

# The Race against Time: Disintegration of the Chang Myun Government and Aborted Democracy

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This essay seeks to find the causes of the Chang Myun government's disruption in internal, rather than external, factors. It is argued that it was not the acceleration of social polarization that directly brought about the collapse of the government. Rather, at the time of the military coup, the government had already fallen into the state of ungovernability due to disintegration from within. This essay aims to explain the process of its downfall, while focusing on how unstable the Chang Myun cabinet was and how inadequate the government's ruling and management capabilities were. Why did the government, which had been founded upon wide popular support, fail to take an initiative in leading social forces by exercising necessary power on one hand and dominating the political agenda in advance on the other? Why could it not effectively command or manage the police or the military in particular, which was prerequisite for maintaining social stability? Why was the Chang Myun government not able to take the initiative with regard to such urgent issues as national reunification or economic development? To put it bluntly, why was the government lacking in necessary ruling and management capabilities? This paper attempts to find the answers to these questions by scrutinizing the internal structure of the government.

*Keywords: Ungovernability, Chang Myun, democratization of Korea, capability of government, and time management.*

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## Social Polarization or Internal Decay?

In April 1960, Korea was overflowing with excitement and hope for democracy after the downfall of the authoritarian regime of President Rhee Syngman. The Chang Myun government was triumphantly launched after winning overwhelming support in the general election of July 29, 1960. However, in less than a year, hope had turned into despair and the country was in the grips of another major crisis. "In February 1961 the Republic of Korea is a sick society." So began a

report submitted to the White House in early March of 1961. The report harshly criticized the Chang Myun government's ineptness and corruption and forecasted that the government would not last until April (*FRUS* 1996, 424-425). The United States Central Intelligence Agency's (CIA) report to the National Security Council (NSC) on March 21, 1961 agreed, diagnosing that although Korea was not in a critical condition in the short-run, the long-term prospect was much more bleak (*FRUS* 1996, 430-435). On May 16, less than two months later, the Chang Myun government was overthrown by a military coup d'état.

What brought about such a swift change in public mood and the collapse of South Korean democracy conceived in the wake of the April 19th Student Uprising of 1960? Why did the Chang Myun government, which initially enjoyed massive popular support, fail to institutionalize its electoral base and stabilize democracy?

Scholars are not in uniform agreement on the causes of the collapse of the Chang Myun government. Some point to the lack of personal leadership within the Chang Myun Government (Lee Jeong-hui 1995), while others emphasize the weakness of the executive power built into the parliamentary system adopted by the Second Republic (Sin Sang-cho 1960). Still others maintain that the democratic and constitutional order would have survived and taken root in society had there not been a small number of politicized military officers clandestinely undermining the political authority and preparing for a military coup d'état. The Chang Myun government was not to be blamed for its failure according to their view (Chang Myun 1967; Jeong Heon-ju 1985).

The most authoritative interpretation articulated by Han Sung-joo, by contrast, stresses the social and ideological polarization engulfing Korean society in 1961 as the fundamental underlying cause of the collapse of the Chang Myun government (Han Sung-joo, 1974). As ideological polarization intensified and political conflict worsened, the government rapidly lost popular support and administrative effectiveness declined profoundly. The continuing economic stagnation, too, provided a good pretext for the political detractors with an ambition, including the military, to shake up the government from the bottom up and intervene in politics through extra-parliamentary ways. However, convincing as this argument might be, political and ideological polarization combined with economic stagnation do not necessarily lead to the collapse of a government, let alone the constitutional order. Democracy can be preserved even in the face of ideological and political polarization if the government in power is capable of managing and intermediating conflicts. Nor is it clear that the most lethal chal-

lence the Chang Myun government faced in 1960 and 1961 came from outside it. That it fell because it was internally disintegrating under the forces of factionalism than because it was overwhelmed by society's ideological polarization should be carefully examined.

This article locates the proximate cause of the Chang Myun government's demise in its internal rather than external factors. It was not the acceleration of social polarization that directly brought about the collapse of the government. Rather, by the time of the May 16th military coup d'état, the government had already fallen into a state of ungovernability due to disintegration from within. Military intervention was by no means the only or even the major factor that led to the collapse of the government led by Chang Myun. The government was not functioning properly even months before the coup.

## The Democratic Party and Factionalism

The internal weakness of the Chang Myun government was generic. The Democratic Party, which formed the backbone of the Chang Myun government, was founded in 1955 in opposition to the authoritarian rule of President Rhee Syngman. The party was divided from within from its very inception, led jointly by the *gupa*, or literally the "Old Faction,"<sup>1</sup> which consisted of politicians from earlier opposition parties, such as the Korea Democratic Party and the Democratic National Party, and the *sinpa*, or the "New Faction"<sup>2</sup> consisting of ex-bureaucrats and politicians who had once worked for Rhee Syngman, but were estranged from him after the political turmoil<sup>3</sup> over his move to institute a system of direct presidential elections in 1952.<sup>4</sup> The majority of the Old Faction

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1. Sin Ik-hui, Jo Byeong-ok, Kim Do-yeon, Yun Bo-seon, and Yu Jin-san were included in this faction.

2. Chang Myun, Park Sun-cheon, O Wi-yeong, Gwak Sang-hun, and Kim Yeong-seon were leading politicians of the New Faction.

3. At that time, the constitution provided that the President must be selected by the National Assembly through an indirect election. As his party held a small number of seats on the floor, President Rhee Syngman thought that it would be difficult for him to be reelected through an indirect presidential election. He proclaimed martial law, threatened the lawmakers by mobilizing the army and police, and amended the constitution by force to institute the direct presidential election system.

4. Kim Young-sam was originally a lawmaker of the Liberal Party, but later moved to the opposition Democratic Party after feeling aversion to the long dictatorial rule of Rhee Syngman. He

leaders came from Jeolla Province. Most of the New Faction leaders were from Pyeongan Province<sup>5</sup> in North Korea and had worked for Heungsadan, or the “Society for the Fostering of Activists,” before joining the Democratic Party.

Because the Democratic Party did not consist of people who shared similar ideological or political goals, it is not easy to define the ideological characteristics of the party as an institution. They had no united political or economic platform, except on the issue of instituting a parliamentary system of government as a way to prevent authoritarian presidential rule. The party knew what it opposed, but not what it stood for. More than anything else, the Democratic Party was an alliance against Rhee Syngman. Another common link among the party members was their opposition to the “leftist” forces.<sup>6</sup> Lacking an independent ideological base and policy agenda as well as suffering from a very shallow party identity that was defined almost solely in terms of opposition against Rhee Syngman, the party was bound to lose its *raison d’etre* once the forces it opposed—Rhee Syngman and his Liberal Party—respectively took exile and disintegrated after the April 19th Student Revolution in 1960.

What marked the Democratic Party both as an opposition party in the 1955-1960 period and as a ruling party during 1960-1961 was its internal factionalism and its negatively and passively defined party agenda. Conflicts among the party members were rampant but controlled before 1960 because they had a common enemy to fight. After Rhee Syngman’s exile in 1961, that external “safety valve” putting the lid on internal factional rivalries disappeared, making it almost impossible for the party leadership to have a common political or ideological view from the outset. Factions formed around party leaders, such as Jo Byeong-ok, Chang Myun and others rather than around policy views and ideologies. The Democratic Party was a political “cohabitation” of two very personalistic political forces with mutually conflicting ambitions for power.

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should have been categorized as a lawmaker of the New Faction of the Democratic Party, but he joined the Old Faction as he had a close relationship with Jo Byeong-ok. Kim Dae-jung, on the other hand, entered his political life by joining the New Faction of the Democratic Party. We can say, therefore, that the discord between Kim Dae-jung and Kim Young-sam may date back to the confrontation between the Old and the New Factions in the 1950s. The discord between the two Kims has been one of the major variables in Korean politics.

