



THE COLD WAR INTERNATIONAL HISTORY PROJECT
WORLD WAR II

CONFIDENTIAL

The *Cold War International History Project Bulletin* is a quarterly journal of the Cold War International History Project. It is published by the Center for Strategic and International Studies, Johns Hopkins University. The journal's content includes articles, book reviews, and documents that shed light on the Cold War era. The *Bulletin* is a key resource for scholars and students of the period.

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“We Need Help from Outside”: The North Korean Opposition Movement of 1956

b James F. Pe
April 2006

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Committee vote.⁴ Szalontai concludes, on the other hand, that the attack on Kim Il Sung's policies at the August Plenum "was a desperate attempt to turn the tide rather than a serious challenge to Kim's rule."⁵

This essay argues, first of all, that the opposition movement began earlier than

August Plenum, along with previously undisclosed details of the ensuing Sino-Soviet

The Background: The Myth of Factional Struggle within the KWP, 1945-1955

Factionalism is widely viewed as a distinguishing characteristic of North Korean politics during the formative years of the Democratic Peoples' Republic of Korea (DPRK). According to the standard narrative, four distinct factions competed for dominance within the leadership of the nascent North Korean party-state following Korea's liberation from Japanese rule in August 1945. The so called "Domestic Faction" headed by veteran Korean communist Pak Hon-yong, the "Soviet Faction" nominally led by Ho Ka-i (A.I. Hegai) but directed from Moscow, the Chinese-supported "Yan'an Faction" of Kim Tu-bong and Choe Chang-ik, and the "Partisan Faction" of Kim Il Sung were allegedly "all engaged in intricate maneuvering" only months after Japan's surrender.⁶ Kim Il Sung eventually succeeded in eliminating the "intense factional rivalry" by purging the rival factions one-by-one.⁷ By 1958, Kim had succeeded in ruthlessly forging a regime controlled by his former "Partisan" comrades-in-arms.

This view of the prominence of factionalism is given credence by the dramatic history of internecine bureaucratic factionalism in Choson dynasty Korea where, according to James Palais, "political groupings organized on the basis of personal loyalty irrespective of concrete policy issues."⁸ Contending factions, or *p'abeol*, even distinguished themselves by making factional affiliation hereditary. Moreover, the early and short-lived Korean communist movement was beleaguered by factional rivalry. Founded in 1925, the Korean Communist Party (KCP) was dissolved by the Comintern in 1928 due to the "ceaseless, unprincipled group struggle of the Korean communists."⁹ As Lankov contends, "factionalism," which he describes as being "indigenous"¹⁰ to Korea, "has always been an important feature of Korean political life, and the Korean communist movement was plagued with it." Thus, "in light of the intense and endemic factional

⁶ Scalapino and Lee, *Communism in Korea: The Movement* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1972): 334.

⁷ Andrei Lankov, "Kim Il Sung's Campaign Against the Soviet Faction in Late 1955 and the Birth of *Chuch'e*," *Korean Studies*, Volume 23, (University of Hawaii Press: 1999): 45.

⁸ James Palais, "A Search for Korean Uniqueness," *Harvard Journal of Asiatic Studies*, Vol. 55, No. 2. (Dec. 1995): 420.

⁹

rivalry and the Korean tradition of political factionalism, it was inevitable that [Kim Il Sung] should see all other factions as sources of potential danger.”¹¹

Yet labeling North Korean politics as “factionalist” may be, as Yang Sung-chul notes, a “simplification,” if not an “outright misnomer.”¹² While the leadership of the North Korean party-state was comprised of cadres with diverse revolutionary backgrounds, the strong factional solidarity based on group loyalty, or *p’abeol*, that plagued both Choson Korea and the early Korean communist movement was all but absent from post-liberation North Korean politics. The only exception may have been the “Domestic” group, which, forged over a two decade-long association and contemptuous of many of the foreign revolutionaries, attempted to prevent the total eclipse of its influence following the merger of the Northern and Southern branches of the KWP in 1949. Once representing the mainstream of the Korean communist movement, Veteran Korean communists such as Pak Hon-yong were relegated to subordinate positions in the unified party. Pak and other Korean communist leaders originally from the South thus perceived a threat and acted accordingly by purportedly attempting unseat Kim Il Sung in a *coup d’ etat* in 1953.¹³ Pak Hon-yong and most “Domestic” group members were purged the same year. Pak, founder of the KCP and once recognized as the head of the Korean communist movement was tried and executed in mid 1956, despite the Soviet ambassador’s attempt to dissuade Kim from carrying out the sentence.¹⁴

The existing documentary evidence does not lend support to the notion that factionalism, supposedly an endemic feature in Korean political culture, characterized all groups that comprised the North Korean leadership.¹⁵ Indeed, there is little to suggest

¹¹ Andrei Lankov, *Crisis in North Korea: The Failure of De-Stalinization, 1956* (Honolulu: University of Hawaii Press, 2005): 19.

¹² Yang Sung-chul, *The North and South Korean Political Systems: A Comparative Analysis* (Seoul: Seoul Press, 1994): 326.

¹³ The portions of the lengthy memo composed by V.V. Kovyshenko and cited by Lankov as proof of factionalism in the leadership of the still nascent North Korean party-state mention only the rivalry between Kim Il Sung and Pak Hon-yong. The fragments cited do appear to prove factional activities of the “Domestic” group, though this came as a result of the Kim-Pak rivalry and threat to the status of other veteran Korean communists.

¹⁴ Memorandum of Conversation with Kim Il Sung, 19 April 1956, AVPRF, Opis 12, Papka 68, Delo 5, Listy 64-65.

¹⁵ Andrei Lankov has suggested that the leaders of the Yan’an faction, especially Choe Chang-ik, “used every opportunity to set Kim against the Soviet-Koreans. In turn, the Soviet-Koreans attempted to prove to Kim that the Yanan members were incapable or untrustworthy.” As evidence, Lankov cites a 12 March 1956 conversation between Soviet-Korean Pak Chang-ok and counselor of the Soviet embassy, S.N.

dynasty and in the early Korean communist movement that verifiably centered on group loyalty, locality, and even heritage, Kim used the term *jeongp'a*, a more slanderous expression usually reserved for religious sectarianism. Indicating the degree to which Marxism-Leninism had become a surrogate for religion, the term suggests deviation from orthodoxy. It is often translated in North Korean publications as 'dogmatist' or 'splittist.'

who had spent time in both China and Korea during the colonial period before going to Moscow for two years to attend the CPSU Higher Party School. [DOCUMENT No. 2]

The factional solidarity of the Soviet-Korean and “Yan’an” groups is likewise questionable. Despite conducting their revolutionary careers in the same countries and even speaking the same languages, it is highly unlikely that the members of the Soviet and Chinese “factions” could have coalesced within weeks or even months of arriving in post-liberation Korea. The Soviet-Koreans came from diverse locations in the Soviet Union and from occupations ranging from teacher to lower-level party functionary. The same was true for Koreans returning from China, as some began their revolutionary careers in Shanghai before moving to the remote Shanxi province with the Chinese communists, while others served in the Chinese 8th and New 4th Armies.²⁰ Furthermore, there were well-known internal conflicts in the groups. Ho Ka-i and Pak Chang-ok, perhaps the two most influential Soviet-Koreans, allegedly disliked each other so intensely that upon learning of Ho’s suicide, Pak expressed little remorse.

Those who arrived from the Soviet Union and China did have shared experiences, however, and a sense of cultural affinity that fostered the creation of loose social groups. Indeed, the Soviet-Koreans and returnees from China, often seen as outsiders by local Korean leaders and citizens alike, were criticized for socializing among themselves,²¹ and, in the case of the Soviet-Koreans, for displaying an “arrogant air of cultural superiority.”²² This was frequently expressed through chauvinism in dealings with local cadres and a propensity to import mechanically the experiences of the more successful Soviet and Chinese parties. Such attitudes, particularly in matters of ideology, raised the ire of local cadres.

Yet the “Soviet” and “Yan’an” groups were labeled “factions” only after the 1956 opposition movement – which, ironically enough, paired leading functionaries from the Soviet Union and China – sought to challenge Kim Il Sung and the KWP leadership on

²⁰ Andrei Lankov, *From Stalin to Kim Il Sung: The Formation of North Korea, 1945-1960* (New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press, 2002): 79.

²¹ Lee Chong-sik, email to author, 20 July 2006 and Memorandum of Conversation with Vice Premier of the Cabinet of Ministers of the DPRK and Member of the Presidium, KWP CC, Pak Chang-ok, 12 March 1956, RGANI, Fond 5, Opis 28, Delo 410, Listy 74-85.

²² Glenn D. Paige and Dong Jun Lee, “The Post-War Politics of Communist Korea,” *The China Quarterly*, No. 14, (Apr. – Jun., 1963), p. 23.

matters of orthodoxy. In the wake of the 20th Party Congress of the CPSU in February of that year, the Great Leader had hastened his transition from internationalist, fraternal socialism to his indigenized version of Marxism-Leninism, or “Korean-style socialism”²³ and the anti-hegemonistic *Juche* ideology. Early indications of Kim’s intention to label these groups as “factions” in order to divide and conquer were evident in late 1955, during an attack on Soviet-Korean cadres. Deputy Premier Pak Ui-wan, a Soviet-Korean, first claimed that the revolutionary experiences of the various groups were being “separately defined,” and that this only served to weaken, not strengthen the party.²⁴ Likewise, following the August 1956 KWP CC Plenum, when the members of the opposition group were purged, the North Korean ambassador to the Soviet Union, Yi Sang-jo indicated in a letter addressed to the KWP CC that “Com. Kim Il Sung and his supporters took revenge on the comrades who spoke [at the August plenum], declaring them ‘the anti-Party Yan’an group’ and ‘conspirators’ trying to overthrow the Party and the Government.” According to Yi, “the so-called Yan’an group, which opposed the cult of personality and which in fact did not exist in nature, was fabricated. As a result, intra-Party democracy and Party unity were undermined even more.”²⁵ Furthermore, despite the fact that the members of the opposition group boldly and openly criticized Kim, and “he assured [them] that he accepts these comradely comments[...] somewhere behind the backs of these comrades, fictitious “cases” were created about their factional activity, calling them the Yan’an ‘group.’”²⁶

In labeling the groups “factions,” scholars have failed to differentiate between actions of and toward individuals and broad-based movements. Moreover, scholars have not sufficiently distinguished genuine policy debate in North Korea from the factional conflicts that plagued Choson dynasty Korea and the early Korean communist movement. Yet, contrary to the totalitarian system that subsequently took shape in North Korea, internal debate was permitted for nearly a decade after the founding of the DPRK. The

²³ Charles Armstrong, “A Socialism of Our Style’: North Korean Ideology in a Post-Communist Era,” *North Korean Foreign Relations In the Post-Cold War Era* (Hong Kong: Oxford University Press, 1998): 33.

