

The present Korean movement under martial law

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Introduction

Power in South Korea has been seized by the fascist clique of Park Chung-hee, as cruel as, if not worse than that of Franco in Spain in the 1930s. Is there an anarchist movement in a country such as this?

Well, yes and no. You cannot understand without realising that the anarchist movement among Koreans before the war was, by and large, a national independence movement, and that conditions within the movement after the war (here they call it "post-liberation") were terribly chaotic. To be more specific, on the one hand you have some anarchists who have become involved in political or popular movements I think it would be difficult to refer to these as an anarchist movement as such. On the other hand, there is a more ideological anarchist movement which got under way a year or so ago but, apart from erecting a monument to Kaneko Ayako¹ at the birthplace of Park Yul, it does not seem to me to have achieved very much. This group is known as the Jajyuin Yuenmaeng (the "Korea Free Men's Federation" - FMF), and perhaps it is the only group which could truly be referred to as 'anarchist'.

When you say that anarchists are active in the political and popular movements, what exactly do you mean?

By 'political movement' I mean the Korean Democratic Unity Party (DUP) of Yang Il-dong, Chung Hwa-am, Ha Kee-rak and others. The 'popular movement' is the 'Autonomous Village Movement,' centered upon the National Cultural Research Institute, whose members include Lee Jung-kyu, Lee Mun-chang, Cho Han-ku and Park Soung-han. Strictly speaking, these two, plus the FMF, should be thought of as constituting the anarchist movement in Korea today. There are also efforts such as Lee Dong-sun's 'Commune Movement,' and Lee Hong-kun's activities, as well as Choi Hea-cheung's 'Educational Cultural Movement,' but these have to be classified as individual endeavours. Of course, anarchist activity is always individualistic, but I have to confess that I don't know too much about them myself, so I would prefer to leave them out for the moment. Nevertheless, I want you to keep in mind these truly anarchistic and individualistic activities, even if they are scattered; I would like to tell you about them on another occasion.

Activities Of The FMF

First of all I'd like a few facts about the FMF. About when was it established, and what are its aims?

Here is a copy of the 'General Principles of the FMF' which comrades have sent to me. Let me explain to you the parts which can be admitted openly:

'The General Principles Of The FMF'

1. Each of us is an individual, a free person with control over his or her own actions, We aim to build a free society where free people have come together of their own free will.

¹ Kaneko Ayako: Park Yul's common-law wife; she was arrested with him in 1923 and died in prison. See 'Chronology' above.

2. All individuals have equal sovereignty over their own actions, No one can violate this right. We reject all political concepts which divide the people into rulers and ruled.
3. We regard as criminal anyone who, by whatever means, seizes the fruits of the labour of others without contributing his or her own labour.
4. In this free society of free men and women, economic life should be organized along the lines of 'from each according to his or her ability, to each according to his or her need.
5. In line with these basic principles, the free society of the future will allow the development of a variety of modes of life according to the special nature of each district and each occupation.
6. At the same time as transmitting the distinct cultural characteristics of each nation as they have been passed through the ages, we aim at the achievement of world peace through the harmonization of those many colorful cultures.

The remaining seven principles I would prefer not to mention here. The Federation is managed plurally by a four-man committee, one member of which is invested with responsibility. His term of office is one year. Because, with a few exceptions, almost all the pre-war anarchists seem to have joined the FMF, it has the look of a National Federation. Yet the atmosphere is predominantly a salon-type one among the pre-war people - most of whom are over 50 - and few attempts have been made to get ideas across to younger people. They do publish anarchist literature and hold lecture meetings for young people, but these don't seem to me to have gone very well. Still, there is nothing else. They meet twice a week to talk at coffee shops.

Even so, under the present conditions of martial law in south Korea, they have done well to sustain any activity at all.

This is the reason that the FMF has become a secret, illegal organization. All publications are produced in secret and passed around by hand. Repression under martial law also meant that the FMF could not be openly called an anarchist federation; this is why its general principles are so moderate as to astonish anyone familiar with the Korean anarchist movement in the past.

There is one peculiarly Korean point which must be kept in mind: this is that 'anti-communism' is a position on which both the anarchists and Park Chung-hee are in accord. It may well be that, because of the anarchists' services to the independence movement in the past, and also because he wants to instill anti-communism as deeply as possible into people's minds, that Park Chung-hee cannot crack down on the anarchists as ruthlessly as he would like. But more than this - more than anything - the saddest point of all - is that the FMF has yet to cause even the slightest inconvenience to Park's regime. Even the members themselves admit, 'We are probably tolerated because we have caused the authorities not even so much as a fleabite.'