5. Jeong Il-hyeong, Ju Yo-han and Kim Jae-sun were included in this band.

6. In the process of forming the Democratic Party, conservative politicians strongly called for the exclusion of former left-wing members. As a result, as the progressive politicians could not join the Democratic Party, Jo Bong-am and his followers formed the Progressive Party.

In the history of the Democratic Party, it was the presidential and vice-presidential election of 1956 that consolidated, institutionalized, or froze the emerging line of internal factional conflicts. To maintain the power balance of the coalition, the Democratic Party split the tickets, nominating Sin Ik-hui of the Old Faction as its presidential candidate and Chang Myun of the New Faction as the vice-presidential candidate. With the unexpected death of Sin Ik-hui during the election campaign, Rhee Syngman once again became the president, but with Chang Myun in the office of the vice president. Meanwhile, Jo Bong-am, the presidential candidate of the Progressive Party, gained 23.8 percent of the votes.<sup>7</sup> The election of Chang Myun as the vice president represented a huge political defeat for not only Rhee Syngman's Liberal Party but also the Old Faction of the Democratic Party, both of who eyed the succession of presidential power after octogenarian Rhee Syngman passed away. The victory in 1956 ironically fed on the internal factional struggles within the Democratic Party rather than uniting it around the new emerging leadership of Chang Myun.

The 1956 election sowed the seed for political trouble after 1960 also by revealing the electoral potential of progressive forces. Even the minority vote of 23.8 percent for Jo Bong-am shocked not only the conservative forces—the Liberal Party and the Democratic Party—but also their patron, the United States. Interpreting the sudden rise of the Progressive Party as an indicator of Korean society's underlying sentiment against capitalism,<sup>8</sup> the United States made every effort to isolate the progressive forces and to consolidate a conservative two-party system. Not only the Democratic Party but also the United States kept silent when Rhee Syngman dissolved the Progressive Party and executed Jo Bong-am and other “leftists” on charges of national subversion in 1959. This overseas patron also tried to influence the Liberal Party and the Democratic Party to draft the “consultative election law” (Macdonald 1992: 169). Despite the criticism and opposition of the entire press, both the Liberal Party and the Democratic Party passed the law in January 1958. Following the enactment of the law, the Liberal Party was able to better control press reports unfavorable to its image. The Democratic Party, on its part, could take part in the election man-

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7. Rhee Syngman acquired 55.7 percent of the votes, and the late Sin Ik-hui received posthumous (though invalid) votes of 20.5 percent.

8. Refer to “Downing to Department of State,” Embdes 333, “Situation and Short-term Prospects of the ROK,” Nov. 21, 1957, 759B.00/11-2157, RG 59, Decimal File, 1955-1959, National Archives in Lee Jong-won's article (1996: 92-93).

agement committee activities on equal terms in the number of participants. The Democratic Party adopted the deposit money system for party candidates that was aimed at preventing independent lawmakers or minor political parties from scrambling for election in large numbers and from eating into its own votes. The United States tried to restrict the activities of independent candidates or the candidates of small or progressive parties by exercising an influence on the Liberal Party and the Democratic Party to adopt the deposit money system, all in order to consolidate the conservative two-party system. As the deposit system required candidates to deposit a certain amount of money with the government when they ran for a general election, financially hard pressed candidates from either the independent or the progressive camp could not easily run for election. The United States successfully used this tactic to exercise influence on the general election in 1958. As a result, the independent camp and the progressive faction crumbled, paving the way for the establishment of a two party system composed of the Liberal Party and the Democratic Party as the United States had anticipated. Under the circumstances, the progressive camp once again had to keep a low profile and finally withdrew from the center stage of domestic politics after making its first comeback since the Korean War 1950-1953.<sup>9</sup>

This U.S. effort to maintain the conservative two-party system continued up to the last days of Rhee Syngman. Some of its mid-level officials toyed with the idea of creating a new ruling conservative coalition by combining the Liberal Party's moderates led by Lee Gi-bung with the Old Faction of the Democratic Party, while encouraging the latter's New Faction to evolve into a new conservative opposition political party (Kim Il-Young 1999a: 301-303). The Liberal Party and the Old Faction of the Democratic Party concurred on the need to merge forces, feeling threatened by Chang Myun's rise to the position of presidential succession in the event of Rhee Syngman's death and worried over the political potential of progressive force shown by Jo Bong-am's 1956 electoral performance. The two met secretly in early 1959 to discuss the possibility of amending the constitution from the presidential to a parliamentary system (Lee Yong-won 1999: 128-129). But the talk was soon interrupted when it was leaked, causing the New Faction to protest vehemently against any political merger, thus Lee Gi-bung had to shelve the plan.<sup>10</sup> The Democratic Party man-

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9. The United States evaluated the election as a "high-point" in the history of Korean politics ("Seoul to DOS," Embdes 13, July 11, 1958, *FRUS* 1958-160, XVIII, 456).

10. Being encircled by hard-liners of the Liberal Party, Lee Gi-bung gave impetus to a fraudulent

aged to avoid splitting into two parties, but the incident kept alive—if not worsened—conflicts between its two factions, which would finally explode after April 1960.

Rhee Syngman stepped down on April 26, 1960. Because the progressive forces were in political retreat since the execution of Cho Bong-am, the fall of Rhee Syngman meant that only the Democratic Party existed as an organized political force to make a claim on power. With major political rivals all disappearing from the national political scene, however, the Democratic Party suddenly found itself in the very difficult situation of redefining its mission and articulating its new *raison d'être*. The “victory” brought a crisis in party identity. In their typical fashion, however, major factional leaders of the Democratic Party turned to an internal power struggle rather than the task of reshaping its organizational agenda, goal, and mission. Free from any check and balance by other organized political forces during the immediate post-Rhee period, they fought among themselves to carve out a bigger share of power within the emerging parliamentary regime. Both the Old and New Factions even individually forged alliances with the now-orphaned Liberal Party’s National Assembly Members in an attempt to control the legislature, giving the latter some leverage over the negotiation over constitutional change during the Heo Jeong interim government formed in the aftermath of Rhee Syngman’s resignation.

After Rhee stepped down, the political parties debated intensely over whether to amend the constitution first or to hold a general election. The Liberal Party who controlled the National Assembly as well as feared for a precipitous loss of legislative seats in any future elections naturally advocated the amendment of the constitution before the holding of an election, hoping to use their seats to better their chance of remaining in power by influencing the structure of the new constitution. The Old Faction of the Democratic Party, too, favored the pursuit of constitutional amendment first because after the death of its factional leader Jo Byeong-ok, it was without a leader who could compete against Chang Myun in terms of popular support or nationwide political reputation. An early election would only benefit Chang Myun. The Old Faction, moreover, supported the amendment of the constitution because it wanted to buy time to realign and possibly even merge with the Liberal Party before the election.

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election scandal to make him and Rhee Syngman co-winners in the upcoming election. This resulted in the election fraud of March 15 in 1960.

The calculation of the New Faction was diametrically opposite. Aware of the de facto alliance between the Old Faction and the Liberal Party, the New Faction argued that the constitution ought to be amended by a new National Assembly to be constituted by a new election because the existing one with a large presence of Liberal Party members<sup>11</sup> was not qualified to draw a new political order. The real intention of the New Faction was to win the election with the popular Chang Myun as their leader and to amend the constitution from their newly won position of political power. In the end, the Old Faction won. Its proposal to form a “special committee for the constitutional amendment for the parliamentary system and the selection of personnel to make a draft bill for the constitutional amendment” passed through the legislature with the help of the Liberal Party members (Jeong Su-san 1992: 91).