²⁴ Memorandum of Conversation with Deputy Premier Comrade Pak Ui-wan, 24 January 1956. RGANI, Fond 5, Opis 28, Delo 412, Listy 67-69.

²⁵ Letter from Yi Sang-jo to the Central Committee of the Korean Workers Party, 5 October 1956 RGANI, Fond 5, Opis 28, Delo 410, Listy 233-295.

²⁶ *Ibid.*

open border between North and South Korea before and during the Korean War served to limit the intensity of such criticism, since those who disagreed could simply cross the border to South Korea. This “safety valve” removed hostile elements from the “North Korean body politic” before they could threaten the stability of the regime with overt criticism.²⁷ While Kim Il Sung did not entirely welcome such discussion, he tolerated it through the early post-war years while making the transition from internationalist, fraternal socialism, including the principle of “democratic centralism,” to “Korean style socialism.” During this transition period, the Leninist principle of “democratic centralism” still allowed for debate and discussion until a policy had been approved by the party. Adopted by virtually every socialist country as the primary decision-making and organizational principle, democratic centralism required that “all party organizations should unconditionally support and carry out the party line and policies, and the lower party organizations must execute dutifully the decisions of the higher party organizations.”²⁸ That is, once a matter was decided, maintaining iron discipline and party unanimity was paramount.

Until Kim defiantly rejected the new line that emerged in Moscow after Stalin’s death, there had been a balance between democracy and centralization in the DPRK. With the exception of the actions of the purged “Domestic” group of Pak Hon-yong, the iron rule of the party remained almost unbroken, and there were no broad-based breaches of democratic centralism warranting the charge of factionalism against any of the groups until Kim Il Sung began to resist the importation of the experiences of foreign fraternal parties in late 1953. During the war Kim did purge a number of high profile Soviet-Koreans and returnees from China, but these were attacks on individuals. In particular, in a disagreement over the future composition of the Korean Workers’ Party, Kim struggled with Ho Ka-I, who sought to turn the KWP into a Leninist vanguard party as opposed to the mass movement party Kim envisioned. As Suh Dae-sook notes, however, “Kim ensured that [Ho’s] expulsion did not signal the purge of other Soviet-Koreans,” and no proof has emerged that Ho had the support of other Soviet-Koreans in his desire to recast

²⁷ Charles Armstrong, “The Nature, Origins, and Development of the North Korean State,” Samuel S. Kim ed. *The North Korean System in the Post-Cold War Era* (New York: Palgrave, 2001): 52.

²⁸ Charter of the KWP, Chapter II, Article 11, cited in Sung Chul Yang, *The North and South Korean Political Systems: A Comparative Analysis* (Boulder, CO: Westview Press, 1994): 231.

the KWP. “Ho’s encounter with Kim was not an organized confrontation of the Soviet-Koreans with Kim or his partisans. It was in essence Ho’s implementation of the policy he considered best for building a strong communist party in Korea that ran counter to Kim’s policy, and other members of the Soviet-Korean group understood it to be that and nothing more.”²⁹ After a series of unsuccessful military campaigns, Kim purged a number of returnees from China serving in commanding positions of the Korean Peoples’ Army (KPA). These actions also did not constitute a purge of the “Yan’an” Koreans, but were instead attacks on individuals.

A month after the armistice, at the August 1953 Plenum of the KWP CC, Kim Il Sung announced his plan for postwar reconstruction: a Three Year Plan for 1954-1956 that called for “priority development of heavy industry with the simultaneous development of light industry and agriculture.” In practice, however, light industry and agriculture received little funding, with some three-fourths of capital investment going to heavy industry.³⁰ The combination of adverse weather conditions and inadequate investment resulted in a poor harvest and subsequent food crisis in the countryside,³¹

the sensitive issue of the legitimacy of North Korean economic policy in relation to that of Moscow.”³³ Thus, for Kim Il Sung, the issue was Soviet hegemony versus national economic self-determination.

This episode demonstrated to Kim the propensity of Soviet-Koreans and returnees from China to try to replicate developments in the Soviet and Chinese parties, and their willingness to violate the principle of democratic centralism to ensure that these foreign experiences be imitated. As Lee Chong-sik observes, “given the history of Korean communism [...] it is quite understandable that Korean communists should mechanically introduce abstract tenets of Marxism and Leninism as well as the experience of the more successful parties abroad. The Korean communists had generally lacked the sophistication, experience, and confidence to relate the abstract theories and foreign experiences to the realities of Korea”³⁴ Until Stalin’s death, the influence of the CPSU had been “too great for the Korean communists to strike out on their own.”

The April 1955 CC Plenum served as an occasion for Kim Il Sung to put an end to the debate over post-war economic recovery policy and confirm his position as undisputed leader of the party and state. He stated that he had given his critics “a powerful key to promote [...] independence and socialist construction by overcoming the old ideological remnants that hinder the forward march of the Korean people on the road to socialism” and, in light of recent violations of the iron will of the party, sternly warned his critics to “refrain from factional struggle.”³⁵ Kim attacked those who had conducted their revolutionary activities abroad (i.e. Soviet-Koreans and returnees from China), warning against attempting to “emulate or imitate others.” He urged all party members, regardless of their revolutionary past, to become “disciplined fighters of the Korean revolution,” asserting that the partisan struggles (i.e. Kim’s own guerrilla activities) constituted the mainstream of the Korean communist revolution. Thus, Kim began the transition from fraternal socialism to a more indigenized form of Marxism-Leninism that was intended to better relate to the realities of Korea. Simultaneously, Kim positioned

³³ Masao Okonogi, “North Korean Communism: In Search of Its Prototype,” in Suh Dae-Sook, *Korean Studies: New Pacific Currents* (Honolulu: University of Hawai’i Press, 1994):187.

³⁴ Lee Chong-sik, *The Korean Workers’ Party*, p. 95.

³⁵ *Nodong shinmun*, 9 April 1955, cited in Masao Okonogi, “North Korean Communism,” p. 188.

himself as the revolution's "chief propagator and defender."³⁶ Those who had previously dared to challenge Kim's post-war economic recovery policies using Malenkov's

him on post-war economic recovery policies. Recognizing that there was little he could do to prevent Soviet-Koreans from maintaining frequent contact with Moscow's embassy so long as they maintained their Soviet citizenship, Kim Il Sung insisted that all DPRK officials who came from the USSR had either to select Korean citizenship or relinquish their positions. On 29 November 1955 the Presidium of the Supreme Soviet of the USSR sided with Kim on the matter after protracted negotiations with Pyongyang, and declared that Soviet-Koreans working in the DPRK should either take Korean citizenship or return to the USSR.³⁹

In early December 1955 Kim's hagiographer, author Han Sol-ya, conjured up alleged anti-Party activities by several Soviet-Koreans—particularly their supposed favoritism toward South Korean authors with questionable ideological credentials over home-grown North Korean proletarian authors. During a meeting with Soviet Counselor S.N. Filatov on 22 December, Foreign Minister Nam Il, himself a Soviet-Korean, explained the essence of this charge:

Soviet-Koreans working on the ideological front – Ki Sok-pok and Chong Yul – having received from the CC an order that after liberation it is necessary to support authors from the South, yet, without even attempting to sort out their position in Korean literature, began to celebrate reactionary authors from the South and criticized local [northern] proletarian authors. After these authors were exposed as spies, they did not admit their mistakes and even threatened local authors who raised the matter, accusing them of being anti-Soviet.⁴⁰

Kim also criticized a number of higher-profile Soviet-Koreans, including Chairman of the State Planning Commission Pak Chang-ok who had also served as head of the Department of Agitation and Propaganda, for supporting reactionary authors from South Korea. Such contrived charges were the opening salvo of a broader assault on the Soviet-Koreans, culminating in Kim Il Sung's attacks during the December Plenum.

At an enlarged presidium meeting on 28 December, Kim unleashed his personal attack on the Soviet-Koreans. In a speech famous for the proclamation of *Juch'e* ideology, Kim accused Soviet-Koreans of being dogmatic and fundamentalist in their

³⁹ Memorandum of conversation with North Korean Foreign Minister Nam Il, 6 December 1955, RGANI, Fond 5, Opis 28, Delo 412, Listy 4-5.

⁴⁰ Memorandum of Conversation with Foreign Minister Comrade Nam Il, 22 December 1955. RGANI, Fond 5, Opis 28, Delo 412, List 96.

Finally, Kim declared his partisan activities to have been the vanguard of the Korean communist revolution and stated that these national traditions, not those of other communist states, should be celebrated. According to Pak Chang-ok, Kim also accused fifteen Soviet-Koreans of being accomplices of Ho Ka-i in factional activities before his alleged suicide in 1953. All fifteen were asked to explain their relationship with A.I.

Hegai.⁴⁵ Kim's speech was distributed to all "primar(l. ac)rT5Cn-27(ztionshof the)cityof t]TJ-0.00154Tw -

Pak reported to Filatov that the Pyongyang city committee had begun to carry out a campaign against all Soviet-Koreans using Kim Il Sung's December 28 speech as their inspiration. Pak emphasized that these actions did not serve to strengthen the Party. On the contrary, "more than ever before, the Soviet-Koreans, Chinese-Koreans, and domestic Koreans, etc., are being separately defined. Dividing into groups [...] does not strengthen the Party, but weakens it. And this all began with the speech of Kim Il Sung at the December Plenum of the CC KWP."⁴⁶

Sensing perhaps that he was not in a position entirely to eliminate the influence of the Soviet-Koreans, and having already achieved his preliminary objectives, throughout the spring of 1956 Kim Il Sung took measures partially to rehabilitate the accused Soviet-Koreans, again following Stalin's methods. During a mid-January meeting of the Political Council, Kim reportedly criticized those who were "dizzy with success"—to use Stalin's term—raising the issue of "the incorrect behavior of individual officials in relation to Soviet-Koreans." Kim suggested they arrange "a meeting with Soviet-Koreans and calm them" and then "hold a meeting with members of the Central Committee and clarify for them the incorrect behae

work, they were criticized, some of them punished, and now our task is to help them turn over a new leaf and become useful to our Party.⁴⁷

Kim Il Sung personally met with Kim Sung-bok, Kim Jae-wook, and others to discuss the literary crisis. He “stressed that Ki Sok-pok, Jang Dong-hyok, Chong Yul and other officials coming from the Soviet Union are fine workers and we made far too many complaints against them. We should individually inform them of their mistakes in relation to literature and art and we should not have accused Pak Chang-ok and Pak Yong-bin of such crimes as they were accused.”⁴⁸

As Lankov suggests, the objectives of the campaign against the Soviet-Koreans were limited from the start. “A lesson had been learned: the most prominent Soviet-Korean leaders had been warned off, the lower

two times in one year is not possible.”⁵¹ The Political Council thus decided to send Kim’s former partisan ally Choe Yong-gon to Moscow instead.⁵²

Besides Khrushchev’s blistering attack on Stalin in the famed “secret speech,” the delegates to the Twentieth Party Congress heard a number of speeches criticizing the cult of personality and supporting collective leadership and peaceful coexistence. Soviet embassy documents reveal that Kim Il Sung received regular reports from Moscow throughout the congress. On 18 February he opened a meeting of deputy premiers and members of the CC KWP with an attempt at damage control:

Recently, in both oral and written propaganda, the question of the role of the individual in the development of the history of mankind has been improperly handled. He [Kim] indicated that in all newspapers and journals his thoughts are referred to far too often, and things that he didn’t even do are attributed to him. This contradicts the theory of Marxism-Leninism, which guides our Party in its development. It leads to the improper training of members of the Party. Kim Il Sung demanded that members of the CC KWP carry out necessary measures on this matter and strive for a correct discussion of the question of the individual among the masses in the development of society.⁵³

According to Pak Ui-wan, a few days later, after receiving another report from Moscow, Kim “very carefully and thoroughly [...] asked about the speech of N.S. Khrushchev with regards to the cult of personality, about collective leadership, about shortcomings in organizational-Party and ideological work. He asked for a description of Com. A.I. Mikoyan’s and Com. Molotov’s speeches. He expressed regret that he himself did not go to the Twentieth Party Congress of the CPSU.”⁵⁴

Three days after the congress adjourned, Choe Yong-gon met with Soviet Foreign Minister V.M. Molotov on 28 February to discuss the proceedings.