The national liberation movement and the anarchist position

Next I want to ask you about the DUP. Mr. Yang Il-dong is the man who met Mr. Kim Dae-jung just before he was kidnapped, isn't he?²

² Kim Dae-jung: unsuccessful New Democratic Party presidential candidate in 1971; he was abducted from a

That's right.

Is he an anarchist?

I would think so, yes. Although he is at present engaged in political activities, his spirit remains an anarchist one. His anarchist career is well-known. Before the war he went to study in Tokyo, where he helped organize Korean workers into the 'Eastern Labour Union,' co-edited the 'Black Newspaper,' the organ of Korean anarchists in Japan, and worked on Jiy Rengo (Free Federation), the Japanese anarchists' newspaper. He was also held for a time in the Ichigaya prison in Tokyo. His career as an anarchist really ought to be better known to the Korean people than it is.

Eh? I don't understand. Wouldn't it be damaging, under present political conditions, for people to discover that Yang Il-dong, leader of the DUP, has a history of anarchist activity and has even been imprisoned for it? Would it not simply give the government a means of attacking the opposition?

No, on the contrary! The point should be played up! You see, there is absolutely no one in the ruling party who has risked his life to fight Japanese imperialism. Even the New Democratic Party, which is little different from the ruling party, is a party of petty bourgeois national capitalists and completely lacks such staunch fighters in the independence movement as Yang Il-dong and Chung Hwa-am. This contrast is what makes the present DUP so distinctive, and in my opinion they should publicize it much more.

How do you explain the mere fact that anarchists are taking part in political party activities at all?

This, too, reflects the special conditions surrounding the Korean anarchist movement. As of way back, from the establishment of the Provisional Government in Shanghai following the March 1st Incident, to the formation of the independent Workers' and Peasants' Party after Liberation, and right up to the creation of today's DUP, the Korean anarchist movement has adopted a political posture. The entire Korean people, for years under the rule of foreign invaders, have longed to be able to create their own nation and form their own government, even the anarchists. No one, not even anarchists, who disregarded this national longing, has ever been able to organize a mass movement in Korea. Even now this remains the case. One might say, too, that the movement to set up a viable nation and to fight for genuine independence still continues today. In this sense the Korean anarchists who have joined the DUP probably still see themselves as they did in the pre-Liberation independence movement days, wouldn't you agree?

And another thing, also a reflection of Korean conditions: as you well know, with the current political repression in Korea, a straightforward anti-government movement is totally out of the question. The only way remaining to them in this situation is to build up a legal political party and to criticize the government from within it. Leaving aside the real nature of South Korea, the impression of outsiders is that it is a parliamentary democracy in which political parties compete for power. Hence the ruling group cannot ban the opposition parties and create a one-party dictatorship. So the anarchists concentrate their activity upon this last remaining gap in the edifice of power.

Then is the DUP an anarchist party?

No, not quite. To begin with, let's look at the way in which the party was founded. After the election of the President in 1971 the left wing of the Now Democratic Party became dissatisfied with the way the party had moved towards the government, split away, and made a broad appeal

Tokyo hotel in August 1973 by agents of the Korean CIA and taken back to South Korea to face charges of electoral law violations.

to all democratic forces in South Korea. The new party which was formed as a result was the DUP. Mr. Yang Il-dong was one of those who left the New Democratic Party. One cannot help feeling that the DUP is the only bastion of the broad democratic united front in South Korea, especially in the light of its recent persecution by the government. However, the fact that Yang Il-dong is head of the party, that Chung Hwa-am is his top advisor, that Ha Kee-rak heads the Policy Advisory Committee, and that these three occupy places on the five-man central committee shows that, while the party itself is not an anarchist organization, it has most certainly come under the influence of anarchism.

Since the Kim Dae-jung Incident, the Park Chung-hee authorities have been increasingly strengthening their dictatorship through suppression of the student movement and of free speech. But how much practical influence does the DUP have amidst all this?

For the moment, at any rate, it has only two seats in parliament. Although the DUP put up candidates in almost all election districts in that preposterously rigged election of 1971, all but Mr. Yang Il-dong and Mr. Ha Kee-rak were defeated. Even they were only elected through an oversight on the part of the government. Therefore, while as a political party it has almost no activities or influence in the parliament, most of its energy is concentrated on the popular, non-parliamentary movement. Surely this kind of activity is interesting from an anarchist point of view? Again, the activities of the rather grandiose-sounding 'Party Committee on Women's Rights' were in fact much the same as those of the Women's Liberation Movement elsewhere: its chairwoman, in fact, was the daughter of an anarchist. All-in-all, I think that one useful barometer of the social influence of the DUP is the degree of repression inflicted upon it by the government. For various reasons, I cannot go into detail here, except to say that the pace of repression is accelerating. Mr. Yang Il-dong once described present-day conditions in South Korea to me as ones of 'see nothing, hear nothing, say nothing' - the truth about daily events in South Korea, even in Seoul, can only be had through reading the Japanese newspapers. In other words, our comrades are counting on us - on the things we know, the things we write, and on all our efforts. Please remember this, above all else. I too will do what I can from now on.