Conflicts between the Old and New Factions continued throughout the constitutional amendment. Again, the two sides did not hesitate to enter into alliance with the Liberal Party, giving rise to the rumors of illicit deals and bribes between Democratic Party members and Liberal Party legislators (Cha Gi-byeok 1975: 101). The newspapers also reported that many *chaebols* previously linked with the Liberal Party donated illegal political funds to the Democratic Party in an effort to secure new political patrons who could protect them from the rising tide of reformist demand in society (*Dong-a Ilbo* June 8, 1960).<sup>12</sup> With their hands compromised by illicit deals with Liberal Party legislators and chaebol owners, the Democratic Party could not turn to reform—including the prosecution of Liberal Party leaders, chaebol owners, and bureaucrats implicated in corruption, election rigging or human rights violations—to satisfy the popular demand for change. The Heo Jeong interim government saw the Liberal Party, but not its individual political dealers, lose power.

The intraparty conflict only intensified as the July 29th general election approached. The two factions of the Democratic Party battled fiercely to have their members nominated as party candidates for the election. As the Liberal

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11. After Rhee Syngman retired, the Liberal Party occupied 148 seats among a total of 231 parliamentary seats, followed by the Democratic Party with 74 seats and independent lawmakers with nine. Although the Liberal Party became rapidly disintegrated thereafter after a lot of deserters broke away from it, the party still possessed at least 65 percent of the National Assembly seats until that period.

12. Two days before the July 29th general election, it was reported that the New Faction of the Democratic Party received political funds of 1.8 billion won from those who amassed wealth by illicit means (*The Dong-a Ilbo* July 27, 1960).

Party was disintegrated and the progressive camp was not fully lined up, the Democratic Party emerged as the only alternative force that could replace the transition government led by Heo Jeong. Candidates nominated by the Democratic Party had fair chances of winning the election. As the number of seats manifests political power under the cabinet system, faction leaders made desperate efforts to nominate the candidates having the same political interest. The party leadership managed to mend the differences by nominating more or less equal numbers of candidates—111 from the New Faction, 108 from the Old Faction, and eight moderates—but only temporarily. The conflict over the nomination, in fact, worsened the rift between the two factions. The call to split from the Democratic Party to establish a separate party was immediately heard in the ranks of the Old Faction as they saw their faction to have lost the war over nomination. Some faction leaders, too, called for a party split, but on the grounds that they needed to establish a two-party system not only to preempt the danger of dictatorial rule by a hegemonic party (that would likely result from the coming general election if the Old and New Factions ran under the same party banner), but also to prevent the progressive force from making inroads into the National Assembly.<sup>13</sup>

In the end, the Old Faction chose to stay on in the Democratic Party not because it had any party loyalty, but because splitting from it before the election would adversely affect its chance of winning seats. Moreover, both factions worried about the possibility of progressive forces making a comeback in the upcoming election as the university campuses radicalized after the fall of Rhee Syngman. The April Revolution galvanized the progressive camp that had hitherto kept a low profile lest they became the target of anticommunist repression. There quickly emerged several progressive political groups, including the Socialist Mass Party and the Korean Socialist Party, who began to raise their moral critique on labor issues, education, and the mass media. With the progressive force on the rise once again, it was difficult for anyone within the Democratic Party to actually carry out the party split.

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13. This statement coincides with the conception of the United States and the Old Faction of the Democratic Party in late 1950s.

## The July 29th General Election and Chang Myun's New Cabinet

The fear of the progressive forces making a strong comeback was soon proven wrong. The Democratic Party captured 175 out of 233 seats in the lower house in the July 29th general election. The margin of victory, in fact, was even greater than these numbers suggested because the majority of 49 lawmakers who won their seats as independent candidates had originally been Democratic Party members. They ran as independents only because they could not get its nomination. Once they were elected, most of them returned to the party. The Democratic Party enjoyed such an overwhelming victory not only because the party received wide support from the people, but also because it overwhelmed the other parties in terms of organizational power, political fund and support from the state bureaucracy. For its part, the progressive camp caught in severe internal disputes, paralyzed by poor organization, lacking financial support, as well as alienated from Korea's mostly conservative society, captured only five seats.

Ironically, however, the landslide victory sowed the seeds for the fall of the Democratic Party in two ways. First, without a sizeable opposition party, the Democrats prepared for a party split along factional lines. Had the progressive force succeeded in winning more seats and emerged a strong countervailing force against the Democratic Party, its Old and New Factions would have mended their personalistic differences in order to forge a unified ideological front against the progressives.<sup>14</sup> Second, the progressive forces, having been excluded from the National Assembly, poured out onto the street in order to politicize social and economic issues, to put forth national unification onto the center of national agenda, and to bring justice to the wrongdoings committed by Rhee Syngman's First Republic as well as Democratic Party bosses. The weakness of the progressives at the electoral booth perversely contributed to the radicalization of politics.

Immediately after the landslide victory, the Old and the New Factions separately held their party meetings. Upon finding that the Old Faction members outnumbered the New Faction by more or less 10,<sup>15</sup> its leaders calculated that by

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14. If this would be the case, it is highly probable that the Democratic Party would have continued to maintain the "cohabitation" of two families under one roof. A similar case was seen in the Liberal Democratic Party under the 1955 political system in Japan.

15. The Old and the New Factions held their separate meetings of successful candidates on the

allying with independent lawmakers, their faction could win the indirect election of the president as well as prime minister and quickly moved to form a new party. On August 4 the Old Faction announced that “to avoid the danger of one-party dictatorship, the Democratic Party has to split into two independent parties and the new government should be composed of those who share the same political views in order to exercise strong sovereign power” (*Kyungnyang Shinmun* August 5, 1960).

The move backfired, however. The Old Faction succeeded in electing Yun Bo-seon to the mostly ceremonial office of the presidency, but failed to put Kim Do-yeon in the prime ministership where power resided in Korea’s new parliamentary system of government. The defeat was due to its inability to lure the independents to its side. Nineteen of the 49 independent lawmakers, originally belonging to either the New or the Old Factions, reentered the factions as subordinate members right after the election. However, the other 30 lawmakers remained independent, whereas, amongst them, twenty decided to vote as a block in the election of prime minister in order to win cabinet portfolios for themselves. They asked the two candidates for prime ministership, Kim Do-yeon of the Old Faction and Chang Myun of the New Faction, about the makeup of the future cabinet. Chang Myun promised that his new cabinet would include independent lawmakers, but Kim Do-yeon announced that cabinet posts would go only to party members with the goal of luring some of the independents into his faction. By doing so, Kim Do-yeon caused the twenty-independent bloc to cast their votes for Chang Myun (*Chosun Ilbo* August 18, 1960; Han Sung-joo 1974: 119-121).<sup>16</sup>

After Chang Myun was elected prime minister, the Old Faction leaders announced the establishment of a new splinter party, with non-parliamentary members as part of its leadership and rank-and-file. To prevent the split of the

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same day on August 6. Ninety-five participated in the Old Faction meeting while the New Faction drew 85. Boosted by the turnout, the Old Faction leaders believed they exceeded the New Faction by 10 seats. It, however, was a miscalculation as it was hard to count the exact number of seats shared by the two factions. At that time, most of the 49 elected independent lawmakers were calculating possible losses and gains before joining either of the two groups.