⁵¹ *Ibid.*

⁵² Choe Yong-gon was a former comrade in arms of Kim Il Sung during his guerrilla days in Manchuria. After failing to convince the chairman of the Democratic Party, Cho Man-sik, to agree to the planned trusteeship over Korea decided upon at the Moscow meeting of Allied Foreign Ministers in December 1945, Cho Man-sik, arguably the most respected political leader in Korea at the time, was forcibly removed as head of the Party and replaced by Choe Yong-gon. Choe Yong-gon was likely a secret member of the Korean Communist Party and later of the KWP, while serving as chairman of the Democratic Party. In 1956 Choe was named to the Central Committee of the KWP, though he was officially still the chairman of the Democratic Party and was technically not a member of the KWP.

⁵³ Memorandum of Conversation with Deputy Premier Comrade Pak Ui-wan, 21 February 1956, RGANI, Fond 5, Opis 28, Delo 412, Listy 70-74.

⁵⁴ *Ibid.*

After exchanging greetings, Choe Y

Soviet influence in Korea, the letter reiterated his earlier warning against dogmatism, formalism and using foreign examples of communism, in particular, using foreign textbooks, pictures, etc., when there was an abundance of “national examples.”⁵⁸

Kim Il Sung’s response to Khrushchev’s attack on Stalin also included sending party members to the Soviet embassy to draw distinctions between Stalin and Pyongyang’s own little Stalin. In one such meeting, an individual named Yi Sung-woon claimed that “Kim Il Sung [...] is not a dictator, he genuinely respects the Korean people, he possesses the traits of humanism; dissidents, traitors, Syngman Rhee collaborators, our government gives them freedom and creates for them the conditions for a normal life. The square named after Kim Il Sung in Pyongyang bears his name not at his own initiative.” Ambassador Ivanov noted skeptically that “Yi Sung-woon himself could not even explain how that came about, and further stated that they do not have a cult of personality.”⁵⁹

Kim Il Sung was also threatened by Khrushchev’s call for peaceful coexistence with the West, as was Mao Zedong, since such a policy implied accepting the division of their countries. On the other hand, as it did for Mao, de-Stalinization provided Kim an opportunity to move decisively against his rivals. This opportunity was enhanced by an unforeseen result of the de-Stalinization campaign—the steady deterioration of Sino-Soviet relations, which gave the North Korean leadership room to follow a more independent line.

The KWP Third Party Congress

Two months after the CPSU Twentieth Party Congress, the KWP held its Third Party Congress, the first such meeting in eight years and the first since the union with the South Korean Workers’ Party. Emissaries from across the communist world converged on Pyongyang to deliver congratulatory speeches at the largely ceremonial event held April 23-29. Among the distinguished guests was CPSU representative Leonid I. Brezhnev, the future general secretary, who spoke of the momentous events that had

⁵⁸ *Ibid.*

⁵⁹ Diary of Soviet Ambassador to the DPRK, Comrade V.I. Ivanov, 13 April 1956. RGANI, Fond 5, Opis 28, Delo 410, List 120.

occurred at the CPSU Congress in February, using the occasion to “urge his North Korean hosts to import Soviet consumer goods instead of machines.”⁶⁰

Kim Il Sung delivered the first of three official reports on behalf of the Central Committee announcing that the first Five-Year Plan would be launched in 1957. With reconstruction efforts and nationalization of industry nearly complete after the Three Year Plan, some 80 percent of capital investment in industry was to be allocated to expanding the foundation for heavy industry.⁶¹ Collectivization of agriculture, which began in November 1954, was to be completed within the shortest possible time. Kim’s report was laced with the customary anti-American vitriol and equally vociferous attacks on “anti-party elements,” i.e. the purged members of the “Domestic” group. Conspicuously absent, however, were references to de-Stalinization and collective leadership. Instead, Kim Il Sung continued to describe the personality cult in the DPRK as having been cultivated by Pak Hon-yong.

Additional reports were delivered by Chairman of the Central Auditing Committee Yi Chu-yon, who discussed Party finances and membership,⁶² and Pak Chong-ae, who introduced the new party charter and announced the changes made to the Central Committee.⁶³ The KWP charter, which was sent to the Soviet embassy for comment, reflected the changed atmosphere in the communist world. Most obvious was the removal of Stalin’s name from the statement: “The Workers’ Party of Korea is guided in its activities by the theory of Marxism-Leninism.”⁶⁴ However, Korean officials failed to make a number of revisions regarding peaceful coexistence recommended by Soviet embassy personnel. For example, while embassy officials had advised the authors to write “The Workers’ Party of Korea advocates all possible support to the people of south Korea in their struggle for liberation from imperialism and feudal exploitation,” without specifying the imperialist nation in mind, i.e. eliminating the word “American,” the final version of the statute reads: “The Workers’ Party of Korea struggles for the liberation of

⁶⁰ Bradley K. Martin, *Under the Loving Care of the Fatherly Leader: North Korea and the Kim Dynasty* (New York: St. Martin’s Press, 2004): 112.

⁶¹ Koon Woo Nam, *The North Korean Leadership*, p. 103.

⁶² Lankov, *Crisis in North Korea*, p. 63.

⁶³ Remarks on the Draft Charter of the Korean Workers’ Party, RGANI, Fond 5, Opis 28, Delo 410, Listy 22-25.

⁶⁴ *Third Congress of the Workers’ Party of Korea: Documents and Materials* April 24-29, 1956 (Pyongyang: Foreign Languages Publishing House, 1956): 387.

the southern half of our country from the American imperialist aggressive forces and the internal reactionary rule.”⁶⁵

According to East German documents obtained by Bernd Schäfer, “GDR officials paid particular attention to the party [charter], subjecting it to a very meticulous and somewhat arrogant exegesis.”⁶⁶ The East German diplomats “criticized the absence of a reference to a ‘peaceful way’ to reunite Korea, the party’s ‘shallow’ notions of how to bring about reunification,” and the Koreans’ failure to address the “problem” of Kim Il Sung’s personality cult. As Schäfer notes, the German comrades “sensed from the [charter] an awareness of the imminent danger allegedly posed by influential factions of ‘party enemies’ within the KWP itself.”⁶⁷

The changes to the Central Committee announced by Pak Chong-ae included replacing its Presidium and Political Council with a Standing Committee and Organization Committee. The Standing Committee would now serve as the supreme executive body, making all decisions between meetings of the Central Committee. Party congresses would be held once every four years as opposed to once a year. The Central Committee would consist of 71 permanent members and 45 candidate members. The changes to the membership of the Central Committee and Standing Committee diminished the influence of the “Yan’an” group and Soviet-Koreans; all but two of the eleven full members of the Standing Committee were Kim Il Sung’s former comrades-in-arms or lackeys. Pak Chong-ae and Nam Il, though Soviet-Koreans, were Kim loyalists, leaving Kim Tu-bong and Choe Chang-ik of the “Yan’an” group as the only potential critics in the upper echelons of the KWP leadership.⁶⁸

⁶⁵ *Third Congress of the Workers’ Party of Korea: Documents and Materials*, p. 387.

⁶⁶ Bernd Schäfer, “Weathering the Sino-Soviet Conflict: The GDR and North Korea, 1949-1989,” *Cold War International History Project Bulletin 14/15*, Winter 2002-spring 2003 (Washington, DC: Woodrow Wilson Center): 26.

⁶⁷ *Ibid*, p. 26.

⁶⁸ The background and affiliations of members of the Standing Committee were: 1. Kim Il Sung (Partisan); 2. Kim Tu-bong (Yan’an); 3. Pak Chong-ae (Soviet, Kim Il Sung circle); 4. Kim Il (Partisan); 5. Choe Yong-gon (Partisan); 6. Pak Kum-ch’ol (Partisan); 7. Yim Hae (Partisan); 8. Kim Kwang-hyeop (Partisan); 9. Nam Il (Soviet, Kim Il Sung circle); 10. Jeong Il-yong (Kim Il Sung circle); 11. Joe Chang-ik (Yan’an); and Candidate Members of the Standing Committee: 1. Kim Chang-man (Yan’an); 2. Pak Ui-wan (Soviet); 3. Yi Hyo-sun (Partisan); 4. Yi Chong-ok (Kim Il Sung circle). RGANI, Fond 5, Opis 28, Delo 411, l. 156. For additional background information on the KWP CC members see; Scalapino and Lee, *Communism in Korea, Part II: The Society* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1972), Appendix C, pp. 1351-1380.