The Commune and Autonomous Village Movements

I see your point. Finally, what kind of people are the anarchists now active in the village movement, concretely speaking?

They are Kropotkinists, to put it briefly. Lee Eul-kyu, a well-known anarchist once called the 'Korean Kropotkin', is still living in South Korea today. His younger brother, Lee Jung-kyu, also well known as an anarchist, is a leading light in the movement. Since Liberation, Lee Jung-kyu has been president of the Confucianist Sung Kun Kwan ('Equality Creating Hall') University. Hence, many people in the educational world who have come under the influence of his ideas have begun to gravitate towards the village movement.

Incidentally, most people are aware that it was the 'Student Revolution' of April 1960 that overthrew the South Korean 'Godfather' Syngman Rhee. However, that revolution's road to victory was not quite so straight as it has been portrayed in retrospect. Before the student-led riots of April 26-28, there had already occurred the confrontation which became known as 'Bloody Tuesday' on April 19th, followed by the celebrated 'Faculty Demo', on the 22nd. According to Lee Mun-chang, Lee Jung-kyu was one of the professors who participated in that second demonstra-

tion. Their appeal used the slogan: 'At a time when our own students are being beaten before our very eyes, what can we teach them in the classroom? Let us respond to the blood of our students!' The 'Faculty Demo' apparently consisted of the professors, lecturers, middle- and high-school teachers who responded to this appeal.

I've digressed a bit from my main point, but the thing I want you to remember is this: among the teachers and students who gathered at that time, there was a strong feeling that it was 'too late for returning to school! There is nothing to teach, nothing to learn. The time requires action!' It was when this feeling reached its peak, through 1960 and 1961, that the search for methods of action led them to the village movement. I think, however, that the decision to go back to the villages also stemmed largely from Lee Jung-kyu's Kropotkinism - his ideal of a federal society based on autonomous, self-defensible farming villages. When I heard of this movement, I immediately thought: 'The Narodniks of Korea!'

So it was not the same as the commune movement?

I don't know what you mean by 'commune movement', but at any rate it is different from the cooperative movements in Japan. According to the model in Kropotkin's 'Field, Factory and Workshop', the former students and teachers went to the villages - or rather, went back to their own native villages where they became primary-school teachers, farmers or local functionaries, and tried to build autonomous, self-defensible villages.

Is each individual working on his own?

No, not at all. They keep in touch with each other through an office established in Seoul. For some reason the signboard reads, 'National Culture Research Institute', although in fact this office is the headquarters of the 'National Conference of Village Activists'.

What exactly do they do?

I don't have too many details, since I lack materials and also because of the language problem, but one concrete example of their activities is their attempt to grow seed potatoes in one place and distribute them throughout south Korea through the Conference. For another, they are trying to activate a relief movement for poor villages which cannot support themselves by agriculture alone, by establishing, wherever possible, light industry, handicrafts, or cloisonne-making as secondary pursuits

I still don't really understand.

I'm not too clear myself, since I haven't been to the villages and have to rely on other people's reports. However, when I explained the four struggle principles of our own cooperative movement in Shimane Prefecture, Japan - (1) turn the villages into communes, (2) set up our own distribution network, (3) supply organic food to local urban consumer organisations, and (4) establish commune schools and educational institutes - they were very pleased and said that it was much the same as their own movement. In fact, I heard them talk about the struggles against pollution, and against the capitalist system of distribution.

So does there exist anywhere in South Korea the kind of society that Kropotkin envisioned?

As I just said, I don't know for sure because I haven't looked into it as carefully as all that, but there do seem to be some interesting cases. However, this movement belongs to the future, too. At any rate, it has been going on for almost ten years, and so its real value will be appraised from now on. I feel sure that it has a great future, for I saw many young students and workers going in and out of the office from early morning till ten at night. Of all the places where I went to meet anarchists in Korea, only here did I see so many active young people. You came away with a very strong impression, though maybe I'm over-estimating...

You've told us that Mr. Lee Jung-kyu is an anarchist and that the movement inspired by him is a Narodnik-type one aiming at an anarchist society. So what are they like, the young people who have joined the movement?

I suppose that there are few whom we could really call anarchists. Most of these people, however, have probably come around to a de facto anarchist position without themselves realising it, through experience in the movement and through contact with Mr. Lee Jung-kyu. Hence the FMF is trying to create an anarchist awareness by holding lectures on anarchism and by organizing propaganda activities based on the question, 'What is anarchism?'

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