16. Besides, the breakaway of some Old Faction members also affected the defeat of Kim Do-yeon. Heo Jeong played a role in fostering the situation. Being dissatisfied with the fact that the Old Faction didn’t give him his due post, he persuaded some of his familiar Old Faction members and independent lawmakers to support Chang Myun (Heo Jeong 1979: 265; Song Won-yeong 1990: 159).

party, Gwak Sang-hun, Speaker of the Lower House and a leading member of the New Faction, convened a meeting of the leaders of both factions including Yun Bo-seon, Chang Myun, and Yu Jin-san on August 21. To head off the split, Chang Myun promised that he would appoint five Old Faction members to the cabinet. Chang Myun, however, could not keep his promise as the New Faction leaders declined to share political power with the Old Faction members. The New Faction leaders hoped that the lion's share of cabinet posts would be taken by them and the independent and the Old Faction lawmakers would be given a small portion of such posts, which they believed would make a good mixture in the distribution of power. The first Chang Myun cabinet, officially launched on August 22, 1960, accordingly consisted of eleven New Faction members, two non-parliamentarians, and only one Old Faction legislator, Jeong Heon-ju, who broke with the factional guideline because of his close personal ties with Chang Myun.

The formation of the cabinet internally divided the New Faction, too. The younger group members within the New Faction led by Lee Cheol-seung began to raise their voices on the floor. They tried to attract several independent lawmakers to their side to help Chang Myun get elected, hoping that they could receive one or two cabinet posts after the election. As they failed to receive any cabinet post, they formed Sojang Dongjihoe (later renamed as Sinpunghoe on January 26, 1961) in order to realize their intention of gaining key party or cabinet posts. Meanwhile, the Old Faction continued their preparation for a party split, establishing an 86-member strong floor negotiation group, Mingu Dongjihoe, on August 31 and finally announcing the formation of the New Democratic Party on November 8 with sixty-five lawmakers.

With the split of the party at hand, some twenty lawmakers—mostly younger members—within the Old Faction decided to remain in the Democratic Party.<sup>17</sup> Thus, the Democratic Party was able to maintain 124 seats in the National

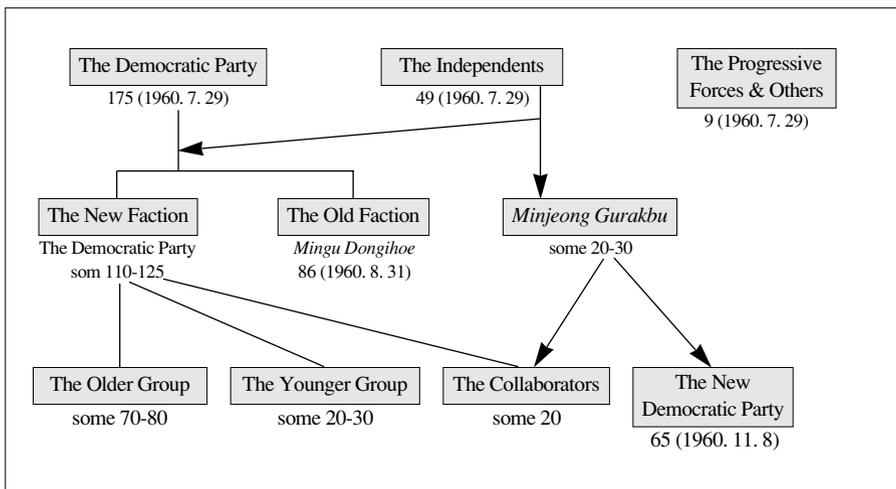
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17. The younger members of the Old Faction neither had ill feeling against the New Faction nor had affection for the Old Faction. They wanted to remain in the Democratic Party and enjoy the distribution of the powerful posts rather than joining the New Democratic Party to become opposition party lawmakers. The majority of them, including Gwon Jung-don, Park Hae-jeong, and Park Hae-chung, were from Gyeongsang Province. They did not join the New Democratic Party because it was hard to expect winning the general election for the second or third time as a candidate of the New Democratic Party in Gyeongsang Province. It was because most of the leaders of the New Democratic Party were from Jeolla Province, the archrival of Gyeongsang Province.

Assembly, seven seats more than the absolute majority. The majority control, however, soon proved to be more a faade than a reality because those Old Faction members who stayed behind with the Democratic Party stridently resisted the authority of Chang Myun after they failed to acquire the cabinet or party posts they were promised (*Kyunghyang Shinmun* November 22, 1960). Now, in addition to the generational cleavage within the party, the Democratic Party came to have some of its members pitted against one another—the blue-blooded New Faction members and the betrayers of the Old Faction. The 124 seats that the Democratic Party held were no more than a loose confederation of these three groups that struggled against one another for cabinet posts.

The political game of coalition building consequently became very complex after the split. The ruling Democratic Party not only confronted the bitter New Democratic Party with a decade-long personalistic hostility to its leadership, but also suffered a three-way split within its own party hierarchy. Chang Myun reshuffled the cabinet posts three times in order to maintain the majority on the floor during its ten months in power. On September 12, 1960, he desperately formed a coalition cabinet with some members of the Old Faction in order to head off the impending party split, only to see Yun Bo-seon and Kim Do-yeon leave their Old Faction to establish the New Democratic Party. In late January the following year, he once again reshuffled the cabinet to placate the disgruntled younger group as well as the Old Faction group remaining within the party

**Figure 1.** Changes in the Number of Parliamentary Seats in Each Party of Faction



by offering the ministership of health and social affairs and the ministership without portfolio to their leaders. When the two minority groups rejected the offer and demanded more powerful posts like the ministership of defense or home affairs, Chang Myun had no other option than to fill the cabinet with the elder members of the New Faction. The third and last reshuffle came in early May 1961, just two weeks before the military coup d'état when Chang Myun again tried unsuccessfully to lure the younger group into supporting him with minor cabinet portfolios (Lee Jeong-sik 1986: 304-315).

Although the Democratic Party succeeded in holding the majority seats, it failed to establish a strong foothold. The Democratic Party could lose the position as the majority party and face a non-confidence motion in the case where younger faction members or collaborators might bolt from it. For this reason, Chang Myun reshuffled the cabinet three times in an effort to bring them over to his side. His effort, however, could not bear fruit due to the interruption of the elder members surrounding him. Thus the Chang Myun government continued to suffer from instability.

### **Toward the Crisis of Ungovernability**

What made Chang Myun's political situation even worse were the demands that society made of him as the head of government. One such demand was the arduous task of economic growth, which he incorporated as the nation's top priority in his 1961 New Year Address. At that time, the South Korean economy was in a dire situation. The United States Operations Mission (USOM) estimated that the number of unemployed and underemployed neared three million, more than 30 percent of the total workforce (*Chosun Ilbo* January 1, 1961). Likewise, in a memorandum to U.S. Secretary of State Christian A. Herter in October 1960, Chang Myun himself estimated that, of the total labor force of 9.4 million, 1.3 million were unemployed. What he called "latent unemployment" even reached several million (Jeong Heon-ju 1985: 270). In public surveys, Koreans overwhelmingly identified employment and economic growth as the top priority concern of the government (*Hankook Ilbo* September 29, 1960; *Dong-a Ilbo* December 28, 1960). Feeling such pressure, Chang Myun enunciated the "economy-first principle" or *gyeongje jeil juui* in the government's White Paper, promising to the public a concerted effort for development. He pledged economic stabilization, directed the state bureaucracy to draw up a long-term economic

development plan, initiated an integral nationwide land development program, and called for an expansion of employment, trade, and housing construction (*Chosun Ilbo* January 6, 1961).

The economy, however, did not show signs of improvement during the Chang Myun government. The failure to bring growth was not entirely its fault because it was in power for only ten months—too short to make a visible impact on the still war-devastated economy. Nevertheless, there is serious doubt as to whether the Chang Myun government could have improved the economic condition even if it stayed in power longer. It is true that the government directed the state bureaucracy to draw up a long-term economic development plan and planned for national land development in early 1961, but this effort at economic planning was not backed by a concurrent effort of institution building to establish an effective mechanism of policy implementation.