As Soviet documents suggest, not all were pleased with the outcome of the congress. Scholars have speculated that some Soviet-Koreans may have managed to meet with CPSU representative Brezhnev during the congress to express their frustrations

Albanian, Hungarian, and Romanian delegations taking part in the Third Party Congress said to him that even before that time it was well known to them that there were serious shortcomings in connection with the cult of personality in the KWP, but this was not reflected at the Congress.” Those who spoke at the Congress, Grigorov reported, “denounced the cult of personality of Pak Hon-yong in Southern Korea and not in the DPRK.”⁷³

Pak Ui-wan, who had met with Brezhnev and the Soviet delegation during the course of the Congress, began to hold regular meetings with Soviet officials, even though, in his own words, the KWP leadership “related negatively to those Soviet-Koreans who visit the embassy.” In a meeting at his home with Filatov, Pak declared that he did not agree with the changes in the Party leadership, since many of the recent appointees were not qualified to rule. “Many talented people like Kim Tu-bong and Kim Il were not selected for work in the Organization Committee of the KWP CC.” This meant that the Organization Committee would play a greater role in the CC than the Standing Committee “because the Organization Committee meets weekly and decides many of the issues in the work of the Central Committee.” Pak further informed Filatov that “Kim Il Sung announced the distribution of duties among the members of the Standing Committee: Choe Yong-gon will oversee the department for connections with South Korea, Pak Kum-ch’ol—the organizational department and commission for Party control, Kim Chang-man—the department of agitation and propaganda and the department of science, Chong Il-yong—the department of industry (he would be relieved from his duties as deputy prime minister), Pak Chong-ae—the department of cadres, Yim Hae was confirmed as the chair of the department of connections with South Korea. The remaining members and candidates members of the CC Standing Committee will have individual commissions within the Standing Committee.”⁷⁴

Archival documents seldom record the feelings or motivations of individual actors as plainly as we would like, but it would be reasonable to surmise that many party members shared the disappointment about the outcome of the Third Party Congress that

⁷³ Memorandum of Conversation with the Bulgarian Ambassador to the DPRK, Comrade Grigorov, 10 May 1956, RGAJo

Pak expressed to Filatov, including those who would later constitute the core of the opposition movement. Pak Ui-wan and some lower officials felt that the party was committing egregious errors by ignoring trends in the international communist movement by not admitting its shortcomings in relation to the cult of personality, collective leadership, and lack of party democracy. Pak stated to Filatov that although the congress was important for the history of the party, “a lot of mistakes were made.” First, “there was very little criticism.” Second, they came out against foreigners—meaning those from the Soviet Union. Furthermore, “denying that the CC KWP does not violate the principles of Marxism-Leninism is also wrong. We have, Pak said, a personality cult. We have not always collectively decided issues, we have broken revolutionary legality.” Expressing a desperate desire to salvage the situation within the KWP, even at the cost of outside intervention, Pak declared that he had thought a great deal about the best way “to change the course of ideological work and ha[d] come to the conclusion that outside help is necessary in this matter.”

He considered that the CC CPSU could, in the necessary manner, assist our leadership to correctly understand Marxism-Leninism and ensure the adherence of Party democracy. All of this will strengthen our Party and prepare it for carrying out the task of reuniting our country.⁷⁵

Speaking to Ivanov on 10 May, Pak presented the shortcomings of the Third Party Congress and the changes made to the party leadership as proof that Kim Il Sung was being led astray by elements hostile to outside influence:

Kim Il Sung has fallen under the influence of several undesirable figures and if this situation is not changed he might fall into an uncomfortable position with the USSR, about which [Pak] wanted to warn him. The propaganda of the DPRK against dogmatism is directed against foreign [propaganda], essentially against Soviet [propaganda]. Under the flag of the development of national traditions, the propaganda of the Soviet Union has been reduced.

It is possible that Pak simply felt it was politically expedient to avoid criticizing Kim Il Sung directly in the presence of Soviet officials, but this seems unlikely in light of his previous statements. Instead, it appears that Pak and like-minded party leaders considered Kim a strong leader who, though lacking sufficient ideological training, could,

⁷⁵ *Ibid.*

Kim Il Sung's forthcoming trip to fraternal countries. In a 7 May meeting with Ivanov, Pak Kil-ryun sharply criticized the KWP Third Party Congress for not having the spirit of the Twentieth Party Congress of the CPSU, and attacked the party-state's economic and ideological policies. Pak, a Soviet-Korean, was apparently attempting to encourage Soviet criticism of the KWP leadership during Kim Il Sung's trip to Moscow in June.⁷⁷

Pak Kil-ryun's lobbying in Pyongyang was supplemented by Yi Sang-jo's vigorous efforts to enlist Soviet support to reform the KWP through criticism. After his return to Moscow, Yi held at least two meetings with CPSU officials: on 29 May with Deputy Minister of Foreign Affairs N.T. Federenko and on 16 June with Director of the Far Eastern Division of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs I. Kurdyukov.⁷⁸ When Federenko asked Yi to share his impressions of conditions in the DPRK, Yi described "severe economic difficulties, a keen shortage of food, housing, a neglect of agriculture, etc.." As regards the Third Party Congress, Yi reported that "the CC KWP leadership thinks that the Congress 'went well and revealed the complete unity of the Party [...], but this is only the official point of view of the CC KWP leadership.'" Although he noted that as ambassador he should have "strictly limited himself to this information," Yi went on to inform Federenko that:

there are other opinions and sentiments about this question and as regards his, Yi Sang-jo's opinion, he also thinks that there were substantial shortcomings in the work of the Congress that reflect serious abnormalities in the work of the Workers Party and the DPRK government.

The unfavorable state of affairs is primarily indicated, Yi Sang-jo pointed out, by the fact that there was no genuine criticism or self-criticism at the Congress and the Congress did not at all take place in the spirit of the issues raised at the XX CPSU Congress. The KWP CC leadership thinks that the shortcomings in the matter of observing the norms of Party life and in other areas revealed at the XX CPSU Congress and, in particular, in the report of N. S. Khrushchev, "The Cult of Personality and Its Consequences," are characteristic of the CPSU and have no relation to the Korean Workers' Party. This policy of the CC KWP leadership also determined the entire course of the Congress.

⁷⁷ Memorandum of Conversation with the Ambassador of the DPRK to the German Democratic Republic, Pak Kil-ryun, 7 May 1956. RGANI, Fond 5, Opis 28, Delo 412, Listy 222-224.

⁷⁸ Report by N. T. Fedorenko on a meeting with DPRK Ambassador to the USSR, Yi Sang-jo, 29 May 1956, RGANI, Fond 5, Opis 28, Delo 412, Listy 190-196 and Memorandum of a Conversation with DPRK Ambassador to the USSR, Yi Sang-jo, 16 June 1956, RGANI, Fond 5, Opis 28, Delo 412, Listy 238-241.

However, Yi informed Federenko, “many Party members, including Congress

situation in the Party but decide not to openly criticize these shortcomings, fearing persecution.

Therefore, continued Yi Sang-jo, we need help from outside, and it would be best if Com. Khrushchev or Com. Mao Zedong talked with the KWP leadership about this issue. When doing so it is advisable that critical comments by Com. Khrushchev or Com. Mao Zedong become known not only to Kim Il Sung and the people close to him, but to a broader circle of KWP Party officials.

Nonetheless, like Pak Ui-wan, Yi Sang-jo still supported Kim Il Sung, explaining that Kim “is a young leader with a good revolutionary past, but he has studied little and does not have sufficient ideological training, and this leads him to mistakes.”⁸⁰ Still others were openly critical of internal party matters in the presence of Kim Il Sung. Chinese Ambassador to the DPRK Qiao Xiao Guang reported to Amb. Ivanov on 5 November that “even before the opening of the Plenum, [Chairman of the CC of United Unions] So Hwi and other individuals made a series of rather serious accusations directed at the KWP CC and in particular about the issue of cadres.” **[DOCUMENT No. 9]** Thus, rather

encourage self-criticism during the upcoming August plenum. Kim's opponents were prepared, however, to replace the party leadership if their grievances were not redressed.

Taking Matters into Their Own Hands

Visits to the Soviet embassy by Kim's opponents had diminished in the wake of the decree forcing Soviet-Koreans either to accept Korean citizenship or be stripped of their posts, but their official business regularly brought many of them into contact with Soviet diplomatic staff. Following Kim Il Sung's return from his month-long trip to Eastern Europe, there was a flurry of activity at both the Soviet and Chinese legations. Over the course of a week, Soviet-Koreans and Chinese returnees met with diplomats at both embassies on what was decidedly unofficial business. Records of the Chinese embassy are not yet accessible, but a Russian memorandum of a conversation between Soviet Charge d' Affaires A.M. Petrov and PRC Charge d' Affaires Chao Ke Xian suggests the general theme of the encounters:

[...] During the discussion comrade Chao further mentioned that individual Korean comrades, in their discussions with officials at the Chinese embassy, show interest in how matters stand with the cult of personality in China. In response to my question about how the Chinese comrades answered that question, Chao said that in answering they quote the well-known decree of the CC Chinese Communist Party, published at that time in the newspaper *Renmin Ribao*.⁸³

In their meetings with Soviet embassy officials Kim Il Sung's opponents revealed their intentions as they prepared their strategy for the August Plenum, suggesting that their actions should not be described as an attempted coup d'état. The day after Kim Il Sung returned from his trip to Europe, A.M. Petrov met with Head of the Department of Construction Materials under the Cabinet of Ministers Yi Pil-gyu,⁸⁴ an influential member of the "Yan'an" group and a leading critic of Kim's policies. [DOCUMENT No. 2] Yi disclosed to Petrom-2(ny)JTJ0.0011 Tc -0.000

A group of officials consider it necessary to undertake certain actions against Kim Il Sung and his closest associates at the earliest possible opportunity [...] In the DPRK there are such people who can embark on that course and who are currently making appropriate preparations.

Yi enumerated the opposition group's charges against the Kim Il Sung leadership, alluding to the frustration of Soviet-Koreans and Chinese returnees over their dwindling influence in the Central Committee and Ministries:

The personality cult of Kim Il Sung has acquired an intolerable character. He does not tolerate any criticism or self-criticism. The word of Kim Il Sung is law. He has surrounded himself with sycophants and lackeys in the Central Committee and Council of Ministers. It would be enough to say that out of 18 ministers, 9 have a shadowy past. [...] The CC is spreading distrust among functionaries. Functionaries follow one another. There is absolutely no trust and friendship among functionaries in the CC KWP and Council of Ministers.

Yi indicated to what extent the opposition was prepared to go to reverse the situation in the KWP, i.e. to restore the influence of the Soviet and Chinese fraternal parties in the Central Committee and Council of Ministers:

[...] the group sets before itself the task of replacing the present leadership of the CC KWP and government. In his opinion, there are two ways of doing this. The first way is sharp and decisive criticism within the Party and self-criticism. However, Yi said, Kim Il Sung will not likely be in favor of that way and he doubts the success of such an approach. The second way is forcible upheaval. That is a difficult path, Yi said, involving sacrifice.

