

[Japan Society-New York: Documents Project. 1890-1930, Foreign Relations)]

Document 43: “Tokyo recognized the necessity of radical reforms.” “Home Rule in Korea?” Saitō Makoto, 1920

It was . . . a cause of general surprise when last spring what is now known as “independence demonstrations” suddenly broke out in many parts of Korea. I shall not go into the genesis of these unfortunate occurrences; they have already been sufficiently ventilated by interested parties, in many instances Japan having been grossly and unjustly misrepresented. Local affairs of unfortunate nature have been represented as being general, and exaggerations and even fictitious stories have been assiduously disseminated at the expense of Japan. Nevertheless, we must admit that, for the serious situation presenting itself last spring in this peninsula, we must hold ourselves as principally responsible. . . .

The Government in Tokyo, thoroly [sic] aroused by those events, recognized the necessity of promptly introducing radical reforms in the administration of Korea. . . . Since my arrival in Seoul I and my assistants have been working day and night to complete the projected reforms in administration, and it is a source of pleasure to be able to say that these reforms have either been already carried out or are on the eve of being carried out. The administrative policy is now based on the rescript granted by the Emperor on the occasion of the promulgation of the revised organic regulations for the Government-General. In this rescript, His Majesty was pleased to announce his desire that in all respects his Japanese and Korean subjects should be placed on a footing of equality. Accordingly, one of the first reform measures taken was the abolition of all discrimination between Japanese and Korean officials in respect to treatment. In other words, the rule was made that Korean officials should hereafter be paid according to the



same scale of salary as that for their Japanese colleagues. Ways were also opened for Koreans of talent and ability to be raised to posts of responsibility and honor in the Government. For instance, the post of principal of common schools for Korean children, hitherto exclusively given to Japanese, will hereafter be given to Koreans, too. It is hoped that the Government will be able to secure many well educated and capable Korean young men for its service, tho, as a matter of fact, there are already many Koreans serving and occupying high posts in the Government, among whom, it may be said, are five provincial governors, forty-four judges and public procurators, and 201 country magistrates.

I earnestly desire to hear the opinions of the Korean people, learn of their complaints and aspirations, and mold my policy so as to satisfy their reasonable desires. With this in view, soon after my arrival at my post, I caused fifty-two representative Koreans, four from each of the thirteen provinces constituting this country, to come to Seoul for a conference, and, besides explaining to them the program of the new régime, had the satisfaction of hearing their opinions and views. . . . I daily receive many callers, Koreans, Japanese and foreigners, to ascertain their views, and find this very beneficial in the execution of my work. It is also my intention shortly to grant the people freedom of speech and press, which for political reasons has hitherto been denied them to a large extent. Several applications asking for official permission to start new Korean and Japanese newspapers have already been received, and they are now being considered by the authorities concerned, and some of them, filed by men of good standing—if not all—will shortly be granted. . . .

All these are preliminaries to the realization of a plan which I cherish, *i. e.*, to grant the Korean people the administration of local affairs at some opportune time in the future. In this connection the Government has already started investigation. It is hoped that, after the Korean

people have shown themselves possessed of sufficient capabilities, they will be allowed to send their representatives to the Imperial Diet in Tokyo.

Among the old institutions not suiting the present condition of things in this peninsula, which it is intended shortly to abolish, is the method of punishment by flogging. This form of punishment had long been practiced in Korea, and, as it was considered a measure suitable to the standard of the people and an effective preventive of minor offenses, the Japanese Government retained it as a penal measure for Koreans. It is, however, a method of punishment at variance with the modern idea of aiming at the reformation of erring people. For this reason it is necessary shortly to abolish it, substituting for it fines or imprisonment with labor, so as to conform to the progress of the times. . . .

These are the more important of the many reforms that have been introduced in the administration of Korea since I was appointed Governor-General. It is still less than two months since I arrived at my post to take up the onerous duty of governing this country, entrusted to me by the Imperial Master, so I cannot as yet claim that I have achieved any marked success. I have, however, great hope that sooner or later the Korean people will understand and appreciate the new policy of the Government, which has no other aim than the promotion of their interests and happiness.

Source: Baron Makoto Saito, "Home Rule in Korea?" *The Independent*, January 31, 1920, 188-191.

Context.

Hundreds of thousands of Koreans rose in protest against Japan's harsh colonial control on March 1, 1919, sparking demonstrations and conflicts in which more than 7,000 died and more than 45,000 were arrested. In response, the Japanese government appointed a new governor, Saitō Makoto, and ushered in a softer policy intended to be more sensitive to Korean interests without giving up control of the country. Evidence of the new policy came in Saitō's public relations campaign, shown in this English-language article, intended to convince both the Koreans and the rest of the world of Japan's determination to bring civilization to Korea. While successful in many ways, the reforms did not stop widespread anti-colonial movements. Nor did they keep the Japanese from running the colony primarily to serve Japan's own economic and political interests.

Questions.

1. Reading Saitō's account, what policies—beyond the fact of colonization itself—do you think might have fueled the previous year's anti-Japanese demonstrations?
2. How did the Japanese regard the Koreans as a people? What is your evidence?
3. Would you call Saitō's new policies enlightened or unenlightened? Why?

Terms.

Organic regulations for the Government-General. This is the name given to the Japanese government's basic rules regulating the operation of government affairs in the Korean colony.

Proculators. This is a typo; the intended word is procurators: regional officials with financial and administrative responsibilities. Koreans held just over a third of the provincial governorships.

Flogging. This refers to beating, usually on the back with a whip or a rod; it sometimes is called caning.