime" was collaborating on a textbook entitled *How to Understand Korean Society*, which was supposedly aimed at "instigating class struggle and violent revolution" (*Korea Times*, 4 August 1994). The police immediately pulled the offending tome off bookstore shelves, and the professors were summoned to the prosecutor's office to discuss the "ideological problems of the book." It is clear that this whole "investigation" is intended to intimidate the academic community—the book had been *approved* by the state censor's office four years earlier! The professors involved courageously refused to answer the summons served on them.

Park Hong's deluded allegations helped propel a wave of anti-communist hysteria, but he went too far when he implicated the bourgeois Democratic Party, which had supported the crackdown on *Jusapa* and other leftist students. Democratic Party leaders denounced Park Hong for suggesting they were connected to *Jusapa*, and demanded that he back up his charges. When the government asked Park to provide evidence, he claimed to have obtained his information from activists in the confessional, "and refused to identify them, citing his duty as a priest" (*Korea Times*, 23 August 1994). Park's fellow priests were not impressed with his behavior and released a statement saying that his "allegations are utterances from wild fantasies" (*Korea Times*, 22 July 1994).

Kim Young Sam may have been popularly elected,

but democratic rights in South Korea are highly circumscribed, particularly for the workers' movement and the left. The president's election promises of political freedom, and his pledge to break the power of monopolistic business conglomerates (known as the *chaebol*), have been scrapped. Workers are not even allowed to organize independent unions, let alone build a party to represent their interests. The military officers responsible for the May 1980 massacre of over 2,000 citizens in Kwangju (participants in a popular uprising against Chun Doo Hwan's coup d'etat) remain free, while leftist prisoners of the old regime, including 36 members of the *Sanomaeng* (Socialist Workers League) languish behind bars. In October 1994 the government extended its reactionary crackdown against the workers' movement by rounding up Choi Il Bung and dozens of other members of the International Socialists (see accompanying article). None of this is accidental. Political repression of the working class is absolutely central to the Korean "economic miracle."

Roots of the 'Economic Miracle'

Before the end of World War II Korea was a predominantly agricultural society, dominated by Japanese imperialism. The history of modern Korea begins in 1945 with the American victory over Japan. It soon became clear that Korea was on the front line in the war to contain "communism." Situated between Japan and the Sino-Soviet bloc, the Korean peninsula was of great strategic importance for American imperialism.

Korea emerged from Japanese occupation with an extremely weak and discredited ruling class. When Japan annexed Korea in 1910, the traditional *Yangban* landlord class had been displaced or co-opted by the Japanese, while the industries constructed were largely Japanese-owned. With the collapse of Japanese colonialism, Korean peasants and workers immediately organized "people's committees," which began to carry out land reform at the expense of the *Yangban* collaborators. Simultaneously, Korean workers affiliated with the *Chon Pyong* (National Korean Labor Council), led by the Communist Party, began to take over the abandoned factories. For a short period in 1945 the bulk of industry was actually run by workers.

After its surrender, the Japanese army handed over control to the representatives of the people's committees, led by Yo Un Hyong. When the U.S. Army arrived at Inchon Bay on 8 September 1945, the people's committees sent a delegation. The American military commander, General John R. Hodge, refused even to meet them, and proceeded to set up the American Military Government in Korea which immediately moved to suppress the *Chon Pyong* and the people's committees. In consolidating power the American authorities used military force to crush a general strike by the *Chon Pyong* in 1946, and to suppress the Yosun mutiny in the Korean Army and the rebellion on Cheju Island.

The Americans assembled a state apparatus in the southern half of the peninsula out the remains of the Japanese colonial government. These collaborators, mainly coming from the *Yangban* class, coalesced to form

the Korean Democratic Party, under the corrupt leadership of Syngman Rhee. The American military, in an attempt to undercut the bitter resentment felt by the Korean masses toward the former Japanese, and now American, puppet administrators, introduced a very limited land reform, allowing each peasant family about one hectare of land. Only 38 per cent of the territory seized from the Japanese was distributed in this way; the rest was sold on the market. In return, peasants had to give the government 30 per cent of all their crops for five years, while the traditional *Yangban* elite was generously compensated with lucrative government posts and control over the factories left over from the colonial period.