It is not clear whether Kim Il Sung was to be among the members of the leadership Yi sought to replace since he noted that "Kim Il Sung will not be in favor of that way." Yi may have anticipated that once Kim learned of the widespread dissatisfaction in the ranks of the Party, he would assist in the removal of unqualified officials. Indeed, while Yi was quite forthcoming in his criticism of Kim Il Sung, he expressed even stronger indignation over the elevation of a number of incompetent Kim Il Sung cronies, all of whom received their positions outside the norms of party procedure. Those whom Soviet-Koreans and Chinese returnees wanted to see replaced apparently included Minister of Education Han Sol-ya, the architect of the literary crisis, who, Yi

says, “should be shot;” Presidium member and Partisan Kim Chang-man, whom Yi describes as a “hateful person;” and Kim Il, a member of the Presidium and a Partisan who “is Kim Il Sung’s protégé.” **[DOCUMENT No. 2]**

It is notable that Yi did not include Choe Yong-gon, a Partisan who became head of the Korean Democratic Party in 1945, only to become a member of the Standing Committee in 1956 while technically never a KWP member. Yi even went so far as to praise Choe, indicating that “he respectfully displays himself in work.” Choe was in fact the prime example of an appointment made in violation of Party democracy, since he was appointed to the Standing Committee of the KWP directly from his former position as head of the Democratic Party. Yi may have spared Choe any criticism during his discussion with Petrov because he felt Choe had become critical of Kim Il Sung’s activities and might have been open to joining the criticism at the August Plenum. **[DOCUMENT No. 2]**

It appears that the level of the threat to Kim Il Sung depended upon his actions at the Plenum. If, after all remonstrance’s were aired, Kim refused to make any changes to the leadership of the CC and Council of Ministers, then his critics would exercise their democratic right, enshrined in the charter of the KWP, to vote the Great Leader out of power. Thus, as Balazs Szalontai argues, the opposition was more a “desperate attempt to turn the tide than a serious challenge to Kim’s rule.”⁸⁵ The ousting of Kim was to be a

The stream of visitors to the Soviet embassy following Kim Il Sung's return to Korea also included Foreign Minister Nam Il, a staunch Kim supporter. On 24 July Nam Il met with Petrov to "seek advice on what position he should take." **[DOCUMENT No. 3]** According to the Foreign Minister, Pak Chang-ok had informed him that "a group of leading functionaries, including Choe Chang-ik, Kim Sung-hwa and a number of others are prepared, in the coming plenum of the Central Committee, to speak out with severe criticism of Kim Il Sung." Furthermore,

Pak expressed confidence that if he himself, and also if Choe Chang-ik and Kim Sung-hwa speak out with that criticism, then he will receive support from individual members of th

these issues in a full-scale investigation in the Plenums of the CC or in meetings of Party organs, but little by little without involving the entire Party in the discussion of these issues.” [DOCUMENT No. 3] Thus, putting his faith and trust in the Great Leader, Nam Il opted not to join his fellow Soviet-Koreans in criticizing the Party leadership.

Judging from Nam Il’s meeting with Petrov, Soviet diplomats were also apprehensive about the prospective criticism of Kim Il Sung, suggesting that Nam Il dissuade Pak Chang-ok and other Soviet-Korean conspirators from taking part in the criticism since it might give the impression of a Soviet-orchestrated attack on Kim Il Sung and KWP policies. Petrov’s advice thus contradicts Kim Il Sung’s depiction to Manush in 1961 that the opposition was an anti-Party conspiracy orchestrated from the Soviet embassy.

In all probability, Petrov’s advice was a reflection of the short-lived post-Stalin attempt by Kremlin leaders to be less intrusive in the affairs of fraternal parties than they had been under Stalin, in an effort to lessen resentment of Moscow and accompanying nationalist sentiment.

On 28 July and 1 August, Petrov received Nam Il and another Soviet-Korean ally of Kim Il Sung, Pak Chong-ae.⁸⁷ Kim Il Sung described the results of this meeting in his closing speech at the August Plenum, revealing the intrigue both sides employed in the days before the crucial gathering:

Rumors reached the leadership of the KWP before the Plenum that, apparently, a person who leads the malcontent and considers the policies of the KWP incorrect is at the Soviet Embassy. The leadership of the KWP was obliged to

Sung-hwa, to Moscow for study just two days before the scheduled start of the plenum, explaining that he “was mixed up in some unsavory business and had to leave.”⁹¹

As an additional protective measure, Kim Il Sung postponed the opening of the plenum for nearly a month, from 2 August to 30 August.⁹² Ko Hui-man later explained to First Secretary of the Soviet Foreign Ministry S.P. Lazarev that “having been informed that the attack had to take place at the Central Committee Plenum, the leaders of the Central Committee kept delaying the Plenum to confuse the group. The date was announced only on the eve of the first day of the Plenum, thus disorganizing their actions.”⁹³

Following up on the criticism Kim received in Moscow, the CPSU CC sent a letter to the KWP CC on 2 August offering further criticism of the cult of personality in the DPRK and the lack of collectivity in the party leadership. The Great Leader followed up on the letter after two weeks by informing Ambassador Ivanov on 13 August that elections to the Supreme People’s Assembly would be held later in the fall of 1956. At the same time, Kim was attempting to placate those critical of his policies in Moscow, the opposition in Pyongyang, aware of Moscow’s intervention, redoubled its efforts and increased the intensity of direct attacks on Kim and the party leadership in late August. During a meeting of the Standing Committee, Choe Chang-ik criticized members of the leadership widely considered unqualified, calling for their dismissal. Kim responded to the intensification of the attacks by increasing his efforts to blackmail potential opponents into submission. Pak Ui-wan was one of those coerced to support Kim at the plenum through blackmail, according to Yi Sang-jo. During a 22 August meeting, “Kim Il Sung told Pak Ui-wan that he had a significant amount of compromising material against him about squandering state resources and threatened to reveal this material if Pak Ui-wan spoke out against the leadership of the KWP with criticism.” **[DOCUMENT No. 5]**

The limitations of relying on the records of former fraternal countries to construct a narrative of this pivotal event are revealed in the lack of information on the domestic front of the campaign to criticize Kim and the party leadership. While there are

⁹¹ Memorandum of Conversation with the Charge d’ Affaires of the Chinese Embassy in Pyongyang, Com. Chao Ke Xian, RGANI, Fond 5, Opus 28, Delo 410, Listy 313-314.

⁹² Lankov, *From Stalin to Kim Il Sung*, p. 164.

⁹³ Memorandum of Conversation between S.P. Lazarev and Ko Hui-man, 18 September 1956, AVPRF, Fond 0102, Opus 12, Delo 4, Papka 68, cited in Lankov, *From Stalin to Kim Il Sung*, pp. 164-5.

memoranda of conversations showing North Korean leaders encouraging Soviet officials to disparage the party leadership in Moscow, there are only passing references to the direct and personal criticisms of Kim and the party leadership during sessions of the KWP CC in Pyongyang. Until additional records are released and North Korean archives become accessible, the question of the amount of criticism Kim received at home before even departing on his “friendship visits” will remain open.

The August Plenum

The official agenda for the Plenum listed only two items: a report on Kim Il Sung’s recent trip to fraternal countries and a discussion of the National Health Service. As one might expect, however, the opposition group’s plans and Kim’s own countermeasures dominated the proceedings. The accounts of the Plenum that Kim Il Sung and Pak Ui-wan relayed to the Soviet embassy provide a much more detailed description of the event than has previously been available, as well as widely varying interpretations. **[DOCUMENTS Nos. 4 & 7]**

In a meeting with Ambassador Ivanov on 1 September, Kim Il Sung focused on what he termed the “anti-Party” activities of his critics. Minister of Trade Yun Kong-hum, for example, “made accusations that the Workers Party rejected the decree of the Twentieth Party Congress, did not follow the principles of Marxism-Leninism,” and preserved “very serious consequences of the personality cult.” Kim reported that Plenum participants were “outraged by the antagonistic manner of Yun’s speech” and “demanded that he be prevented from speaking.” **[DOCUMENT No. 4]** Pak Ui-wan confirmed to Ivanov six days later that Kim’s allies used this tactic to silence the remaining critics before they could speak. **[DOCUMENT No. 7]**

Kim Il Sung informed Ivanov about the four members of the “Yan’an” group—So-hwi, Yi Pil-gyu, Kim Kang, and Yun Kong-hum—who left the plenum and fled to China. He also described in detail the serious measures taken against his critics: So-hwi, Yi Pil-gyu, and Kim Kang were expelled from the Party *in absentia*; Choe Chang-ik was “removed from the CC Presidium;” and Pak Chang-ok was “removed from the post of Deputy Chairman of the Cabinet of Ministers and removed from the ranks of the CC.”

[DOCUMENT No. 4] As Szalontai observes, Kim's acts of repression, "which ran counter to the new trend in Soviet and Chinese policies, could not pass unnoticed."⁹⁴

In his account to Ivanov on 6 September, Pak Ui-wan offered a much more detailed account of the proceedings, describing a carefully orchestrated offensive against the leadership's critics. **[DOCUMENT No. 7]** Pak charged that Kim Il Sung's address touched upon the problem of the personality cult only "in connection with the status of work in the area of propaganda," and that the audience spontaneously burst into praise throughout the speech "without any reason." He described the next two speeches, by chairman of the State Planning Committee, Yi Tong-ok and secretary of the provincial committee of the Party from the province of Northern Hamgyong, Kim Tae-gong, as "sycophantic," though Kim Tae-gong "singled out and sharply criticized the work of the Ministry of Trade and the activities of the unions."

Pak's account of Yun's speech is similar to that of Kim Il Sung, especially in his description of Yun's accusations and the Standing Committee's hostile reaction. However, Pak's account also refers indirectly to Yun's comments on the lack of party democracy when he complains that "Choe Yong-gon is the leader of another party and was immediately named to the post of Deputy Chairman of the KWP, a clear violation of party democracy." In response to this comment, "Choe Yong-gon stood and called Yun a dog and insulted him in every manner." **[DOCUMENT No. 7]**

According to Pak, the evening session of 30 August contained more sycophantic speeches by Minister of Finance Yi Tyu-yong, Minister of Foreign Affairs Nam Il, and the chairman of the CC of the Union of Democratic Youth, Pak Yong-guk. Each of these speeches praised the KWP and its leadership while deriding the 'anti-party' group. While generally optimistic, Foreign Minister Nam Il's speech was less flattering than the others, recognizing, according to Pak, "that unfortunately the decree of the March Plenum of the CC, where Kim Il Sung talked about the personality cult, was not brought to the attention of the members of the Party." Nam Il's criticism of Yun Kong-hum, however, was as bitter as that of others from the Standing Committee.

Speaking next, Choe Chang-ik, one of the leaders of the opposition group, evidently recognized that his plan to make Kim recognize his shortcomings had already

⁹⁴ Balazs Szalontai, *Kim Il Sung in the Khrushchev Era*. p. 98.

failed, and therefore chose not to attack the

Koreans coming from China that they would work for ten years in the DPRK without getting a higher title than Major-General.” [DOCUMENT No. 7]

In his speech, Pak Chang-ok denied any involvement with the opposition group and expressed his frustration at having been removed from his former position following the December Plenum of the CC KWP, stating that the Plenum “took a very strict and unfair position in relation to him.” According to Pak Ui-wan, Pak Chang-ok was interrupted by calls from the Standing Committee and the hall and was not permitted to continue speaking.

