



Global Nonviolent Action Database

Published on *Global Nonviolent Action Database* (<https://nvdatabase.swarthmore.edu>)

South Korean students force dictator to resign, new elections, 1960

19 April

1960

to: 26 April

1960

Country: South Korea

Location City/State/Province: *Seoul*

Location Description: *Kyongmudae (the Blue House), National Assembly building*

Goals:

Resignation of President Rhee Syngman, new and fair elections to be held

Methods

Methods in 1st segment:

- 006. Group or mass petitions
- 007. Slogans, caricatures, and symbols
- 038. Marches
- 047. Assemblies of protest or support
- 062. Student strike
- 131. Refusal to accept appointed officials

Methods in 2nd segment:

- 007. Slogans, caricatures, and symbols
- 038. Marches
- 047. Assemblies of protest or support
- 062. Student strike
- 131. Refusal to accept appointed officials

Methods in 3rd segment:

- 007. Slogans, caricatures, and symbols
- 038. Marches
- 047. Assemblies of protest or support
- 062. Student strike
- 131. Refusal to accept appointed officials

Methods in 4th segment:

- 007. Slogans, caricatures, and symbols

- 038. Marches
- 047. Assemblies of protest or support
- 062. Student strike
- 131. Refusal to accept appointed officials

Methods in 5th segment:

- 007. Slogans, caricatures, and symbols
- 038. Marches
- 047. Assemblies of protest or support
- 062. Student strike
- 131. Refusal to accept appointed officials

Methods in 6th segment:

- 001. Public speeches
- 007. Slogans, caricatures, and symbols
- 038. Marches
- 047. Assemblies of protest or support
- 062. Student strike
- 131. Refusal to accept appointed officials
- 147. Deliberate inefficiency and selective noncooperation by enforcement agents

Notes on Methods:

When the protestors marched on the road toward Kyungmudae (the Blue House) and confronted policemen, the students claimed that they only wanted to present a petition to President Rhee, but the police ordered them to disperse. The students continued on to march toward Kyungmudae and continued to shout for the resignation of President Rhee and for new, fair elections to be held. On April 25, university professors that had joined in the protest made speeches that included the list of demands they had for the government before an audience of citizens in front of the National Assembly building.

Classifications

Classification:

Change

Cluster:

Democracy

Group characterization:

- South Korean students

Leaders, partners, allies, elites

Leaders:

Students from Seoul National University, Yonsei University, Konkuk University, Chungang University, Kyunghee University, Dongguk University, and Sungkyunkwan University

Partners:

University professors

External allies:

Republic of Korea Army
Involvement of social elites:
Not known

Joining/exiting order of social groups

Groups in 1st Segment:
Groups in 2nd Segment:
Groups in 3rd Segment:
Groups in 4th Segment:
Groups in 5th Segment:
Groups in 6th Segment:

- Republic of Korea Army

Additional notes on joining/exiting order:

Republic of Korea Army initially fired on the protestors, but on 25 April, the Army under General Song Yo Chan was ordered not to fire.

Segment Length: 1 day

Opponent, Opponent Responses, and Violence

Opponents:

President Syngman Rhee

Nonviolent responses of opponent:

Not known

Campaigner violence:

Burning of five police stations, sacking of Seoul Sinmun, and breaking into the Liberal Party headquarters.

Repressive Violence:

Police firing on protestors

Success Outcome

Success in achieving specific demands/goals:

6 points out of 6 points

Survival:

1 point out of 1 points

Growth:

3 points out of 3 points

Notes on outcomes:

President Rhee resigned a week after the protests began. After his resignation, the interim government drafted a new constitution and new elections were held in July. Yun Po-sun, the candidate for the opposition Democratic party, was elected as president.

Despite the police brutality, repression, and deaths, the students continued to protest and demonstrate against President Rhee.

Initially, mostly students were protesting against President Rhee and the fraudulent elections, but as the campaign continued,

professors joined in the protests as well. As the professors read the demands the citizens had in front of a crowd in front of the National Assembly building, the number of students and citizens protesting increased in numbers and the day culminated into an all night demonstration.

In South Korea, President Rhee Syngman of the Liberal Party won the March 1960 election with 88.7% of the votes. This implausible result was the result of election fraud: the day of the election the Liberal Party had stuffed ballots, switched ballots, and removed opposition ballots. On the eve of balloting, the police had also fired upon a group of Democratic Party supporters, killing eight. South Koreans in the city of Masan protested against the fraudulent election. On 11 April 1960, the tortured body of Kim Chu Yol, a student who had participated in the antigovernment demonstration, was found by a fisherman in the bay near Masan; he had been fatally struck by a tear-gas canister and had fragments of a tear-gas bomb in his eyes. Despite efforts by the Rhee administration to keep this news quiet, word spread throughout the country, reaching students in Seoul.