Over the years the U.S. invested heavily in turning South Korea into a viable bulwark against “communism” in Northeast Asia. Between 1945 and 1976, South Korea received \$5.7 billion in economic and \$6.8 billion in military aid which helped establish a formidable modern army of 600,000 men with a U.S.-trained officer corps.

In 1960 a massive student uprising overturned the corrupt Rhee regime, and supported an unstable liberal government. This ended in 1961, when a military coup d’etat crushed the popular student movement, ushering in a dictatorship headed by General Park Chung Hee. This coup proved a turning point for South Korean capitalism. The new leadership represented young nationalist military officers with few loyalties to the traditional Korean elite, and had ambitions to turn South Korea into a major economic power. This gave the modernizing military regime a relatively free hand. Park Chung Hee established the Korean Central Intelligence Agency (KCIA, renamed the Agency for National Security Planning under Chun Doo Hwan in 1980) which aimed to create an all-embracing corporatist state: local governments were brought under central control, banks were nationalized, labor unions, and even professional associations, were overseen by the KCIA. The new regime also drew up an economic plan to promote new export-based industries and sought and found financing for additional domestic industry. According to the liberal economist Lim Hyun Chin:

“At the core of the outward-looking development policy was export promotion of manufactured goods, first through labour-intensive industrialization and next through capital-intensive industrialization. The premise underlying such a policy was that if Korea maximized its comparative advantage of cheap labor by inducing foreign investment to build labor intensive industries, it could compete effectively in the world market by specialization of labor-intensive commodities. Once this is achieved, Korea could then shift its comparative advantage from cheap labor to knowhow by building capital-intensive industries. Capital intensive industries would enable Korea to increase its competitiveness in the world market by specializing in technology-intensive commodities. In short, export promotion industrialization would...promot[e] capital accumulation.”

—Lim Hyun Chin, *Dependent Development in Korea*

Judged strictly in terms of economic expansion, Park’s development program was a startling success. The average annual growth rate of the economy between 1961 and 1979 was 9.1 percent, and continues today at a

rate of two to three times those of North America and the European Union. Per capita GNP exploded from a meager \$25 in 1962 to \$6,518 in 1991. South Korea has established itself in the international market as a major exporter.

Secrets of Capitalist Success: Exploitation and Repression

The workers of South Korea did not do so well under the police state set up by Park Chung Hee. One of the most important components of Park’s corporatist system was the Federation of Korean Trade Unions (KFTU) which acts as a national company union. In South Korean factories, the law permits only one “union.” Normally this “union” is not organized by the workers, but by company managers who select workers to “lead the union.” Companies pay the salaries of these “union officials” and even provide the offices and furniture. The role of the company union is to ensure that wages remain “reasonable” and production is not disrupted. Naturally the KFTU has always been a member in good standing of the pro-imperialist International Confederation of Free Trade Unions, whose heroes include Lech Walesa and Lane Kirkland. The U.S. State Department/AFL-CIO agency in Seoul, the Asian-American Free Labor Institute, cooperates closely with the KFTU, and regards workers’ demands for real unions as “communist provocations.”

When workers attempt to push the compliant KFTU unions into action, the companies often counter by organizing *kusadae* bands. The *kusadae* (or “Save our Company” committees) are gangs of company thugs and scabs (often organized in paramilitary fashion) who violently intimidate workers challenging the company unions. When company unions and *kusadae* gangs are not enough to contain workers’ struggles, the bosses can count on the state to step in.

Ensuring “labor peace” has been the key to South Korea’s competitive edge on the world market. As George E. Ogle, the author of *Dissent Within the Economic Miracle*, noted:

“Under the forced march of the early 1980’s while productivity of these highly sophisticated commodities shot up at a rate of about 24 percent per year, the real income of the workers rose less than 15 percent. The exporters herald the difference as Korea’s comparative advantage.”

The entire system, which has served the South Korean bourgeoisie so well, depends crucially on preventing the workers from developing their own independent institutions. This is why all such attempts have met with violent attacks by the state.

