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The Story of the Korean Anarchists and the Anarchist Revolution in Manchuria, 1929–1931

Tokologo African Anarchist Collective

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Conclusion: What Can We Learn?

by Tokologo African Anarchist Collective

The Korean anarchist revolution was a heroic struggle of the working and poor people. It fought for decolonisation through anarchism. Power and wealth were not to be simply transferred from a foreign (in this case, Japanese) ruling class to a local (in this case, Korean), ruling class. It was to be transferred to the popular classes, in an anarchist manner. The anarchists would work with the nationalists sometimes, but general pushed an independent class line, anarchism, as an alternative.

What happened to their struggle? Partly, they were weakened by difficult circumstances: a situation of war was taking place in the region, in which many big powers were involved: the Japanese empire, the Russian Marxist dictatorship which backed the Communists, the Chinese and Korean nationalists.

There were also divisions amongst the anarchists, which saw some anarchists making serious revisions in their theory: a group around Ha Ki Rak would later run an anarchist political party in Korean state elections! This section of the anarchists absorbed much of the nationalist approach, and this limited their ability to challenge the nationalists with force and with ideas – essential tasks to spreading the revolution into areas controlled by the nationalists. The revolution did not manage to spread into China and into the Korean peninsula, or into Russia.

Finally, Japan got embroiled in war with Russia and Japan, as part of the Second World War; this was followed by the Cold War between Russia and America. The American ruling class conquered the Japanese state, and then placed Korea under American control. A war broke out, and the country was eventually split into a Russian- and American-backed North and South, each run by dictators.

The Korean anarchists' views, as represented by the Talwhan ("Conquest") group, outlined a vision of anarchist society free of both (Japanese) imperialism and local (Korean) capitalism and land-lordism. They wanted a free independent Korea that did not just replace a foreign elite with a local elite.

Their statement of intent included:

1. Do not allow the existence of oppression and the state;
2. Oppose power by elites, and the rule of privileged minorities over the majority;
3. No private property: instead, a common property system under a non-state system of control;
4. Instead of a civilisation run by an elite, society and civilisation must be well integrated with each other;
5. The individual will consume according to her or his own demand, and produce according to her or his own ability;
6. Free communism through autonomous (independent) producers' (working class and peasant) organisations;
7. There is no state, and no political elite, but instead independent self-governance;
8. Taking Korea back from the Japanese capitalist government;
9. Refusing to make a deal with the capitalist class of the native country of Korea, or to give independent Korea to the Korean elite;
10. To provoke a spontaneous upsurge of the masses as the motor of decolonisation and anti-capitalism.

The Korean anarchist movement wanted to build an independent self-governing anarchist society, a cooperative system of the masses of the Korean people. They wanted to take civilisation from the capitalist class, and return it to the popular classes. By doing so, the capitalist and colonial society that existed in Korea (as elsewhere in Africa and Asia and east Europe) would be replaced with a new society. This new society would be based on the principles of freedom and equality, that guarantee the independent self-rule of the producing classes: the working class and the peasantry.

Who was Kim Joa-Jin, Korean Anarchist Revolutionary?

by Eric Every (Tokologo African Anarchist Collective)

Kim Joa-jin was born in 1889 to a wealthy family. Like many of his generation, his life was shaped by the Japanese imperial government's colonisation of Korea. This began formally in 1910, but key aspects of Japanese control dated to 1895. The year 1919 saw a massive wave of struggle against colonialism: the March 1st Movement. This was part of a global series of uprisings.

Kim became involved in the Korean Independence Army (KIA). In 1920, he helped lead a famous defeat by the KIA of a Japanese army division at the battle of Ch'ing-Shan. At the same time, he became drawn to anarchism by his relative, Kim Jong-Jin. Anarchism / syndicalism was a very powerful force in the Korean national liberation and popular class struggles. Japanese anarchists worked closely with Korean anarchists: they knew the Japanese ruling class was also their enemy.

In 1925, Kim formed the anarchist group, the "New People's Society." Working closely with the Korean Anarchist Federation

in Manchuria and the Korean Anarcho-Communist Federation, in 1929 he helped launch (with KIA support) a large anarchist revolutionary zone in Shinmin in Manchuria, in the Korean borderlands. A large Korean population lived here; Japanese imperial power was not as strong as in the Korean peninsula. The zone was run through the Korean People's Association in Manchuria, also called the "General League of Koreans."

From 1929–1931 we can speak of an anarchist revolution in this area. It was based on the peasantry and the military.

Kim was assassinated by a Korean Communist Party member while working in a cooperative. The Communists hated the anarchists. They wanted to form a one-party dictatorship, as existed in Russia.

The Story of the Korean Anarchist Revolution: Decolonisation through Anarchism

by Lucky Sumione (Tokologo African Anarchist Collective)

The Korean anarchist movement wanted to build an independent self-governing anarchist society, a cooperative system of the masses of the Korean people. They wanted to take civilisation from the capitalist class, and return it to the popular classes. By doing so, the capitalist and colonial society that existed in Korea (as elsewhere in Africa and Asia and east Europe) would be replaced with a new society. This new society would be based on the principles of freedom and equality, that guarantee the independent self-rule of the producing classes: the working class and the peasantry.

The Korean movement had important strengths. These included the support of a large sector of the Korean Independence Army (KIA), centred on the anarchist Kim Jao-Jin. He was an anarchist military leader sometimes compared to Nestor Makhno of the anarchist revolution in the Ukraine (1918–1921).

Anarchists like Kim worked closely with the Korean Anarchist Federation in Manchuria and the Korean Anarcho-Communist Federation (KAF-M) to create a large anarchist revolutionary zone in Shinmin, Manchuria, in the Korean borderlands.

How did the Korean anarchist structures make decisions?

In Shinmin, a system of administration was organised as the Korean People's Association in Manchuria, also known as the General League of Koreans. Its aim was to create an independent self-governing cooperative system of the Korean people, who had assembled their "full power" to fight for the people by struggling against Japanese imperialism.

There were three key structures. First, there was the section of the KIA linked to Kim. Second, there were the specific anarchist political organisations, the Korean Anarchist Federation in Manchuria and the Korean Anarcho-Communist Federation. Third, there were the mass structures created in Shinmin. These were initiated by the Kim wing of the KIA along with the KAF-M, which formed the Korean People's Association.

The structure was federal, going from village meetings to district and area conferences. The Korean People's Association also had executive departments to deal with agriculture, education, propaganda, finance, military affairs, social health, youth and general affairs. Full-time staff in these departments received no more than the average wage.

What Were the Aims of the Korean Anarchists? **Anarchism, Syndicalism and Decolonisation**

by Leila Veerapan-Lewis (Tokologo African Anarchist Collective)