Pak Ui-wan gave little detail about Kim Il Sung’s closing speech other than that he suggested that “organizational measures” be taken against the opposition. After finishing his account of the plenum, however, evidently fearful of further retaliation against the Soviet and Yan’an groups beyond the immediate expulsions, and mindful of Kim Il Sung’s earlier blackmail attempt, Pak, a Soviet-Korean, indicated that he wished to renounce his North Korean citizenship, regain his Soviet citizenship, and be reinstated in the ranks of the CPSU. [DOCUMENT No. 7]

Why did the opposition’s attempt to encourage Kim Il Sung to reform through pointed criticism fail so miserably? Two reasons in particular stand out. First, the critics did not garner enough support from other members of the Central Committee and Standing Committee. Indeed, a number of Soviet-Koreans, including Nam Il and Pak Chong-ae, refused to join their compatriots and even informed Kim of their plans. Presumably there was very little they could offer those who sided with them that Kim Il Sung and his associates could not. Second, following the KWP Third Party Congress, the “Yan’an” group and Soviet-Koreans were simply outnumbered in the Standing Committee and Central Committee. These factors, combined with Kim’s own counteroffensive, made success nearly impossible.

Foreign Meddling: Anastas Mikoyan and Peng Dehuai Come to Pyongyang

Sometime after the disastrous morning session of 30 August, four members of the opposition group – Minister of Trade Yun Kong-hum, ChaiJ0.0dub3172 0 Tdeinform C,.72501 TTJ0.34lout

were detained by Chinese border guards. **[DOCUMENT No. 4]** Word of their flight reached fraternal embassies in Pyongyang, and on 4 September the Soviet and Chinese ambassadors met to discuss the issue, as well as the results of the Plenum as a whole. PRC Ambassador Qiao Xiao Guang described the situation as “an extremely serious event [...] concerning the relations between the DPRK and the PRC” and explained that the Korean government had filed a petition demanding the return of “the guilty individuals.” The Chinese government, which had been “immediately informed about what had occurred,” announced that “the noted individuals are not simple border crossers and that their forcible return is impossible.

who had fled to China. As Balazs Szalontai notes, this coordinated action “indicates that

revealing the very fact of the visit of Mikoyan and Peng Dehuai to Korea is achieved, not giving the Party masses reason to believe that the decree of the September Plenum was passed under pressure from fraternal parties or that fraternal parties were interfering in our internal affairs.” **[DOCUMENT No. 8]**

Ivanov proceeded to ask the opinion of the Chinese charge d’ affaires’ regarding some of the more controversial issues connected with the joint intervention. One issue in particular stood out, revealing that Kim Il Sung had good reason to claim meddling by the fraternal parties. Pak Il-u, a prominent member of the “Yan’an” group and allegedly the personal representative of Mao Zedong in Pyongyang, had served as Minister of the Interior before being purged and imprisoned in 1955. During a meeting with Kim Il Sung, Peng Dehuai requested that Pak Il-u and another member of the “Yan’an” group, former Korean Peoples’ Army officer Pan Ho-san, be released from prison and returned to China. On 5 November, Ivanov was informed by Ambassador Qiao Xiao Guang that “the leadership of the Chinese Communist Party shows great interest” in the measures taken by the Koreans “to carry out the decision of the September Plenum.” Ivanov replied that the CC KWP had reportedly “decided to release Pak Il-u from imprisonment,” though he did not indicate whether Pak would be allowed to depart for China. **[DOCUMENT No. 9]**

Qiao asked Ivanov how he thought the “Korean friends view the visit of Comrades Mikoyan and Peng Dehuai to the DPRK.” Ivanov responded that “to judge by the course of the September Plenum, the reaction of the friends should be considered positive, however to confirm this categorically would be premature.” Qiao responded that he too “has not yet reached a specific conclusion regarding the reaction of the friends to the visit of comrades Mikoyan and Peng Dehuai.” **[DOCUMENT No. 9]**

Of course, as indicated by the conversation five years later between Kim Il Sung and Myftiu Manush cited in the introduction to this essay, the North Korean leader strongly resented the intervention.⁹⁶ As Kim’s biography later claimed, “at this time, the modern revisionists exposed themselves in this international communist movement, and engaged in shameless intervention in the internal affairs of fraternal parties and fraternal

⁹⁶ Memorandum of Conversation between Kim Il Sung and Manush [Myftiu] composed by Albanian Ambassador to the DPRK, Hasan Alimerko, 4 October 1961, AQPPSH, MPP Korese, V. 1961, D4, translated by Enkel Daljani.

countries, preaching the false line of imperialism and shrinking from the revolution.”⁹⁷

Moreover:

[Kim Il Sung] dealt a decisive blow without restraint on the counterrevolutionary factional elements, in the interests of the Party, the revolution and the people. At the same time he soundly smashed the intrigues of the great-power chauvinists and revisionists who tried to interfere in internal affairs, making use of these elements.

But for him, this was far from being a crisis that called for all his energies. As an outstanding strategist, Comrade Kim Il Sung used this struggle forced on him to more firmly establish *Juche*, and led the revolution in a great upsurge, defeating the revisionists and the great-power chauvinists in the international arena, and enhanced the spirit of self-reliance among his own people.”⁹⁸

Ivanov and Qiao also discussed the flight of Yun Kong-hum, Li Pil-gyu, So Hwi and Kim Chang-il, who were still in China. The Soviet ambassador asked if the four knew that as a result of the Mikoyan/Peng intervention they had been reinstated as members of the KWP, or whether they intended to return to the DPRK. Qiao replied that they are aware of the decision, but “not wishing to return to the DPRK, they want to ask the government of the DPRK to allow their families to depart to China since they know also that the Korean government is not pressing for their return to the DPRK.” Qiao said further that

Yun Kong-hum, So Hwi, Kim Chang-il and Yi Pil-gyu, in an address to the CC CCP and CC CPSU, blamed the Korean leadership for destroying a number of notable party actors in the period after liberation and during the war, for leading the country and party with anti-democratic methods, and for incorrectly appointing and cultivating leading cadres. In connection with this, they consider Pak Chong-ae, Pak Kum-chul, Kim Chang-man and Han Song-do as unqualified to occupy leading posts in the party; finally, they charge that the leadership is not carrying out a struggle against the cult of personality of Kim Il Sung. [DOCUMENT No. 9]

In closing, Ivanov informed Qiao Xiao Guang that the Korean leadership had released Yi Sang-jo from his duties as ambassador to Moscow, but Yi refused to return to

⁹⁷ Baik Bong, *Kim Il Sung: Biography [II]*, 1970): 553.

⁹⁸ *Ibid*, p. 549.

of democratic centralism or by a desire to eliminate the two foreign-backed groups at a time he was distancing himself and the North Korean party-state from fraternal socialism and internationalism? What drove Kim's critics to attempt to change the course of events in the DPRK? Did the few Soviet-Koreans who participated in the opposition seek only to regain lost stature in the Party? Did members of the "Yan'an" group perceive themselves as the next target of repression, following the elimination of the "Domestic" group and the limited attack on the Soviet-Koreans?

We now know, however, the specific charges that were leveled against the party leadership and specifically against Kim Il Sung. We can conclude that the opposition saw replacing Kim Il Sung as a last resort. If Kim failed admit to his mistakes and make appropriate changes in party democracy and the personality cult, then the opposition was prepared to vote him out of power—a democratic right guaranteed in the recently revised KWP charter. Some semblance of political life thus seems to have existed in the DPRK prior to the 1956 August Plenum.

We also now know from the newly available documentary evidence that Kim was well aware of his critics' intentions and foiled their attempts. By postponing the start of the plenum, he was able to blackmail and coerce members of the leadership who may have been sympathetic to the opposition. Earlier accounts of the August Plenum describe an attempted coup d'état, perhaps because such rumors served the purposes of both Kim and his critics. For South Korean intelligence, and later South Korean scholars, rumors of an attempt to overthrow Kim Il Sung may have been welcome because they demonstrated a lack of popular support for the leader. Similarly, within North Korea, the rumors benefited Kim Il Sung since few would question his motives in eliminating such conspirators from the party leadership.

Taking into account that reliance on Russian documents tends naturally to exaggerate Soviet agency, the historical record presented here makes it clear that in 1956 the Soviet embassy still played a key role in the affairs of the Korean party. After surviving this serious attempt by Moscow and Beijing to meddle in internal party matters in Korea, Kim Il Sung redoubled his efforts to limit the influence of the foreign communist parties within the KWP. The Sino-Soviet rift soon gave him the means to

pursue a markedly more autonomous path, ever vigilant against a renewed threat from his patrons.

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II. DOCUMENT APPENDIX

DOCUMENT No. 1

Memorandum of Conversation with Vice Premier of the Cabinet of Ministers of the DPRK and Member of the Presidium, KWP CC, Pak Chang-ok, 12 March 1956.

[Source: Russian State Archive of Contemporary History (hereafter RGANI), Fond 5, Opis 28, Delo 410, Listy 74-85. Obtained and translated for CWIHP by James F. Person.]

From the diary of
Counsellor of the Embassy of the
USSR in the DPRK
Comrade Filatov S.N.

It is necessary to point out, Pak Chang-ok said, that in the Soviet Union I was involved in insignificant party work, but in Korea I was pushed into important party and state work. Lacking the necessary experience, I made a number of mistakes when deciding difficult matters of state. Furthermore, when I arrived in Korea I did not know the country, did not know the part

As you know, Pak declared, at the start of 1954, Kim Il and I then served as vice-chairmen of the CC KWP, at the suggestion of comrade Kim Il Sung we were reassigned to work in the Cabinet of Ministers – [as] Deputy Premiers. At the same time I was confirmed chairman of the State Planning Committee and Kim Il as Minister of Agriculture. This transition did not go too smoothly. When Kim Il Sung spoke during a session of the Political Council with such a suggestion, comrades Pak Chong-ae, and Kim Tu-bong expressed their opinions about the inexpediency of my and Kim Il's move to positions in the Cabinet of Ministers.

My promotion to the post of deputy premier and chairman of the State Planning Committee brought me closer to Kim Il Sung. All matters related to the rehabilitation of our economy were decided in the government at the initiative of the State Planning Committee. Comrade Kim Il Sung always supported me and demanded that things be put in order in the ministries. I, said Pak, sought to carry out neatly the directives of Comrade Kim Il Sung for which he repeatedly held me up as an example. This caused some stirring among a number of functionaries and especially among Ten Il-yen, Choe Chang-ik and others.

At the start of 1955 I started to notice that Comrade Kim Il Sung began to display dissatisfaction with me and my work. My attempts to ascertain the cause of his discontent in talks with comrade Kim Il Sung did not lead to anything. Comrade Kim Il Sung did not desire to discuss this matter. I saw, said Pak, that someone had begun to influence comrade Kim Il Sung. Furthermore, this influence adversely affected the work of the State Planning Committee.