The Rise of an Independent Labor Movement

The crushing of the *Chon Pyong* movement in the 1940s set the tone for the next forty years in the South Korean labor movement, with most struggles being smothered or crushed. Although there were many examples of heroic sacrifice and struggle, the corporatist labor system remained intact until the massive strike waves of the “Great Workers’ Struggle” in 1987. This whole arrangement has subsequently been dislocated;

many KFTU unions have withheld dues from the center, and struggles for reform have accelerated.

The "Great Workers' Struggle" began with a wave of massive demonstrations in late June 1987, during the interregnum between dictator Chun Doo Hwan and his handpicked successor, Roh Tae Woo. Hundreds of thousands of Koreans poured into the streets to demand sweeping constitutional reforms. To avert a social explosion Roh hastily announced plans for direct presidential elections. This opening was all the labor movement needed. The pent-up frustration of decades boiled over; during the next four months over 3,400 strikes erupted. Within a year the *minju* (democratic) union movement was born, and soon embraced several hundred thousand workers, organized in 2,800 union locals. The movement was strongest in the largest factories of the *chaebol*. Seventy percent of plants with more than 1,000 workers went on strike. The state-run union federation was paralyzed, with 80 percent of its constituent unions ceasing to pay dues.

The *minju* union movement has only recently attempted to consolidate itself as an alternative to the state-run unions. Although the mass struggles led by the *minju* unions during their first three years raised workers' real wages by 45 percent, the *minju* unions have not yet been able to break down the onerous labor control system. Their national coordinating body, the *Chonno-dae*, is only two years old. It remains illegal and is today supported by only 420,000 workers compared to the 1.3 million in the state-run KFTU. The 1994 summer strike wave failed to achieve significant gains despite its militancy because the government and *chaebol* were able to muster sufficient force to repress the strikers. Hundreds of unionists were arrested, including Kim Young Gil and Yang Kyoo Hyon, co-presidents of the *Chonnodae*.

Yet the influence of the *minju* movement has continued to grow. Having lost many of its largest unions, including those at Daewoo and Hyundai, the KFTU leadership recently proposed a merger of the two union federations (*Korea Times*, 30 October 1994). The *Chonno-dae* reportedly responded that it would only consider a merger if the KFTU completely severed its connection to the government and campaigned for the repeal of Korea's draconian labor laws.

The Necessity for Revolutionary Leadership

At every step the independent unions come up against the repressive power of the state. While union organization is vitally important, it is becoming clear to many advanced workers that union activism by itself cannot substitute for the political organization required to counter the moves of the capitalists and their repressive apparatus. This requires a workers' party committed to the struggle to replace the dictatorship of the *chaebol* with a workers' and farmers' Korea.

Such a party could reach sectors of the working population that the unions now find difficult to organize. For example, in the last two years, some 100,000 foreign workers have been brought to South Korea as "trainees." These "trainees," who come from Africa and South and Southeast Asia, are being used to lower wages and work-

ing standards. They do the dirtiest and most dangerous work, but are paid a paltry \$200 to \$260 per month. They make up some 10 percent of the workforce in small- and medium-sized manufacturing firms. While the government has encouraged the recruitment of these workers, it is also engaged in promoting hostility toward them as carriers of "foreign" diseases, e.g., AIDS. There have been threats to kick out some 5,000 workers who are in South Korea "illegally." It is vitally necessary for the Korean working class to undercut the poisonous chauvinism of the bosses and fight for full civil, political and economic rights for these foreign-born workers, who can provide native workers with a powerful ally.

A revolutionary workers' party would also take the lead in struggles around the unresolved national and democratic tasks in Korea. The 1980 Kwangju massacre (which was approved by American military authorities) demonstrated that the presence of U.S. troops in South Korea is not only aimed at the deformed workers' state in the north, but also presents a direct threat to workers' struggles. The U.S. Army constitutes a reliable last-ditch ally of the *chaebol* against an insurgent population. The struggle for ousting the U.S. imperialist forces can only be consistently championed by a workers' party. A revolutionary proletarian party would also reach out to the millions of small farmers in their struggles to defend their living standards. Under the rule of the working class, it would make sense to promote voluntary collectivization as a means of increasing agricultural productivity, as well as raising incomes and improving living conditions. A workers' party would also campaign for a revolutionary solution to the post-war partition of Korea, through social revolution in the South to expropriate the *chaebol* and establish the rule of workers' councils and proletarian political revolution in the North to overthrow the corrupt bureaucratic dictatorship of Kim Jong Il.