On 18 April, students from Seoul National University launched a protest against police brutality and demanded that new elections be held. The Rhee regime called upon the Korean Anticommunist Youth Association to attack these protestors. On their way home from the protest, the protestors were assaulted by members of the association, resulting in dozens of injuries. In response to this attack, students from Seoul National University, Yonsei University, Konkuk University, Chungang University, Kyunghee University, Dongguk University, and Sungkyunkwan University joined together to prepare a massive antigovernment demonstration, and set the date for this protest to be the next day: 19 April 1960.

On 19 April, about 30,000 students started the demonstration in the morning. By mid-day, over 100,000 South Koreans poured out into the streets, shouting, "We demand new elections!," "Defend democracy to the death!," "The Syngman Rhee government must resign!," and "Re-hold March 15 elections!" The protestors also jeered, burned five police stations, sacked the office of Seoul Sinmun, a daily newspaper, and broke into Liberal Party headquarters. The protestors first held the demonstration in front of the National Assembly building. They then pressed on toward Kyungmudae – also known as the Blue House, which is the presidential mansion. On the road towards Kyungmudae, the protestors encountered police forces. The student spokesmen told the police that the protestors simply wanted to present a petition to the president. The police ordered the protestors to disperse. However, the students continued to press on toward Kyungmudae. The police fired tear gas shells at the protestors, but the demonstration continued on. The police then fired volley after volley. A state of martial law was imposed and R.O.K. Army troops moved into Seoul to enforce the seven o'clock curfew. At the end of the day, the casualties were 130 dead and over 1,000 wounded or injured.

In an attempt to end the protests and appease the South Korean people, President Rhee made all cabinet members and Liberal Party officers resign on 21 April 1960. On 23 April, President Rhee offered a counterproposal in which he agreed to governmental reorganization and the restoration of the post of premier. However, the students rejected this proposal, as it did not meet their demand for a completely new election. The protests continued and in response, on 24 April, Rhee announced that he would be cutting all ties with the Liberal Party. Even this move did not appease the public. On 25 April, three hundred university professors joined the protest and led a demonstration in front of the National Assembly building. The professors read a list of demands, of which the most important was the resignation of President Rhee. Another 15 civilians were killed and over 200 injured. However, as the protest pressed on, the Martial Law Command under General Song Yo Chan finally refused to fire on the demonstrators and turned its back against the Rhee regime.

The United States also responded to the April Revolution. On 19 April, the U.S. Secretary of State pushed for the "holding of re-elections according to democratic means and guarantee of the freedoms of expression and assembly. On 20 April the U.S. State Department also released a statement that called for the democratization of Korea. In the end, the United States also pressed for the resignation of President Rhee.

On April 26, President Rhee issued his formal resignation and went into exile in Hawaii, which brought an end to the demonstrations. An interim government drafted a new constitution. New elections were held in July and the candidate for the

opposition Democratic Party, Yun Po-Sun, was elected as president.

Research Notes

Sources:

Allen, Richard C. Korea's Syngman Rhee; an Unauthorized Portrait. Rutland, VT: C.E. Tuttle, 1960. Print.

Brazinsky, Gregg. Nation Building in South Korea: Koreans, Americans, and the Making of a Democracy. Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina, 2007. Print.

Gibney, Frank. Korea's Quiet Revolution: From Garrison State to Democracy. New York: Walker and, 1992. Print.

Kim, Eugene, and Ke-soo Kim. Western Political Quarterly. 1st ed. Vol. 17. Salt Lake City, UT: University of Utah, 1964. JSTOR. Web. 5 Oct. 2012.

Kim, S?n-hy?k. The Politics of Democratization in Korea: The Role of Civil Society. Pittsburgh, PA: University of Pittsburgh, 2000. Print.

Yi, Ki-baek. A New History of Korea. Cambridge, MA: Published for the Harvard-Yenching Institute by Harvard UP, 1984. Print.

Name of researcher, and date dd/mm/yyyy:

Yein Pyo, 06/10/2012

A project of Swarthmore College, including Peace and Conflict Studies, the Peace Collection, and the Lang Center for Civic and Social Responsibility.

Copyright Swarthmore College.



Global Nonviolent Action Database is licensed under a [Creative Commons Attribution-NonCommercial-NoDerivs 3.0 Unported License](https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-nc-nd/3.0/).

Original website design and artwork created by [Daniel Hunter](#).

Permissions beyond the scope of this license may be available at <http://nvdatabase.swarthmore.edu>.

Registered users can [login](#) to the website.

Source URL (retrieved on 07/10/2020 - 21:04): <https://nvdatabase.swarthmore.edu/content/south-korean-students-force-dictator-resign-new-elections-1960>

Links:

[1] <https://nvdatabase.swarthmore.edu/category/pcs-tags/mainly-or-initiated-student-participants>

[2] <https://nvdatabase.swarthmore.edu/category/pcs-tags/example-paradox-repression>

[3] <https://nvdatabase.swarthmore.edu/category/pcs-tags/example-regime-change>