It must be said that all of the members of the Political Council, with the exception of Pak Kum-chul, negatively related to Kim Il Sung's suggestion about the co-optation of comrade Choe Yong-gon into the composition of the Political Council. Comrade Kim Il Sung did not strive to get the agreement of the Political Council about the co-optation of comrade Choe Yong-gon into the Political Council and unilaterally went with the proposal to a plenum. It is necessary to mention that the majority of the members of the CC KWP recognized comrade Choe Yong-gon as the head of a petty-bourgeois party and were surprised by his appearance at a Presidium of the Plenum.

I think that with his acceptance into the Political Council the collection of material against me, Pak Yong-bin and other Soviet Koreans started. Comrade Kim Il Sung began to express more and more displeasure with my work, the work of Pak Yong-bin and even that of Pak Chong-ae.

Last August, in my absence, comrade Kim Il Sung summoned all of my subordinates in the State Planning Committee and ordered them to compose material about the poor work of the State Planning Committee. They carried out his order. However, the material was so poorly prepared that comrade Kim Il Sung decided not to even talk with me about the shortcomings in the work of the State Planning Committee.

On 21 November comrade Kim Il Sung spoke during a meeting of economic advisors with harsh criticism of the work of the State Planning Committee and of me personally. I considered the points of his speech as guidelines and took measures to improve the work of the State Planning Committee.

Prior to the December CC KWP Plenum, Pak said, I was twice called to Kim Il Sung where he made a number of accusations against me.

First of all he said to me that my attitude toward proletarian authors, including Han Sol-ya, was incorrect. I incorrectly supported writers who arrived from the south. He said that after the death of Hegai I did not excuse a number of Soviet Koreans from their posts who, together with me composed a group and all matters were decided like a family.

In response I told Comrade Kim Il Sung that I did not do anything without the permission of the Political Council and his personal orders. Until the end of 1948 I was in unimportant work and did not have any influence on the work of the CC KWP. Regarding those who came from South Korea, the Political Council of the CC repeatedly made pronouncements demanding that the possibility to work be given to those people and that they be supported. Furthermore, you, Comrade Kim Il Sung repeatedly instructed us and demanded support and correct relations with those workers who came from the south.

Regarding the Koreans who came from the Soviet Union, I did not place them in leading posts. That was done before me. Furthermore, all of them were confirmed by the

Political Council and many of the functionaries were nominated to the leading posts at his, Kim's, initiative.

I directed comrade Kim Il Sung's attention, Pak said, to the fact that all of the matters which he had raised related to the period 1947 – 1952 and that discussing them at the present time is hardly constructive, however, if at present a number of members of the Political Council consider that in these matters mistakes were made, then why must I carry all of the blame for these blunders. All of these matters were decided in the Political Council so it means that all of the Political Council should be responsible.

Comrade Kim Il Sung agreed with my thoughts and asked me to remain calm and continue to work actively in the Political Council and Cabinet of Ministers.

In spite of the meeting and agreement with my argument, at the end of the meeting of the December Plenum of the CC KWP, comrade Kim Il Sung delivered a speech. His entire speech was devoted to the theme of the Soviet Korean affair. I understood that political accusations were being made, and I decided once again to speak with comrade Kim Il Sung and express my thoughts. In a discussion with me, comrade Kim Il Sung once again repeated the now notorious accusations. However, at the end of the discussion in which Pak Chong-ae took part, comrade Kim Il Sung said you have already been criticized enough, quietly continue to work.

I learned that Kim Il Sung's speech made at the CC Plenum was distributed by the Pyongyang City Committee to all primary organizations and it is being discussed in party meetings.

On 27-29 December [1955], Pak said, there was an enlarged plenum of the CC KWP in which over 400 people participated. At the initiative of comrade Kim Il Sung, I, comrades Pak Yong-bin, Ki Sek-pak, Ten Dong-hek and Ten Yul were compelled to deliver speeches admitting our shortcomings. The gathering was prearranged and as I was the first to speak was given around 100 questions. I was accused of wanting to become the face of the state, and if not the face, then the second in command. For this I rallied a number of dependable Soviet-Korean cadres. Pak Yong-bin and I, taking refuge in the collectivity of the leadership, put ourselves forward and beseeched the role of the Vozhd, comrade Kim Il Sung. We were, as a number of participants demonstrated, conduits of bourgeois ideology to the party.

However, on 18 January I was once again summoned to a meeting of the Presidium of the CC KWP where I was asked to read a draft decision of the Presidium that had already been accepted by the Political Council. Comrade Kim Il Sung suggested that I express my opinion about the matter under discussion to all members of the Presidium. None of the members of the Pr

up to now they have not given me anything. I informed comrade Kim Il Sung of this. He promised to take measures.

I directed Pak Chang-ok's attention to the address of comrade Kim Il Sung in relation to the fact that he, Pak Chang-ok, was on more than one occasion ordered to speak with criticism of his erroneous actions. Pak responded that no one had ever given him such an order. During a conversation in October of last year comrade Kim Il Sung drew attention to the fact that I had to deliver a speech on the work of the union of writers of Korea. I answered him that I am entirely unfamiliar with the literature of Korean writers. On that, the conversation ceased.

I asked comrade Pak Chang-ok to describe how the party functionaries in the CC KWP and the Cabinet of Ministers study the decision of the 20th CPSU Party Congress, the speech of comrades N.S. Khrushchev and N.A. Bulganin, and what influence and impressions they got from the 20th CPSU Party Congress.

Pak answered that the majority of party functionaries were still silent. They are waiting until comrade Kim Il Sung himself talks about the line of issues, and especially about the personality cult, collective leadership, observance of inter-party democracy, revolutionary legality, etc. All of these questions are of supreme importance to the future work and strengthening of our Party.

The praise of comrade Kim Il Sung is especially widespread in both oral and print propaganda in Korea and if anyone comments on this matter, they are subject to

The leading members of the Party, Comrade Pak said, at the present moment are studying the decision and materials of the CPSU Twentieth Party Congress; discussions are taking place everywhere on the question of the personality cult, and I don't doubt that the majority of the leading cadres correctly understand all of the matters and attitudes advanced in the decision of the Twentieth Party Congress and reach the necessary conclusions. I also think, he continued, that comrade Kim Il Sung will largely change the forms and methods of leadership. Without that, the further strengthening of the Party and reinforcement of its influence on the masses is inconceivable.

At the end of our discussion, comrade Pak Chang-ok informed me that he had a hand in the composition of the unforgettable letter which Choe Yong-gon delivered to the Soviet government in February of this year. In this note, the Korean government asks the government of the USSR about the deferment and partially about forgiving the advanced payments on credit the Soviet Union had previously given to Korea.

Furthermore we discussed the question of approaching the Soviet government with a request to render the DPRK further material assistance. We think, said Pak, that it is necessary for you during the upcoming five year plan to receive material assistance in the amount of one billion rubles; we assume that this assistance will be rendered in roughly equal portions by the Soviet Union and China.

During a meeting of the Political Council, Comrade Kim Il Sung said on this matter that it is not necessary to appeal to the Soviet government now with the simultaneous requests for the deferment and partial forgiveness of the advanced payments on credit and additional material assistance. It is necessary to decide, he said, first the primary question – the matter of the deferment and partial writing off of the advanced payments on credit. If the Soviet government complies with our request, then after some time we will appeal to the government of the USSR for additional material assistance. Members of the Political Council agreed with comrade Kim Il Sung's suggestion.

I thanked comrade Pak Chang-ok for the information.

The meeting lasted for 4 hours.

Comments:

1. From the meetings conducted with Soviet Korean comrades Pak Chang-ok, Pak Yong-bin, Pak Ui-wan, Kim Sung-hwa, Kim Dae-wook, Chang Dong-hok, and others, it is clear that comrade Pak Chang-ok, much like comrades Pak Yong-bin, Ki Sek-bok, Chang Yul, and Chang Dong-hok admitted to the fabricated charges made against them at the meeting of the Presidium of the CC KWP on 18 January on the grounds [that were put forth in] the decree passed by the Presidium of the CC KWP “About the Future Struggle Against Reactionary Bourgeois Ideology in Literature and Art.”

It is necessary to consider that for over two months the CC KWP discussed the matter in plenary sessions of the Presidium and Political Council of the CC and also in primary party organizations. The discussion of this matter, in point of fact, turned into a discussion of the activities of a number of leading Soviet Koreans. What’s more,

People's Army, and later commanded the 6th Army. From the army he was sent to the Ministry of the Interior in the capacity of first deputy minister. At one time he carried out the duties of the Minister of the Interior. He worked for a long time with Pak Il-u and

I asked Yi what the objective of that information was and he answered that it comes from the desire to alert the Soviet embassy to the fact that there was a possibility of one or another development taking place in the DPRK.

Regarding the life of the masses, Yi explained that 80% of the population of Korea consisted of peasants. After the liberation of Korea, peasants were given

graduated from a Communist college in the Soviet Union to be left in peace. This means that she pledged to the Japanese not to become engaged in revolutionary activities.

Choe Chang-ik – a person with a revolutionary past and independent wit. If a struggle against Kim Il Sung ensued, he would come to the side of Kim Il Sung's opponents.

Pak Chang-ok – he still had a lot to do to make up for his faults. He was the very first to name Kim Il Sung irreplaceable, prai

Nam Il agreed with me. He thinks that it would be good to warn Kim Il Sung and the Presidium of the Central Committee now so that Kim Il Sung would speak critically of himself at the Plenum in connection with his report about the results of the trip of the government delegation to the USSR and People's Republics.

Nam Il again stressed that he and other members of the Presidium would help Kim Il Sung in every possible way to prepare a speech containing self-criticism. The discussion lasted 1 hour and 30 minutes.

Charge d' Affairs ad interim
USSR in the DPRK

/A Petrov/

31.VII.56

DOCUMENT No. 4

Memorandum of Conversation with Premier Kim Il Sung, 1 September 1956

[Source: RGANI, Fond 5, Opis 28, Delo 410, List 319. Obtained and translated for CWIHP by James F. Person.]

From the diary of
The Ambassador of the USSR in the DPRK
Comrade Ivanov V.I.
29 August – 14 September

1 September 1956

MEMORANDUM OF CONVERSATION WITH KIM IL SUNG

...At the plenum, following [Kim's] address, the issue of Yun Kong-hum arose, who, in his speech made accusations that the Workers Party rejected the decree of the Twentieth Party Congress, did not follow the principles of Marxism-Leninism, painting the matter in such a manner that inside the KWP very serious consequences of the personality cult were being preserved. He rejected the general line of the party.

According to Kim, the participants of the plenum were outraged by the antagonistic manner of Yun's speech at the plenum and demanded that he be prevented from speaking. Choe Chang-ik supported Yun. Others who spoke revealed the anti-party

character of Yun's speech at the plenum and cited facts of his anti-party activities leading up to the plenum.

Alongside Yun, undercover anti-party activities were carried out by So-hwi, Yi Pil-gyu and the deputy minister of culture, Kim Chang-il, who, according to Kim, fled the plenum and crossed the border. They were held at the present moment by Chinese border guards and are located in Andun.