Korean Students & the Struggle Against the State

The South Korean students have been very important allies of the workers' movement, and have provided both practical support and many of the organizers of the *minju* unions. For generations Korean universities have been a breeding ground for the leftist and anti-imperialist movements that have fought successive imperialist occupiers and military dictatorships. Yet despite the long tradition of struggle against Japanese colonialism and military rule, until 1980 most politically active students had illusions in liberal democracy, and even in the role of the United States. The Kwangju massacre changed that. The failure of the mass struggles to topple the military regime in 1980 led to a *sasang tujaeng* (ideological struggle) on the campuses. There were extensive debates about the role of students and other social groups in the struggle against the regime, the character of the regime, and, most importantly, the ultimate goal of the struggle. Until the early 1980s, students had embraced the *sammun* idea: national liberation, oppressed people's liberation and democracy. After Kwangju two main tendencies emerged within the radical student

movement: the National Liberation (NL) group and the National Democracy (ND) group.

Both tendencies defined their politics in Marxist terminology, but they had radically different approaches. The NL tendency emphasized the neo-colonial character of the regime, and argued that the main conflict was between American imperialism and domestic social forces. In the struggle for “national liberation” the NL argued that the *minjung* should form an alliance with the national bourgeoisie against the imperialists and the monopolist *chaebol*. The NL therefore sought to mobilize the *minjung* solely on questions of national liberation—kicking out American troops and unification with North Korea. The ND took a more left-wing position, and denied that the so-called national bourgeoisie could play any progressive role historically. They sought to mobilize the workers and peasants of South Korea on class issues: organizing unions and building a revolutionary workers’ party. When the ND became the Constitutional Assembly (CA) tendency, they consciously embraced Lenin’s pre-1917 formula, as elaborated in *Two Tactics of Social Democracy*, of a two-stage struggle for socialism. In the first stage, the workers and peasants must fight to establish a “democratic dictatorship of the proletariat and peasantry,” which CA (following Lenin) believed was possible only through armed insurrection. Only after the victory of the first stage could a second, socialist, revolution be prepared.

The 1987 presidential elections presented an important test for these two tendencies. The election revealed in practice how each group would align with existing social forces. The three candidates in the election were Roh Tae Woo (the ruling party’s candidate and successor of Chun Doo Hwan), Kim Young Sam and Kim Dae Jung. The latter two were bourgeois oppositionists who had made names for themselves by defying the previous military dictatorships. They were in the same party until they quarrelled over who would get to run for president. There were no political differences: they both called for the repeal of the NSL, but were clearly pro-capitalist and very anti-communist. The NL, which was coming under the influence of *jusa* (Kim Il Sung Thought), called for a “critical” vote to Kim Dae Jung. The CA, in contrast, called for the formation of a *Minjung* party on a program of nationalizing the *chaebol* and dismantling the oppressive state apparatus. Many *jusa* students, who could not stomach their leaders’ support to an openly capitalist candidate, joined with the CA in building the *Minjung* party.

Today there are four major tendencies on the student left. The largest and most right wing is the *Jusapa* (formerly NL). They have become uncritical admirers of North Korea and Kim Il Sung’s autarkic theories of total self-reliance (*juche*) in the construction of socialism in half a country. The repulsive and ridiculous celebration of Kim Il Sung’s leadership and his discredited strategy has put the North Korean deformed workers’ state in a desperate situation. The contraction of production in this socialist paradise should have made the bankruptcy of *juche* clear to all. The considerable economic and industrial progress made in previous decades was, despite all the proud declarations of “self-reliance,” made

with the help of considerable amounts of Soviet aid. Now North Korea is facing an economic crisis, and is desperately seeking investment from the South, and even offering “Special Economic Zones” like those in China to encourage foreign capitalist investment.

