

MANIFESTO OF THE KOREAN COMMUNIST PARTY IN SHANGHAI (1921)

Introduction

Korean Communist parties came into being very quickly after the Bolshevik revolution in Russia and operated both inside Korea and among Korean exiles in China, Manchuria, Japan, and Russia itself. Away from the tightly-controlled environment of the Korean peninsula, some took part in armed struggle against Japanese forces and interests and tended to regard more conservative nationalists who hoped for the gradual realization of independence from Japan with disdain. Kim Il Sung, the eventual ruler of the DPRK (North Korea), was a leader of one Manchurian group, and one cause of the eventual political division of Korea was the split between the Communist and non-Communist nationalist opposition to Japan during the colonial period.

This document, written in 1921, issued from one early Korean Communist group based in Shanghai.

Document Excerpts with Questions (Longer selection follows this section)

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Manifesto of the Korean Communist Party in Shanghai (1921)

Our national emancipation movement is merely a step toward the ultimate purpose of social revolution. We are striving for the complete elimination of all the classes of our present society. This is our belief and, at the same time, the common objective of all the toiling masses of the world. ...

[Translated by Dae-Sook Suh]

Question:

1. What is the ultimate goal of the group, as declared in the manifesto? Who or what is it ultimately fighting against, and why? What place does the Korean struggle have in that goal?

Longer Selection with Questions

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...

The fact that the Japanese annexation of Korea is unnatural and unreasonable is very clear. Since the annexation, Japan has deprived us of all freedom of assembly and speech. Japanese interference reached an extreme when they intervened in our industrial enterprises and by irrational laws prevented the growth of these industrial enterprises. The social progress of the Korean people and the cultural development of the masses have been virtually halted by these inhuman acts, which have brought hunger to the material life and impoverishment to the spirit of the masses. We are striving to overthrow the Japanese yoke for the prosperity of our people. We have fought a hard fight during the past three years, since the declaration of war against Japan. Though our efforts have been weak, our sincerity and zeal have more than supplemented what we have lacked in our forces and we believe that ultimate victory will be ours.

Our national emancipation movement is merely a step toward the ultimate purpose of social revolution. We are striving for the complete elimination of all the classes of our present society. This is our belief and, at the same time, the common objective of all the toiling masses of the world. Thus, our enemy is all the exploiting classes of the world as well as the Japanese militarists and financiers. All the masses who share the common fate under the oppression of the ruling class must unite their efforts. Thus, our efforts may be meager, but we express heartfelt congratulations to the Russian working masses and await with great expectation their success. We also expect the success of the activities of the Chinese mass revolutionary organizations and trust in the success of the birth of the recent Japanese socialist organization and Japanese Communist Party. Thus, we shall together destroy and drive out the roots of all the crimes of the exploiting classes in East Asia, nay, in the entire world.

The World War of 1914, which resulted in great bloodshed for the world's masses, had its very roots in the purpose of filling the bottomless storehouses of the bourgeoisie of the capitalist countries. But it has been said that the war was a means to destroy imperialism and bring eternal peace, and also that the war was to emancipate the oppressed people of the whole world, thus deceiving the oppressed masses. Because of this deceptive propaganda, including such propaganda as Wilson's Fourteen Points, some people placed great trust in the Peace Conference and the League of Nations. But even though the bourgeoisie used cunning tactics and strenuous efforts to conceal its true intentions, its evil and tyrannical objectives were eventually exposed. The Versailles Peace Conference is nothing but a meeting of hungry wolves to divide the territories of the defeated and collect reparations from the defeated. The

difficulties of the English and the French in Europe and the antagonism between the United States and Japan over Pacific problems are all the same kind of problem.

The League of Nations is merely an organization to revive the already destroyed foundations of capitalism...and thus it is a peculiar and worthless organization. The weak are always attempting to hang onto the roots of anything nearby. Until today we have always expected the true revival of the League of Nations by appealing to the leaders of the world emancipation movement and by pointing to justice and humanity. It is not that we do not understand those who attempt to utilize the opportunities made available by the intense struggles of the United States and Japan in the Pacific, but look at the exploitation by the British in India, by the French in Annam, and by the United States in the Philippines. By observing these phenomena, it is not difficult to see who is truly our friend, and who is our foe. Our excitement over the Russian October Revolution is not without justification, because in carrying out the great task of the world revolutionary movement we feel that we are on the same footing with them. Thus, we share the same fate with the working masses of the world and their organizations. We must unite to fight against our enemies in the League of Nations, the hounds of world capitalism and imperialism, and its supporter, the Second International.

The Third Communist International is truly the federation of the world's toiling masses and the only headquarters of the world socialist revolution, at which the Koreans have already been represented in the name of the Korean Socialist Party, and it is with the Comintern that we can share our fate in the struggle against the capitalists. Our party is an independent Korean section of the Communist International.

We strive to establish the Korean soviet government under the dictatorship of the proletariat so that it will be possible to carry out the fight to destroy all the existing systems and establish the great society for the ultimate happiness of all men. We trust that the ultimate victory is ours and that victory will be the victory of the working masses of Korea, which comprise seventy percent of the Korean population. All proletariats unite under the Communist banner.

[Translated by Dae-Sook Suh]

Questions:

1. How does the manifesto explain this group's opposition to Japanese colonialism?
2. What is the ultimate goal of the group, as declared in the manifesto? Who or what is it ultimately fighting against, and why? What place does the Korean struggle have in that goal?
3. Why might this group, in claiming to represent "the working masses of Korea," expect support? Implicitly, what do they think of other (non-Communist) Korean nationalist groups? Who or what might they represent, according to the authors?