The Ministry of Reconstruction (MOE) was then the planning agency, but because it did not have the power to allocate budget, it lacked concrete policy instruments to link its development plan with the other ministries' policies and effectively implement its investment plan. Aware of this institutional shortcoming, the MOE bureaucrats—many of who had been trained in the United States and/or worked for international donor agencies—had argued for the ministry's expansion into a super-ministry with the power to allocate budget since the last days of Rhee Syngman.<sup>18</sup> Partly because of the indifference of the Rhee Syngman government to the issue of economic development and partly because of the Finance Ministry's strong objection against the surrendering of its budgetary power, the proposal made no progress until the Chang Myun government was inaugurated and showed interest in development planning. The Democratic Party organized a "seven-member committee for restructuring the government" composed of government ministers and the ruling party leaders, which subsequently established a subcommittee<sup>19</sup> to actively map out a plan for the reorgani-

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18. ee Gi-hong, then one of the elite bureaucrats, maintained that Korea should have had an organization like the Planning Commission of India in order to accelerate the nation's economic growth. The organization, if set up, should have had the extra function of distributing resources in addition to the coordination function of India's Planning Commission. The new organization should have been developed into a ministry that would have ranked first among the ministries (Lee Gi-hong 1999). Lee Han-bin, who had studied at Harvard University, had a similar view (Jo Yeong-mok 1987).

19. It was composed of director-general for personnel at the State Affairs Council (Kim Yeong-jun), director-general for budget at the Ministry of Treasury (Lee Han-bin), director-general for

zation of the state bureaucracy. The subcommittee eventually drafted a plan to create the Ministry of Development with both planning and budgetary powers, which the Chang Myun government announced in early November 1960. This state reorganization plan, however, got nowhere for the next six months due to internal problems (Kim Heung-gi 1999: 31-34).

The apologists of the Chang Myun government attribute the failure to the lack of time, implicitly or explicitly arguing that it could or would have succeeded in carrying out the state reorganization plan had the military not intervened in politics by launching a coup in May 1961 (Jeong Heon-ju 1985). Considering that the military regime launched the Ministry of Development<sup>20</sup> on May 26, 1961—only 10 days after it seized power—however, such a view does not hold much ground. Although the Chang Myun government proclaimed the economy-first principle, which the military junta ironically reiterated after overthrowing Chang Myun, the Democratic Party government utterly failed in transforming its rhetoric into concrete economic policy innovation and institution building efforts. It is more accurate to say that it lacked the ability to make timely decisions to implement its plans rather than to say that the military coup deprived it of the minimum time required to carry out its plan.

Like the state reorganization plan, the fate of economic development policy too showed both change and continuity between the Rhee Syngman presidency and the Chang Myun government. That Chang Myun ordered his government to draw up a long-term development plan in November 1960 certainly distinguished him from Rhee Syngman who barely understood the importance of state initiative in bringing economic growth. During his presidency, it was U.S. advisory missions rather than the Liberal Party that attempted to plan out Korea's economic future. The Nathan Report and the Tascia Report were both initiated by a U.S. economic advisory mission (KDI 1995: 140-141, 152-156) at the end of the Korean War (1950-1953) as part of an effort to reconstruct the war-torn economy. The Korean government showed interest in economic planning only by the late 1950s. The interest then was, moreover, political rather than economic. Rhee Syngman ordered the Ministry of Reconstruction (MOR) and its Industrial Development Committee to hurriedly draw up a long-term

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planning at the Ministry of Reconstruction (Lee Gi-hong) and director-general for legislation at the Government Legislation Agency (Kim Do-chang).

20. The Ministry of Development was renamed the Economic Planning Board (EPB) on July 22 the same year.

economic development plan with the goal of persuading the U.S. to make aid policy for the long-term rather than on a yearly basis, as it had done since the end of the Korean War. The president calculated that if the MOR could get U.S. aid officials directly involved in long-term economic planning, their government would have no other option than to finance long-term investment projects with a stable injection of aid.

Not surprisingly, given the lack of political commitment, economic planning during the Rhee presidency never took off. The MOR's Industrial Development Committee drew up a seven-year economic development plan (1960-1966) in 1957, only to shorten it to a three-year plan (1960-1962) in the face of U.S. disinterest. The ministry submitted this plan to the cabinet for discussion on December 31, 1959 (Lee Wan-beom 1999: 18-26), but it was shelved because the Rhee presidency was by then totally absorbed in the campaigning for the presidential and vice presidential elections to take place on March 15, 1960. When the cabinet finally approved a modified version of the three-year plan on April 15, 1960, the country was in turmoil, with waves of demonstrators protesting against the election fraud perpetrated on March 15. Eleven days later, Rhee Syngman resigned, again indefinitely postponing the implementation of the three-year plan.

By contrast, the Chang Myun government acted more quickly, ordering the Industrial Development Committee within the MOR to map out a long-term economic development plan in late November 1960. Based on the three-year economic development plan drafted during the Rhee Syngman presidency, the committee began working on the drafting of a five-year economic development plan (1961-1965) and submitted a preliminary plan for bilateral talks with U.S. aid officials on May 10, 1961.<sup>21</sup> The MOR secured three hundred million dollars in U.S. aid to finance parts of the five-year plan, which would be finalized when Chang Myun was to visit Washington in July to sign an agreement with President John F. Kennedy. This visit never took place because on May 16, 1961, the military revolted and Park established a military junta, again shelving the development plan.

The First Five-Year Economic Development Plan was put into action only in

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21. Unfortunately, there is no full text of the draft plan remaining now, partly because it was not made in a complete form of documents (Yu Gwang-ho 1998: 125; Lee Wan-beom 1999: 33-34). We can only see the outline of the five-year economic development plan made in Feb. of 1961 (KDI 1995: 207).

1962 by the new military regime (Jeong Heon-ju 1985: 274-276). The critics of Park Chung Hee argue that the military junta was not the architect of what was to be the beginning of the “Miracle of Han River” and that it simply stole from the Chang Myun government their ideas for economic growth. Such a “copy-cat” theory is partly, but not completely, true. After its launch, the military government adopted the economic development plan of the Chang Myun government. In the process of drafting its First Five-year Economic Development Plan, the military government adopted a large portion of the Chang Myun government’s draft plan in the initial stage. Especially, the military government completely adopted the two industrial strategies<sup>22</sup> of developing the import-substitution industries that target domestic, rather than foreign, markets and placing top priority of investment on heavy industry. After the strategies failed to realize the anticipated results, the Park Chung Hee government changed the original plan into “the export-oriented industrialization strategy” in 1963. Korea achieved the marvelous economic growth based on an amended bill that began to be put into practice in 1964. So, we cannot say that the economic development under the Park regime is in debt completely to the Chang Myun government.

The most critical question when appraising the ability of the Chang Myun government, however, was not the absence of a coherent and viable strategy that integrated individual projects into a concerted action program. The five-year plan of the subsequent military junta, too, initially lacked logical consistency and realism and had to be revised substantially throughout 1963 to become a catalyst for economic development. Rather, it is the timing that gives clues to the relative commitment of the political leadership behind economic growth. The Chang Myun government publicly pledged to implement a development plan by January 1961, but was able to complete the draft plan only by May 1961. For its part, the military junta called in economic bureaucrats and technocrats for a comprehensive review of economic planning only three days after the May 16 coup and completed the drafting of a new economic development plan as well as the transformation of the MOR into a super-ministry in just two months (Jo Gap-je 1999; Kim Heung-gi 1999: 55-56). Compared to the military junta, the Chang Myun government lost its race against time. The delay in drawing up the

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22. The U.S. government called the economic development plan of the Chang Myun government a mere “shopping list,” or a “project list” without a coherent and viable strategy to trigger growth and even criticized it as “socialistic” (Macdonald 1992: 289; D. H. Satterwhite 1994: 353). The newspapers meanwhile called it “unrealistic” (*Chosun Ilbo* May 14, 1961).

plan, as well as in creating the Ministry of Development, casts serious doubt on its ability to make timely decisions on the choice of both policy priorities and institutional reform.

