

the worker's rights struggle at the Han-gook Textiles Company, and the activities of the YH Union (see above). Chun Tae-il's action not only signalled the start of the democratic labor movement, but also resulted in a far deeper awareness of social reality on the parts of leading figures in the pro-democracy and other progressive social movements.

His death forced liberal movement forces to reflect upon their existing minimalist democratic agendas, and incorporate more concrete issues such as the right to livelihood of workers, the urban poor, and other grassroots disadvantaged. Chun's action also became the seed for a new social alliance, between workers and students, as well as a pivotal moment after which intellectuals became engaged in the industrial sectors, and religious groups expanded into industrial mission work.

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## The Second Period of Democratization

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### A. Multiple Coup d'état and the May 18 Gwangju People's Struggle

The assassination of Park Chung-hee on October 26, 1979, a manifestation of the crisis of developmental dictatorship, created a power vacuum and a position of stalemate between contending forces which is often called the 'Spring in Seoul'. It was

a 'new military' faction, consisting of members of a group within the Korean army which went under the title of the 'Society of One', that took power by a series of coup d'état (the





The martial law soldiers pointing rifles at young high school student. (1980)

longest recorded coup in the world) and filled the void left by the late Park Chung-hee. The group was led by Generals Chun Doo-hwan and Roh Tae-woo. For the 'new military', the last obstacle in its path to power consisted of the popular forces opposing it. The bloody confrontation in Gwangju which began on May 18, 1980 was part of the process of the subjugation of those popular forces by the 'new military'. The regime, now with Chun Doo-hwan at its head, emerged victorious, and the developmental, dictatorial state constructed by Park Chung-hee was restored and temporarily fortified,

'Gwangju of May 1980', being the final chapter of the 'Spring in Seoul,' did not merely end in tragedy; it destroyed the new military's ambition to seize power without resistance, and forced the military to pay a huge cost for its successes. Gwangju triggered both the state and the pro-democracy movements to intensify their antagonism against each other: state repression heightened to an unprecedented level, and popular resistance intensified to a similar degree. From that time onwards, the dynamics of these two changes would become decisive in defining political change in Korea.