

## The 'New Community' Movement in Korea

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*Photo date and location unknown*

"Workers of the world unite" is a well-known phrase that you may have heard before. In fact when somebody talks of building a new society and the brotherhood of man -- when a man starts to talk of living and working in communities, we may assume that he has heard too much from Marx.

But isn't it the desire of all men to unite and live as one happy brotherhood? The Communists' dream is not their own creation. Their method is the only innovation. They have failed to make this dream a reality, however. Brotherhood means love, cooperation and voluntary action, not force and hatred. That is why I am excited about the "New Community Movement" in Korea.

The "Saemaul" or "New Community" movement has been spreading throughout most of the village areas since about two years ago. When I first landed in Korea and drove from Kimpo Airport to Seoul, the complete contrast between the grand highway and the thatched hamlets beside it shocked me. In Seoul, too, grand office blocks rise above an inhabited shambles.

The Korean people themselves are hard working. In the past ravaged by war and poverty, this country is now beginning to take mighty strides. However the people still need massive doses of that well known medicine, "organization." Hence the October Revitalizing reforms and the Saemaul movement seem to me like water to a thirsty man.

In Korea, and over all the Orient, the Confucian system has left a still very structured society. The top man is top and a hierarchy descends from his position. When complete freedom is given to political parties, often bickering and petty arguments arise. Last autumn we had just been through a particularly pointless bout of these fractious politics, when President Park put his foot down on Korea. As you may have read, he closed the universities and parliament, and brought in martial law.

The Westerners in Korea were so shocked! "Not democratic," they complained. The Koreans on the other hand reacted quite calmly. I watched them pass the tanks that had been parked in strategic points around Seoul. The people seemed to accept it unemotionally. Whether from being accustomed to seeing such things before, or whether they welcomed the change I can't be sure. But I think that although at first many were put off, most Koreans welcomed the change, the new wave of discipline and organization.

The Westerners here in Korea think that Western democracy is very developed so they expect Korea to follow their system. But Koreans didn't have the opportunity to learn and study democracy. I overheard an American speaking with a Korean last week. "Did women have the right to vote before World War II?" the American asked. The Korean looked pensive wondering how to be polite. Eventually he said "Women didn't vote. People didn't vote!" Certainly Korea needs a strong leader now, especially during the North-South talks. And not only Korea but the Philippines, Taiwan, Vietnam, and even Japan if she would admit it. This especially now when East-West detente is proceeding.

When President Park started the Saemaul campaign in 1970 he told the farmers and fishermen that he would turn the nation's attention away from the concentration on industry which he emphasized during the '60's, and pay more attention to rural area development. At the same time he urged them to wake up from their centuries-old resignation and passivity and join the government effort to create new, revitalized rural communities. He budgeted a good deal of money to the Saemaul movement and explained how important it is to embrace the whole population, regardless of age, sex, religion, or occupation, if the New Community Movement is to achieve ultimate success. Farmers and fishermen were advised by energetic campaigners to refrain from spending excessive money for extravagant wedding ceremonies and funeral services.

The movement is to be carried out gradually throughout the next four years and is divided into three categories: realization of spiritual revolution; development of farm economy; and improvement of the social environment.

The President emphasizes that it is the will of the people that is eventually to decide the outcome of the movement. He has warned government officials not to interfere with the regional movements. "Don't try to supervise them," he says.

The villagers of a village must have to volunteer to be a part of the project. Then the goal is to have all the people working as a team to build and repair all types of farm equipment and ground. Hillsides are terraced, trees planted, roads and dams built and the villagers work on collective projects which produce saleable commodities. The result of this has been a great increase of produce and income to the villagers. Many now have been able to replace their thatched roofs with tile and have village halls and baths. The government gives an initial amount of cement and steel to each project, but before they can receive any more, success and effort must be shown.

Most Koreans really are positive about the movement which is now spreading even into the major towns. Moreover, how many national leaders in the West are talking about a "spiritual revolution?"