To be sure, the Chang Myun government also formulated a short-term land development program, with the goal of reducing unemployment as well as constructing the infrastructure required to back economic development. In order to build roads and power plants, reclaim farmland, and develop water resources and forestry, the government hoped to receive ten million dollars from U.S. economic aid. Unlike the aborted five-year economic development plan, this land development project began to be implemented in March 1961. Those who positively appraise the Chang Myun government's place in postwar Korean history see the project as its greatest accomplishment. The Chang Myun government selected and trained two thousand college graduates to man the land development team and dispatched them to construction sites across the nation in order to carry out the plan (Jeong Heon-ju 1985: 272-273).

Although the Chang Myun government distinguished itself as developmentalist from its predecessor by formulating the land development plan, it is also true that as an instrument for development, the plan suffered from several serious shortcomings. First, the land development plan had only minuscule effect on employment, only hiring two thousand university graduates in poverty-stricken Korea. Those who were employed, moreover, complained of the poor working conditions and frequently refused to work on the construction sites because their salaries were not enough or because the food and lodging conditions were unsatisfactory (*Chosun Ilbo* March 7, 1961).<sup>23</sup> To make the situation worse, the project was not well financed, with the budget allotment frequently delayed by political leaders. The delay in U.S. economic assistance frustrated the economic development plan and budgets were drawn up according to the political maneuvers of lawmakers. Many of the land development projects were chosen for the purpose of political display in provincial cities rather than on the basis of economic and social impact (*Kyunghyang Shinmun* February 19, February 25, April 11, April 30, 1961; Jeong Su-san 1992: 167-169). Moreover, the project was prematurely stopped after two months because of the military coup.

Would the Chang Myun government have been able to produce better results

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23. Although they were college graduates, they boarded and lodged at the construction sites and worked like manual workers.

if it had been given more time? It is not easy to give a positive answer considering the continuous delay in institution building and policy decision. The ten months of its tenure showed that it lacked the entrepreneurial spirit to take risks and the initiative required to formulate and implement reform. The Chang Myun government moreover found it hard to allocate necessary funds, causing the whole project to be doomed to a failure from its very inception. It is true the military deprived the Chang Myun government of not only political power but also of the time required to implement the economic programs it finally was able to assemble by May 1961. However, it is also true that the government failed to make the best use of the time it had since August 1960 and wasted time to act.

### **The Challenge of Progressive Forces and the Paralysis of Bureaucracy**

While the government lost the time to act on the economic front, tensions worsened in its relationship with society. The college students who returned to the campus after instigating the overthrow of Rhee Syngman in April 1960 began showing up at protest sites by late 1960. The problem was partly the Chang Myun government's own doing. Student activists were outraged when the court proved to be very lenient on the crimes committed by Rhee Syngman's closest associates in its October 8, 1960 ruling, with some students even occupying the National Assembly building.

Those who were brought to trial at this time were either anti-democratic criminals including those involved in vote rigging or those who illicitly amassed wealth in collusion with Rhee Syngman. Those in the former group were mainly the Liberal Party members and bureaucrats under the Rhee Syngman administration, while *chaebol*, or business conglomerates, were categorized as the latter group. Although the students and the citizens called for the enactment of a special law to punish them, the Heo Jeong's interim government and the Chang Myun administration paid no heed to their opinion. As the court imposed light penalties on the anti-democratic criminals and illicit fortune makers under the provisions of the existing law, the students and the citizens went onto the streets again for protests.

The government made every effort to subdue social unrest, but to no avail. To ameliorate the public anger resulting from the court's lenient ruling on the criminal charges brought against former Rhee supporters, the Chang Myun gov-

ernment pushed through four special laws<sup>24</sup> to impose heavier sentences on the perpetrators. However, this did not appease the disgruntled students and citizens. Demonstrations, in fact, became more severe.

To make the situation even worse, the enactment of the special law made the conservative force, hitherto an ally of the Chang Myun government, withdraw their support. Following the enactment of the law, as many as 4,500 policemen and 5,000 public servicemen were forced to resign because of their collaboration with Rhee Syngman. The state bureaucrats and the police cooperated with the Chang Myun government when it took a lukewarm attitude toward the passage of the law. Now that the bill had been passed by the National Assembly, they turned their back on Chang Myun. To re-impose control over the bureaucracy and policy, without which Chang Myun could not maintain social order, he should have quickly filled in the posts that were left vacant after the large-scale purge of pro-Rhee elements. This was, however, prevented by the ensuing conflict among Democratic Party factions keen to distribute the posts to their political followers and allies. When Chang Myun was able to appoint some, moreover, he only angered his opponents by recruiting many of his closest political allies and cronies rather than politically neutral but technically competent people for the posts. One of the worst cases occurred in the Ministry of Home Affairs, where both the Democratic Party and the New Democratic Party struggled to appoint their own people to the major posts in the Seoul City Government as well as provincial administrative units in order to use the Home Affairs's nationwide bureaucratic organization to mobilize votes in the local election on December 29, 1960. The appointments were delayed until October 1960 when Chang Myun finally named governors for the provinces, most of whom were from the New Faction.<sup>25</sup> The delay in the appointments paralyzed the administrative machinery, making it that much harder for the government to deal effectively with social unrest (Jeong Su-san 1992: 142-157).

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24. The four special laws were: The bill on punishing those involved in vote rigging; the bill on punishing illicit fortune makers; the law on restricting the civic rights of anti-democratic criminals; and the bill on establishing special prosecution and special courts.

25. In detail, the posts of the South Jeolla and Gangwon Province governors went to the New Faction members who had failed in the general election, and a relative of Kim Yeong-seon became the Governor of the North Chungcheong Province. An election advisor of Hyeon Seok-ho became the Governor of North Gyeongsang Province (*Kyunghyang Shinmun* Oct. 9, 1960).

After Rhee Syngman retired, students turned their attention from politics to enlightenment movements such as the movement to enlighten the people's national consciousness and the new life movement. As they were neither well prepared nor well organized, the movement could not bear the desired fruit. Under the circumstances, some student activists were dismayed at the delay in punishment of the former collaborators of Rhee Syngman, the continuing economic underdevelopment, and the government's seeming inability to act with a clear set of goals. They turned to what they thought were "fundamental" structural causes that blocked reform on the political and economic fronts. They wrongly or not concluded that without national reunification, these problems could not be solved. They thought that only after the progressive force, not the conservative force like the Democratic Party, assumed the reigns of government could they see the adherents of Rhee Syngman punished. It, they believed, was as hard to expect the progressive force to gain power if the state of national division continued and the superpowers tacitly approved it. They also believed that the nation could make economic development only after economic cooperation was made between South Korea privileged with its human resources and agricultural development and North Korea endowed with its underground natural resources and superiority in industrial growth. From this, it was a short step to argue that what needed to be done was a struggle against the superpowers that blocked reunification. Such a belief originally germinated from the ideas of some progressive ideology-minded college circles at certain major universities. Those ideas, however, appealed to the students who had been adrift following the failure of the enlightenment movement and who were disappointed with the Chang Myun government's anti-reform drive. Accordingly, the university campuses became the center of radical movements calling for the immediate reunification of the country (Kim Il-Young 1990: 100-109).

This shift in the mood on the college campuses coincided with—if not indirectly or directly caused by—the changing political strategies of the progressive camp. After their defeat at the election booth on July 29, 1960, the progressives searched for a way to break out of their political isolation from society in general and concluded that they could do so only if a political alliance was forged with the university student movements. In January 1961, the Socialist Mass Party took the initiative to establish a "Consultative Committee for Nationalist and Independent Unification of Korea" (Minjatong) with sixteen political organizations, including the Student League for National Unification (Haksaeng Minjok Tongil Yeonmaeng) and the National League of Teachers' Labor Union. The

consultative committee soon became the focal point of all reunification movements.