Under Kim Il Sung, foreign currency earned from rice exports was used to further his personal cult, with millions of copies of his unreadable works published in every major language on earth, while the North Korean masses lived on cheap imported corn. Money was also spent purchasing thousands of pages advertising his “thought” in prominent capitalist newspapers around the world. His son, the “Dear Leader” Kim Jong Il, lives in luxurious villas, where he enjoys rare delicacies like Black Sea Caviar and the livers of blue sharks. He is also reputedly the owner of one of the world’s finest collections of Daffy Duck comics and related paraphernalia. The bizarre regime, with its forced adulation of the “leader,” and police-state surveillance of the population, is hardly a pole of attraction for workers in South Korea. Revolutionaries take no pleasure in the current difficulties of the North Korean deformed workers’ state. We stand for workers’ political revolution to overthrow Kim Jong Il and replace the bureaucracy he heads with institutions of proletarian democracy. At the same time, we defend North Korea against capitalist assault from without and counterrevolution from within.

Taking their cue from the North Korean regime, the *Jusapa* have become indistinguishable from petty-bourgeois nationalists, and rarely make even a token reference to socialism, Marxism or the working class. Their calls for “reunification” have degenerated into cheering reconciliation between Seoul and Pyongyang. This unity mongering is extremely dangerous because it does not distinguish between a revolutionary reunification (through social revolution in the South and workers’ political revolution in the North) and the kind of counterrevolutionary reunification that took place in Germany. A capitalist reunification of Korea would mean counterrevolution in North Korea, and would be a severe blow to all Korean workers and peasants. Although we respect the courage of the *Jusapa* cadres in their opposition to the South Korean state, and defend them against capitalist repression, genuine socialists can only hope that the best militants of this tendency break from the dead end of Stalinist nationalism.

One wing of the former Constituent Assembly tendency, the People’s Democracy (PD), unites various leftist anti-*Jusapa* students. They reject any collaboration with bourgeois democrats and look to a mass proletarian uprising to smash the power of the *chaebol*. Unfortunately, by basing their program and perspective on Lenin’s pre-1917 formula of the “democratic dictatorship of the proletariat and peasantry,” they ignore the central lesson that Lenin drew in the aftermath of the February 1917 revolution: the proletariat cannot take power and fulfill the democratic tasks of the bourgeois revolution without smashing the social and economic power of the bourgeoisie through social revolution. This understanding was codified in Lenin’s famous April Theses of 1917, which signaled his break with all his previous ideas about two-stage revolutions and two-

class dictatorships. The April Theses politically oriented the Bolshevik Party to struggle for proletarian revolution. The would-be Leninists of PD, who ignore the critical leap that Lenin made in renouncing all variants of the two-stage model of revolution, forsake the road that led to the October Revolution. Instead CA/PD has taken to calling for a “progressive” party in Korea, while deliberately avoiding the question of the class basis and program of such a formation.

Further to the left is the *Sanomaeng* (Socialist Workers League), which broke with the confused, pre-April 1917 “Leninism” of the PD, and openly calls for socialist revolution in South Korea. As the group with the hardest and most leftist stance, the *Sanomaeng* has been subject to the most intensive repression from the state. Many of its leading cadres have been imprisoned for several years.

The Korean International Socialists (IS), who publish a monthly paper called *Nodongcha Yontae* (Workers Solidarity), have also recently been the target of state repression. The IS is linked to the British Socialist Workers Party, led by Tony Cliff. It has made a useful contribution to the development of the left by publishing some of the works of Leon Trotsky in Korean for the first time. But the political ideas and activities of the IS have nothing in common with Trotskyism. The IS’s international tendency originated when Cliff and his co-thinkers split from the world Trotskyist movement when they refused to defend North Korea against the U.S. and its South Korean puppet at the time of the Korean War. In a naked capitulation to anti-communist pressure, they claimed that there was no difference between the brutal neo-colonial Rhee dictatorship and the deformed workers’ state in the North, which had broken the power of the landlords and capitalists. According to Cliff, both states were “capitalist.” But in 1950, the Korean masses greeted the Northern army as liberators and Rhee’s dictatorship was only saved by the massive military intervention of the U.S. and other imperialist powers.

