

Will Korea Seize Its '1989-Like' Chance?

by L. Wolfe and Kathy Wolfe

In what Europeans know as the “historical opportunity of 1989,” the peaceful people’s revolutions in Eastern Europe toppled the Berlin Wall, and placed Germany and all of Europe on the threshold of a potential new era of cooperation and prosperity. Instead of taking the pathway down that road, as proposed by U.S. political figure Lyndon LaRouche, the Europeans allowed themselves to be bullied by Anglo-American circles into a policy of looting the East of raw materials and labor; and a great opportunity to change a corrupt and bankrupt world paradigm was lost.

The results of South Korea’s April 15 parliamentary elections—in which the new URI Party of President Roh Moo-hyun received an epoch-making vote, winning 152 of the 299 seats—mark a similar ‘1989-type’ revolution in South Korean politics. President Roh, whose party stood for the “Sunshine Policy” of peaceful and expanding relations with North Korea, had been impeached on March 12 by the maneuvers of Grand National Party, whose links to the neo-conservative thinktank, the American Enterprise Institute (AEI), are widely known. The blatant interference by the crowd of thugs associated with Vice President Dick Cheney in the already-corrupt soap opera that is South Korean politics, triggered, throughout the country, a political protest that mirrored demonstrations in the former East Germany more than a decade ago, filling the streets with hundreds of thousands of Koreans in candlelight vigils in Seoul and many other cities.

Flight Forward

It was this movement, whose members are mostly younger Koreans, that President Roh’s URI Party rode to victory in the polls. The neo-cons and Cheney, in their zeal to orchestrate in South Korea a regime change more favorable to confrontation with the North, produced the kind of blowback that could have been expected—except by an irrational ideologue. While the URI Party could have been expected to win narrowly prior to Roh’s impeachment, the smashing size of their victory was a political impossibility before Cheney’s blunder.

That this “revolutionary event,” the first elected absolute majority in the recent memory of Korea, occurred with Cheney on the scene in person in South Korea, is a delicious bit of irony. Cheney had been on an imperial tour of Asia, stopping first in Japan and China, and delivering threats that American patience is growing thin with North Korea on its

alleged nuclear program. Citing new unspecified “evidence” of that program, Cheney told audiences and government officials that North Korea could be expected to share its weapons with terrorists. He repeated demands, already denounced as unacceptable by the North, that it agree to immediate verifiable disarmament or suffer the “consequences”; “time is running out” for North Korea, he blustered. Stopping just short of threatening war, “Beast-Man” Cheney threatened that the United States would seek a total embargo of North Korea.

Such statements, repeated in South Korea, flew in the face of the new political reality created by the election results. Even members of the AEI-backed party would refuse to support an embargo, which nearly everyone understands would starve the North Korean people, while having little effect on the government—except perhaps to make it more belligerent. Cheney and his neo-cons don’t want to “solve” the crisis as much as they want to use it as an excuse for a new imperial war, a fact which many Korean leaders recognize.

The South Korean Constitutional Court, which has 180 days from March 12 to rule on the validity of President Roh’s impeachment, had decided to wait until after the elections to make its decision. It is widely expected that they will reinstate Roh. Cheney and Company may have some cards to play with the Court, but it is hard to see any government acting against the broad mandate of the April 15 vote for “Sunshine” and against the neo-cons.

The Wisdom To Lead

But the real question is whether South Korean leaders have the wisdom to seize the opportunity they have been given. As was shown in 1989, the Korean people who have been out in the streets require seasoned leaders to deal with very real crises.

South Korean leaders have thus far shown that they haven’t a clue on how to handle the economic crisis that has enveloped the country, producing 9% unemployment—and even higher rates among ex-students. This will get worse if the U.S. dollar and economy collapse, savaging Korea’s main export market. Internally, free-market banking deregulation has opened up South Korea to a huge credit card bubble, with default rates on consumer debt now running at around 35%.

And while most South Koreans don’t believe Cheney’s ravings about the North Korean threat, their leaders have wavered in dealing with the crisis, backing off, for the time being, from promising programs of peninsular economic cooperation; as, indeed, the North blows hot and cold on such matters as well.

It is on such policy matters, and on their solutions, that Lyndon LaRouche and his representatives are playing a pivotal role. As the global economic and strategic crises deepen, Korean leaders are listening more to LaRouche and less to Cheney. But, as with the events of 1989, actions are required, lest opportunities pass them by.