When South Korea and the United States signed the “Comprehensive Agreement Relating to Economic Assistance and Technical Cooperation” in early 1961, the progressive camp and the New Democratic Party opposed it on the grounds that it was an “unequal” treaty. The treaty stated that the “the United States has the right to *continuous observation and review* of the way U.S. financial and technical aid was being administered by the Korean government” and that “South Korea was required to provide *full and complete information* concerning the aid programs and other relevant information which the government of the United States may need” (Kim Se-jin 1976: 263-266, emphasis added). The progressive camp formed a common front to oppose the unequal provisions of the agreement, which it thought allowed U.S. intervention in any Korean economic policy its aid officials chose to intervene in. Although the struggle failed to receive support from Korea’s deeply conservative and fiercely anti-Communist public, it occasioned the progressives to come together under a national umbrella organization and put pressure on the Chang Myun government in a systematic way (*Kyunghyang Shinmun* February 15, 1961). The agreement was ratified by the National Assembly in late February.

Although the reunification movements frequently clothed in the rhetoric of anti-Americanism failed to win the support of society, it raised a sense of crisis among Korea’s conservative establishment and put the Chang Myun government on the defensive throughout the first half of 1961 as it made the government appear ineffective in guarding national security. Accordingly, to placate the conservatives as well as to preempt the spread of radical protests, the Chang Myun government sent out strong warnings against the progressives, hinting at investigations into and crack downs on the “subversive forces” responsible for organizing the reunification movements (*Chosun Ilbo* November 1, 1960; *Dong-a Ilbo* November 2, 1960). The government arrested some of its leaders, including Kim Dal-ho, Head of the Socialist Mass Party, Seonu Jeong, Chairman of the Socialist Mass Party’s Propaganda Committee, and Go Jeong-hun, Chairman of the Unification Socialist Party’s Propaganda Committee (*Hankook Ilbo* March 22, 1961). But the government failed to go beyond suppression or offer a convincing policy alternative to the radicals’ call for immediate reunification on the issue of national division. All that it could or would do was to reiterate the traditional position that the two Korea should be reunited through an all-Korea election under the supervision of the United Nations, strictly in accordance with

the constitution of South Korea.<sup>26</sup> The prestige of the government nose-dived in spite of the continued political isolation of the progressives.

As the activities of the progressive forces intensified, the government moved to prepare two special security laws in March 1961: The “Anti-Communist Provisional Law,” and the “Street Demonstration Control Law.”<sup>27</sup> The progressive camp vehemently opposed both laws, going out to the street to demand an end to any legislative activities throughout the month of March. In Daegu, North Gyeongsang Province, more than ten thousand people made a street protest against the enactment of the law on March 18, followed by other protests between March 21 and 25 in which tens of thousands of protestors participated. Such street demonstrations spread to other major cities including Seoul, Busan, Masan, Gwangju, and Jeonju. Especially, the evening torchlight parades in some provinces produced shock and a feeling of uneasiness in the people (*Hankuk Ilbo* March 19, 22, 1961). Even the conservative newspapers doubted the desirability as well as the effectiveness of the two special laws. *Hankuk Ilbo* complained that “the government does not do the things it should do, and hurries up to do the things it should not do” (March 24, 1961). The government eventually withdrew the bill in early April.

Then, as the first anniversary of the April 19th Revolution approached, society was engulfed by all kinds of rumors. Some warned of the likelihood of another popular uprising, and others of the threat of a military coup d’ état. These rumors were not entirely groundless, as a band of young colonels in the army led by Major General Park Chung Hee had been not-so-clandestinely preparing for a coup since early 1960, the news of which was leaked even to the military security forces. The progressive camp restrained radical protests throughout April, lest they give the military a pretext for intervention in politics. Thus society briefly enjoyed stability in the month of April, but this was only a façade as it resulted from the progressive camp’s tactical maneuver to preempt any causes of a military coup (Han Sung-joo 1974: 205).

Stability ended in May when the radical wing of student movements returned to the street to propose the holding of a “South-North Korean Students’ Conference” to bring national reunification. The progressive camp, including the

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26. This reunification scenario was adopted by the majority of the lower house on March 13, 1961 (*Minuiwon Hoeuirok*, The 38th session, No. 35: 10-18).

27. The former aimed at controlling pro-communist subversive activities and the latter at controlling street demonstrations.

Socialist Mass Party-led Consultative Committee, welcomed the students' initiative, while North Korea responded positively with its own organizing of student representatives. The Chang Myun government and the conservative camp predictably denounced the movement as a pro-communist subversive activity and moved to deter it with force.

The worsening political unrest alarmed the U.S., but like many Koreans, it did not know how to reverse the disintegration of the Chang Myun government from within. The U.S. government sensed the coming of a crisis as early as November 1960 when the Department of State produced a National Intelligence Estimate report (NIE 42.1-2-60) entitled, "Prospects for the Republic of Korea." There it forecasted that "changes in leadership and realignments of forces will probably occur in the next few years" and, in that case, there would be "some shift away from the present dominance of conservative parties and an increase in the strength of socialist forces" (*FRUS* 1994: 697-698). The report was pessimistic about the survival chances of the Chang Myun government as well as the future of South Korean politics.

Then came an even more pessimistic report entitled, "The Situation in Korea, February 1961" to the White House by Hugh Farley, a technology advisor at the Korea branch of the International Cooperation Administration (ICA). Having been disappointed with and discouraged by Korea's corruption and chronic incompetence, Farley tendered his resignation and returned home in 1961. The ICA headquarters postponed accepting his resignation and suggested to Farley that it would provide a forum to discuss the issue with the U.S. State Department officials after he submitted a report on the Korean situation. So was born the so-called "Farley Report." The report harshly criticized the inability and the corruption of the South Korean government and forecasted that the government would find it hard to remain in power until April that year. In addition, Farley warned that South Korea, if abandoned by the U.S., might face a Communist revolution or a disaster of similar magnitude. The U.S. government, Farley argued, should send a special envoy to the Chang Myun government at the earliest possible date and intervene in South Korean politics to accelerate reform. If not, there could be a military coup (*The Academy of Korean Studies* 1999: 14-38; *FRUS* 1996: 424-425).

The document was submitted to Walt Rostow, vice national security advisor, at the introduction of Bob Comer at the national security office at the White House. Rostow reported it to President John F. Kennedy (*Jo Gap-je* 1998: 292-293). The White House apparently was shocked by the Farley Report. Kennedy

ordered the Department of State and the Central Intelligence Agency (CIA) to thoroughly research the Korea situation while directing the National Security Council (NSC) to map out a new policy for the Korean peninsula. The State Department, however, was not convinced by the Farley Report. The Department admitted that South Korea faced a critical moment, but believed that Chang Myun was regaining control and that the South Korean government would sustain itself if it continuously received U.S. economic aid and political support. The Department dismissed as unrealistic Farley's argument that a deeper U.S. involvement in South Korean affairs would end political turmoil. Rather it thought that further U.S. involvement in South Korean politics would be seen as a foreign meddling in domestic politics by the public and precipitate anti-American protests, especially when Korean nationalism had grown so strong since the April Revolution (The Academy of Korean Studies 1999: 6-12).

The CIA, too, presented an intelligence report entitled, "Short-range Outlook in the Republic of Korea" to the NSC on March 21, 1961. In their report, the CIA warned that "the April anniversary of the fall of President Rhee will be marked by demonstrations and some acts of violence... However, present grievances among opposition groups and the public are not as intense as those which gave rise to the 1960 revolution." The report concluded that, "South Korea is basically so weak economically and unsteady politically that internal crisis or threat of crisis will be the norm, not the exception, over the years ahead" (*FRUS* 1996: 430-435).

