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Shin Chaeho

Declaration of the Korean Revolution

1923

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Editor's Note: Shin Chaeho (1880–1936) was a Korean revolutionary active in the Korean national liberation movement following Japan's annexation of Korea in 1910. He wrote the following "Declaration of the Korean Revolution" for a Korean national liberation group, the Righteous Group (Uiyoldan), based in China. Despite its nationalist and anti-Japanese tone, the Declaration illustrates Shin Chaeho's shift towards anarchism in its advocacy of a "direct revolution" of the masses that would destroy exploitation and social inequality. In 1927, Shin Chaeho joined the Eastern Anarchist Federation, which had members from Korea, China, Vietnam, Taiwan and Japan. He was arrested by Japanese authorities in Taiwan in 1928 for raising funds for the Korean anarchist movement in China and sentenced to ten years in prison, where he died in 1936. The translation is by Dongyoun Hwang of Soka University of America (Asian Studies Department).

TO SUSTAIN THE KOREAN PEOPLE'S survival, we need to wipe out Robber Japan. The expulsion of Robber Japan can only be accomplished by a revolution...

But where do we begin to engage in a revolution?

After the revolutions of the old days, people used to become the slaves of the state, and, above them, there used to be lords and masters, a privileged group dominating them. Consequently, the so-called revolution was nothing but an altered name for the privileged group. In other words, a revolution used to just replace one privileged group with another. Therefore, people determined their orientation toward revolution according to their understanding of which group of the new/old lords and masters was more generous, more ruthless, more virtuous, or more vicious. Evidently, as a result, people had no direct relations with revolution. Accordingly, a slogan such as "behead the king, console the people" became the sole goal of the revolution... However, today's revolution is one that the masses make for themselves, and, for that reason, we call it a "revolution of the masses" and a "direct revolution." Since it shall be a direct revolution of the masses, the fermentation and expansion of their enthusiasm for it transcends any numerical comparison in the revolution between the weak and the strong. The result of the revolution, whether a success or a failure, always goes beyond the ordinary meaning of warfare: the masses without money and arms defeat a monarch with millions of soldiers and hundreds of thousands of wealth, and expel foreign invaders. The first step toward our revolution, therefore, is to demand the awakening of the masses.

How can the masses be awakened?

The masses will awaken neither by having a divine person, a sage, or a gallant hero, who makes the masses "awaken," nor by hearing vehement statements such as "masses, let's awaken" and "the masses, be awakened."

We go to the masses and go hand in hand with the masses.

With ceaseless violence, assassination, destruction, and rebellion, we will overthrow the rule of Robber Japan.

Transform all the absurd systems in our life, and construct an ideal Korea in which one human being will not be able to oppress other human beings and one society will not be able to exploit other societies.

Destruction by the masses and for the masses of all obstacles, such as inequality, unnaturalness, and absurdity, that stand in the way of improving the masses' livelihood, is the only way to "awaken the masses." In other words, the masses who have awakened in advance should become the revolutionary fore-runners for the whole masses...

Because of starvation, cold, plight, pain, wives' shouting, children's crying, pressures to pay taxes, pressures to pay back private loans, no freedom of action, and other various pressures, the general masses can neither live nor die. In this situation, the robber has instituted the politics of robbery that are the main causes of the pressures. If the robber is knocked down, all the facilities of the robber are destroyed and good news [about this] reaches the four seas; all the masses, then, would shed sympathetic tears. Consequently, all of them would realize that, besides death from starvation, there is rather a road called revolution. If the brave out of righteous indignation and the weak out of pain could come along the road and relentlessly advance to influence the masses universally, so that they could make a great revolution under nation-wide unity, that would definitely make a day when the crafty, cunning and cruel Robber Japan would be expelled. Therefore, if we want to awaken the masses, overthrow the rule of the Robber, and thus open up a new life for our nation, raising one hundred thousand soldiers and launching a rebellion should be considered, for they are incomparable to throwing a bomb or to the thousands of billions of sheets of newspaper and magazine writings.

If a violent revolution of the masses does not occur, so be it. However, when it does, like a stone rolling down from a cliff, it won't stop until it reaches its destination...

The road to revolution shall be opened through destruction. However, we destroy in order not just to destroy but to construct. If we do not know how to construct, that means we do not know how to destroy, and, if we do not know how to de-

stroy, that means we do not know how to construct. Construction is distinguishable from destruction only in its form, but, in spirit, destruction means construction. The reasons why we are to destroy the Japanese forces are:

1. To destroy the rule of a foreign race. Why? Since at the top of "Korea" resides a foreign race, "Japan," a despotic country, Korea under the despotism of a foreign race is not an authentic Korea. To discover the authentic Korea, we destroy the rule of a foreign race.
2. To destroy a privileged class. Why? Since at the top of the Korean "masses" sits the Governor General or others who are the members of a privileged class composed of a gang of robbers who oppress the masses, the Korean masses under the oppression of the privileged class are not the free masses of Korea. To discover the free masses of Korea, we overthrow the privileged class.
3. To destroy the system of economic exploitation. Why? Since the economy under the exploitive system is not an economy organized by the masses themselves for the sake of their livelihood but an economy organized to feed the robber, we are to destroy the system of economic exploitation and to develop the livelihood of the masses.
4. To destroy social inequality. Why? Since the strong exists above the weak and the high above the low, a society full of any inequalities will become one in which people exploit, usurp, hate and detest each other. In society, at first for the happiness of the minority, damage is inflicted upon the masses, the majority, and, at last, the minority inflict damage upon each other... To promote the happiness of all the masses, therefore, we destroy social inequality.

5. To destroy servile cultural thoughts. Why? Are these not something produced by the strong to support the strong in the form of religion, ethics, literature, fine arts, customs, and public morals? Haven't they served the strong as various tools for its pleasure? Aren't they narcotics that enslave the masses? While the minority class becomes the strong, the majority masses end up being the weak. That the weak could not resist an unjust oppression is entirely due to the fact that they are fettered by servile cultural thoughts. If we do not cut off the chains of these restraints and put forward a culture of the masses, the general masses, weak in thinking of their rights and lacking their interest in advancing freedom, would just circulate through fate as slaves. Therefore, to advocate the culture of the masses, we must destroy servile cultural thoughts.

In other words, in order to construct a Korea made of the "authentic Korea," the free Korean masses, the economy of the masses, the society of the masses, and the culture of the masses, we attempt to break through such phenomena as the rule of a foreign race, the exploitative system, social inequality, and servile cultural thoughts... We understand by now: that destruction and construction are inseparable, not two but one; that prior to the destruction by the masses exists the construction by the masses; that the Korean masses now will destroy the forces of Robber Japan only through the masses' violence, as those forces are the obstacles standing in the way of constructing a new Korea; and that the Korean masses encounter Robber Japan on "a single bridge" where the two realize that one of them shall be ruined by the other. So, we, the twenty-million masses, will be united and march toward the road to violence and destruction.

The masses are the supreme headquarters of our revolution. Violence is our only weapon for our revolution.