The Korean IS today upholds Tony Cliff’s capitulation on the Korean War. When it reports on the North, *Nodongcha Yontae* sounds like a far-right rag, rehashing imperialist slanders about Red Army soldiers raping Korean women during the post-1945 Soviet military occupation. Where the *Jusapa* idealize North Korea, the IS deny any of its achievements, and oppose not only the bizarre political regime but also the collectivized economy upon which the regime rests.

In South Korean politics the IS tends to advance reformist positions. For example, in the 1987 presidential elections, they say it was proper to call for critical support to Kim Dae Jung, an openly bourgeois candidate. They equate Kim’s candidacy with the militant action of members of the National Struggle Committee of Fired Workers, who last May occupied a KFTU building to protest the government’s refusal to reinstate fired government workers. The September 1994 issue of *Nodongcha Yontae* asserts that, in both cases, “critical support” was the appropriate attitude. Students and workers who are serious about building a revolutionary

organization, based on the ideas and tradition of Lenin and Trotsky, should not look to the IS for a lead.

For A Trotskyist Party in Korea!

The development of mass independent trade unions marks a very important stage in the struggle of the South Korean working class, which serves as an inspiration to workers around the world and a living example of the social power of an aroused proletariat. But unions alone cannot break the power of the Korean bourgeoisie. Unions, by their very nature, must embrace all workers regardless of political program. The urgent task posed for subjectively revolutionary students and advanced workers in South Korea is to regroup the most militant and politically advanced elements to forge the nucleus of a Leninist vanguard party, committed to fighting for leadership within the mass organizations of the class.

A Korean Bolshevik party must be based on Trotsky’s program of Permanent Revolution, a program tested and confirmed by the experience of the victorious October Revolution of 1917. It must take the lead in struggles over the national, democratic and agrarian questions and link them to the fight for proletarian power in alliance with the poor farmers. It must also champion the interests of all the oppressed and take up the struggles for women’s liberation, for academic freedom on the campuses and for full citizenship rights for immigrant laborers. It must intransigently oppose any collaboration with bourgeois parties or politicians, while seizing opportunities to engage in principled united fronts with other tendencies in the workers’ movement. It must defend the collectivized economy of North Korea against capitalist restoration, while upholding the perspective of workers’ political revolution to oust Kim Jong Il’s nepotistic dictatorship.

A revolutionary party in South Korea must be an internationalist party. It must recognize that a workers’ victory in Korea can only be secured by spreading proletarian revolution to other countries in East Asia and around the world. This is not a utopian proposition: a revolutionary victory in Korea would immediately find an echo in the powerful Japanese proletariat with its substantial Korean component; it would inspire a generation of young fighters around the world to struggle against their own rulers; it would shatter the bourgeois lies about “the death of communism” and unleash a wave of class struggle that would sweep the Pacific Rim.

Korean workers do not have to go very far to discover an internationalist tradition. When their country was subject to Japanese colonialism from 1910 to 1945, Korean revolutionaries drew inspiration from the model of the October 1917 Russian Revolution. In China, the Russian Far East, and even Japan, Korean youth studied the example of the Bolshevik Revolution in order to create their own communist movement. Korean delegates attended the Soviet-sponsored Baku Congress of the Peoples of the East in 1920, and were also represented at the early congresses of the revolutionary Communist International. Hundreds of Koreans were active with communist and anti-imperialist groups in China and in the Russian Far East.

The Korean proletariat has shown tremendous capacity for struggle, from the creation of the *Chon Pyong* after World War II, to the militant union struggles of today. To go forward to victory it is necessary to forge revolutionary workers' parties in both halves of the peninsula, fighting for political revolution to dislodge the unstable Stalinist regime in the North and for a socialist revolu-

tion in the South that will expropriate the *chaebol*, smash the capitalists' repressive apparatus and establish a united, socialist Korea. The International Bolshevik Tendency has begun publication of a Korean edition of *1917* in order to help connect the struggles of Korean workers and students today with the best traditions of revolutionary Marxism. ■