Despite the differences on the likelihood of regime change, practically all reports identified South Korea under Chang Myun as a basket case. Sensing the build up of political pressures, the NSC began preparing a new policy for the Korean peninsula as instructed by Kennedy. A task force was launched in early May in spite of the lack of consensus among U.S. officials on how to help the Chang Myun government govern more effectively. At that juncture, the military struck under the slogan of "anti-communism."

## **The South Korean Military**

That the real threat to the Chang Myun government was not the politically isolated progressive camp, but the organizationally modernized armed forces should have been clear to all. In the course of the Korean War, the South Korean military was greatly enlarged and politicized at the same time. To build up the

military into a professional force capable of carrying out large-scale modern war, but also to prevent the armed forces from turning against its political master, Rhee Syngman guaranteed the basic institutional interests of the military by professionalizing its officer corps, at the same time adopting a “divide-and-rule” tactic vis-à-vis the military. He simultaneously patronized several military factions with political and economic privileges in order to have them check and balance each other. Moreover, Rhee Syngman exercised vigilant control over the armed forces through the Army’s massive counter-intelligence force (Kim Se-jin 1971). So, when Chang Myun was faltering politically in 1961, there existed a military that was both professional and politicized, caught in between the ideals of professionalism and the reality of corruption.

The combination of professionalization and politicization sowed the seeds for trouble during the democratic transition. Soon after Rhee Syngman resigned, younger officers individually or in groups petitioned the purge of the generals who had collaborated with the Rhee Syngman regime in political repression and economic rent seeking. Most of the young officers were intensely nationalistic but also professional, modeling their role after the example of mid-nineteenth century Meiji Japan’s modernizing samurai to build “a rich nation, a strong army.” Moreover, they knew that their organization with a decade-long U.S. tutelage as well as the three year-long experience of fighting a modern war on a massive scale constituted it as the most modernized institution of Korea. They had the experience of running a huge modern military bureaucracy, which many thought could be readily applied to the task of governance. To these high-spirited but contentious young officer corps, the generals who had worked for Rhee were not only corrupt but also an impediment to institutional rejuvenation through generational change. Among those disgruntled with the delays in generational change were Kim Jae-chun and Kim Jong-pil, future leaders of the coup. Like the two Kims, the ranks of the reform-minded military officers were mostly lieutenant colonels or colonels who saw very little prospect of being promoted any time soon to the rank of general.

Against this backdrop, the Chang Myun government announced on August 27, 1960 that it would reduce the armed forces by 100,000 in order to relieve the budgetary burden and to redirect resources into economic development. Although Chang Myun retrogressed on the plan due to objections from the U.S. and the Korean military, the plan nonetheless angered the already disgruntled junior military officers. To the junior officers, Chang Myun had the priorities all wrong, trying to save resources by cutting down the size of the military while

turning oblivious to the rampant corruption that plagued the military hierarchy.

At the center of the young military officers with ardent zeal for nationalism and dissatisfaction with delayed promotion was Major General Park Chung Hee. After the Korean War, the top posts of the South Korean military were taken up by those who had come from North Korea. They were divided into two factions: Seobukpa (the so-called northwest faction) who came from Pyeongan Province, and Dongbukpa (the northeast faction) who came from Hamgyeong Province. Under the Chang Myun government, Seobukpa held the reins of the military as the New Faction of the Democratic Party, including Chang Myun and Jeong Il-hyeong, who had come from Pyeongan Province. He did not belong to any of the two major factions of the military originating from what is now North Korea. He was from the Gyeongsang Province region in South Korea. He did not have a good promotional record. Compared with his fellow generals, he was late in promotion. He would have had no other way but to retire if he had not rebelled against the government. Junior military officers respected him, as he was clean-handed, incorruptible, and nationalist-oriented.

Whereas the nationalist zeal and dissatisfaction with the promotional system constituted the immediate cause of Park Chung Hee and his junior officers' decision to intervene in politics, the social instability and ideological anomie sweeping over society after the April Revolution comprised the pulling factors that lured the junior officers of the military barracks to launch the coup. Chang Myun's inability to deal with social disorder provided a good pretext for the military to intervene in politics. The demands of radical student leaders and progressive forces to bring the immediate reunification of the two Koreas, in particular, scared off the general public into the arms of the coup leaders. The United States, too, probably became more ready to accept the military coup as a fait accompli because of the Chang Myun government's inability to put its house in order to devise a unified response to the security threat.

The importance of controlling the military during the period of transition to democracy cannot be overemphasized. As Alfred Stepan once wrote, "since a monopoly of the use of force is required for a modern democracy, failure to develop capacities to control the military represents an abdication of democratic power" (1988: XV). The Chang Myun government utterly failed in this task. Not only the prime minister failed to recruit former generals with very close ties to the military into the cabinet (Joungwon A. Kim 1976: 220-221), he also paid but little attention to the guaranteeing of the military's professional interests. On the contrary, he angered the military by reviewing personnel reduction while at

the same time leaving the military to fend for itself. The prime minister had neither the intricate system of divide-and-rule nor the loyal military security forces to check on would-be coup-makers. Many junior officers in the military security forces and intelligence units, in fact, became the center of coup plotting during the Chang Myun government.

## Conclusion

The April Revolution broke out spontaneously without any direct input from the Democratic Party as students and citizens took to the streets being fed up with the corruption, the election frauds, and the brutal suppression of demonstrations under the Rhee Syngman regime. Nevertheless, the Korean people entrusted the Heo Jeong interim government and the Democratic Party with the power and authority to restore political order after the revolution. The Democratic Party, however, busied itself with factional struggles rather than the pressing business of political and economic reform. It was this failure of the Democratic Party to discipline internal factional struggles rather than the challenge of the isolated progressive camp that led to the collapse of Korea's first democratic experiment. In spite of the ideological legitimacy it enjoyed as a duly elected lawful government and the legislative majority that the July 1960 election conferred on it, the Chang Myun government could not maintain stability and control the process of political, economic, and social agenda formation because it was engrossed in internal factional struggles over party leadership and cabinet portfolios.

Compared even to the Rhee regime, the Chang Myun government was a failure. The Rhee regime lasted longer because as an authoritarian government, it had the will and the capacity to silence opposition through political oppression. With the intricate system of divide-and-rule and through a tight surveillance established by the brutal counter-intelligence of the military forces, moreover, the Rhee regime prevented internal factional struggles within the political and military elites from developing into open power struggles having dire consequences on regime stability (Kim Se-jin 1971). By contrast, as a self-designated spokesperson of Korean democracy, the Chang Myun government refused to put down even unlawful protests, lest it looked authoritarian before the public. Nor was the Chang Myun government able to initiate or shape the process of political, economic, and social agenda formation. Before an uncompromising progressive camp that persistently called for the punishment of Rhee Syngman's

cronies and followers demanding a dramatic improvement in inter-Korea relations, the Chang Myun government could only reiterate its call for order without offering any action program.

This study focused on the Chang Myun government's lack of ability to impose discipline on its internal factions as the principal factor that precipitated its disintegration from within. The government's ability to govern collapsed even before the progressives launched their reunification movements not because it did not have popular support, but because it was paralyzed by internal factional struggles. The Chang Myun government showed that procedural legitimacy could not by itself guarantee the stability of a democratically elected government. Democracy could have taken its root only if the government in power had been capable of pursuing political and economic reform and had ushered in development while maintaining social stability. Certainly, the triple political task of simultaneously ensuring stability, reform and development in the fragile transition from authoritarianism to democracy overburdened the Chang Myun government. Unfortunately, however, its leadership only undermined its ability to deal with the triple task by engaging in internal factional power struggles. The collapse from within preceded the collapse from without.

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