For their anti-Party activities So-hwi, Yi Pil-gyu and Kim Chang-il were expelled from the party. Choe Chang-ik was removed from the Presidium of the CC. Pak Chang-ok was removed from the post of Deputy Chairman of the Cabinet of Ministers and removed from the ranks of the CC. The issue had been referred to a Party Commission of the CC. At that, Kim explained that the party leadership would not have intentionally applied such measures in relation to Choe Chang-ik and Pak Chang-ok. However, the participants of the Plenum, after learning about their anti Tw 11.040831hG3o7Ao[(rema8(i)-delled)]TJ0180

accommodate the material needs of the people in the new Five-Year Plan and requested further support from the PRC. Concrete figures of the amount of support that the Korean friends would like to receive from the PRC in the coming Five-Year Plan were not mentioned in the discussion. However, while specifying the plan for trade between the two countries for 1957 it became known that the aggregate output of supplies to the DPRK from the PRC in 1957 must consist of 185 million yuan, of which 85 million should be used to cover commodity circulation, 50 million to [cover] the expense of remaining unpaid labor and the government of the PRC requested to allot 50 million Yuan.

Qiao said that the question that was advanced by the Korean side with regard to additional assistance was transmitted to the government [in Beijing] and that he had still not received an answer.

Coming to the second issue, Qiao told me that during the work of the Plenum of the CC KWP, an extremely serious event occurred concerning the relations between the DPRK and the PRC. On 3 September the Deputy Minister of Foreign Affairs of the DPRK, Yi Dong-gon, explained that on the night of 30-31 August of this year, four Korean citizens: Minister of Trade Yun Kong-hum; Chairman of the CC of United Unions So Hwi; Deputy Minister of Culture Kim Chang-il; and the Head of the Department of Construction Materials, Yi Pil-gyu, crossed the Korean – Chinese border in the region of Andun and were detained by Chinese border guards. Yi Dong-gon lodged a petition by the Korean government about returning the guilty individuals to the DPRK.

Qiao said the government of the PRC was immediately informed about what had occurred. Korean border guards urged the above-mentioned individuals to return to the DPRK; however, they all categorically refused.

In response to the request of the Korean government it was announced that the noted individuals were not simple border crossers and that their forcible return was impossible.

At the same time, Qiao said that on 1 September he was invited by Choe Yong-gon and Kim Chang-man, who told him about the course of events at the plenum. Minister of Trade Yun Kong-hum spoke during the discussion on Kim Il Sung's address.

His speech contained malicious and libelous attacks on the leadership of the KWP. He accused the leadership of the KWP of poorly putting into practice the decree of the 20th Party Congress of the CPSU about the personality cult. As a result the leadership of the KWP had supposedly committed serious mistakes, conveying in the absence of democracy within the party incorrect distribution of cadres, and displaying incompetence in handling the difficult welfare situation of the Korean people. Yun's speech was cut short, and after lunch, he, together with th

Concerning the course of the work of the Plenum and answering Qiao's question about my thoughts on all of the incidents, I said that the issues which arose in the KWP were serious and were not stimulated by any outside factors, Soviet or Chinese, but were a domestic process taking place within the KWP.

Qiao expressed total agreement with the observations I made, at the same time asking a second time about my thoughts on the individuals who fled to the PRC. I commented that since the named individuals were located in the PRC, the Chinese side is apparently more aware of their reason for leaving. I added that I did not know those individuals personally and did not yet have anything to say about the reason for their fleeing. I also knew that the Korean government accuses them not only of anti-party activities, but also of disrupting work, of amoral crimes and of the embezzlement of state funds.

Qiao commented that from the moment of his coming to the DPRK he had meetings with So Hwi and Yun Kong-hun and added that he was also aware that the embezzlement of about one million won has been attributed to Yun Kong-hun and others.

The meeting was attended by and translated by Attaché Kurbatskii M.N. and translator Wang Bao-min.

DOCUMENT No. 6

Report by N.T. Fedorenko on a conversation with Yi Sang-jo, Ambassador of the DPRK to the USSR, 5 September 1956

[Source: RGANI, Delo 5, Opis 28, Delo 412, Listy 224-228. Obtained for CWIHP by Nobuo Shimotomai and translated

[Stamp:
CC CPSU
32165
[11 Sep 56]
subject to return to
the CC CPSU General Department]

FROM THE JOURNAL OF
N. T. FEDORENKO

Top Secret Copy N° 10
5 September 1956
N° 134/nf

He added that a situation of threats and terror had been created in the Party. For example, Kim Il Sung told Pak Ui-wan that he had many compromising materials against him, Pak Ui-wan, about the squandering of government resources, and threatened to circulate these materials if Pak Ui-wan criticized the KWP leadership.

4. Yi Sang-jo told how he had heard that it was admitted at the CC KWP Plenum that many displays of the cult of personality had occurred in propaganda but at the same time Kim Il Sung and Choe Yong-gon declared that there were no harmful consequences of the cult of personality in Korea. Such a statement was sharply contradicted by the facts, Yi Sang-jo pointed out. For example, people were arrested in the DPRK for printing portraits of Kim Il Sung on insufficiently good paper or carelessly, and there were cases of an arrest of a person for wrapping a book in a newspaper containing a portrait of Kim Il Sung. Several thousand people had been arrested for things of a similar nature.

All this, Yi Sang-jo stressed, testified to the existence of the most negative consequences of the cult of personality in the DPRK.

5. Yi Sang-jo then said that he had received a second summons to Pyongyang and obviously he would have to go there for some time. Meanwhile, he had informed the DPRK MID that he was ill. Yi Sang-jo added that had still not decided about the question of visiting China for some time. He did not explain how the Chinese comrades would view such a request by him. Yi Sang-jo added that he had decided to return to the DPRK although he knows that reprisals await him there. Kim Il Sung, in Yi Sang-jo's words, has given instructions that any citizen might given any punishment for any deed on the testimony of two witnesses, even so far as execution.

In reply to my question about the possible date of his return, Yi Sang-jo said that he intended to wait until the CC CPSU's attitude toward his statement was clear.

B. N. Vereshchagin, adviser to the DVO, was present at the conversation.

Attachment: copy of Yi Sang-jo's letter to Com. N. S. Khrushchev.

DEPUTY USSR MINISTER
OF FOREIGN AFFAIRS

/N. FEDORENKO/

I hope you have received a report from Pyongyang in which you were informed of those serious events that are occurring in

expelled, who will examine the current situation in the Workers Party together with members of the CC CPSU Presidium and will work out specific steps to remove the shortcomings in the Party.

If this possibility, too, is precluded, then please send a written appeal to the CC of the Workers Party of Korea in the name of the CC CPSU that would describe the substance of the issue. Such a comradely comment would be more effective if the CC of the Chinese Communist Party also were to subscribe to it.

If these steps are possible then please receive me and I will describe the situation in Korea in more detail.

/YI SANG-JO/

3.IX.56

DOCUMENT No. 7

Memorandum of Conversation with Deputy Premier, Pak Ui-wan, 6 September 1956.

[Source: RGANI, Fond 5, Opis 28, Delo 410, Listy 327-332. Obtained and translated for CWIHP by James F. Person.]

From the diary of
The Ambassador of the USSR in the DPRK
Comrade Ivanov V.I.
29 August – 14 September

6 September 1956

Pak Ui-wan told me the following about the work of the Plenum of the CC KWP:

In Kim Il Sung' address, the problem of the personality cult was touched upon only in connection with the status of work in the area of propaganda. It was mentioned by Pak that both with and without any reason, many shouted "hurray" to the leader and also glorified him in various textbooks and literature.

In the discussion on the address, the first to speak was the Chairman of the State Planning Committee Yi Dong-ok, who, in a sycophantic tone, spoke about the massive feats achieved in the DPRK.

The second to speak was the secretary of the provincial committee of the Party from the province of Northern Hamgyong, Kim Dae-gong. He also talked about the

decree of the Twentieth Party Congress, successively put into effect the principles of Marxism-Leninism. He stressed that the personality cult was spread and supported not by Kim Il Sung, but by Pak Hon-yong who was practically compared with God. He also said that there was no need to be critical. Talking about democratic perversions inside the party, he pointed out that they are the legacy of Ho Ka-I [Hegai] and do not pertain to the practical work of Kim Il Sung.

Following that, a letter of the CPSU arrived in which it was indicated that in individual countries where the problem of the personality cult was being examined, certain individuals took advantage of that, expressing their discontent with the leaders. He did not speak about the inner-Party problems that were coming to a head, but only concentrated on the anti-Party group, making it their aim to overthrow the leadership and seize power in their hands.

The speech of the chairman of the Party Committee of the province of South Hamgyon, Hwang Dong-min, was directed against those who expressed discontent.

The head of the department of propaganda and agitation of the CC KWP, Yi Il-gong, pointed out that the Third Party Congress was completely guided by the ideas of the Twentieth Party Congress and following it, the CC of the KWP in turn resolved the shortcomings connected with the personality cult. Several individuals accused us [the North Koreans] of discontinuing radio programming from the Soviet Union. However, it was well known to all that in those countries, which developed and matured, absolutely nothing was transmitted from the Soviet Union. We also grew, and therefore discontinued broadcasts from the [Soviet] Union.

In his speech Choe Yong-gon pointed out that Yun presented to the Plenum a concentrated program against the party and government. In a truncated form, the factionaries presented to the plenum all issues of the Party: its history; the issues of the economic condition of the country; the personality cult and the placement of cadres. The factional activities of those individuals are a continuation of the principal work of the group of Pak Il-u. Choe Yong-gon pointed out that it was Yun Kong-hum, Choe Chang-ik and others that mounted the campaign against the Soviet Koreans, starting to lash out at them. They prepared this in a bomb shelter at Pak Hun-II's, Director of the Agricultural Department of the CC in 1952, where Pak Il-u, Choe Chang-ik and others were, in order to work out a program of activities against Kim Il Sung. To do that they had to unite with Pak Hon-yong, and they did. So Hwi told two Koreans coming from China that they would work for ten years in the DPRK not getting a higher title than major-general.

Choe Yong-gon said that Yi Pil-gyu came to the CC KWP and said that they were led by Choe Chang-ik and Pak Chang-ok and that if measures to improve welfare

standards were not taken then there would be major dissatisfaction and that they would have another Poznan on their hands. He was indignant at the fact that Pak Il-u to this day was being held in jail.

Choe Yong-gon also named Minister of Communication Kim Chang-kil, who having warned [the central committee] that he should not be associated with any faction, attacked individual party and state functionaries. Of Pak Chang-ok, he said that that person was a deep-seated factionary and connected to that [factionalist] gang, and that he sent Yun to the Soviet embassy.

Following that, Pak Chang-ok spoke, explaining that he thought that the December Plenum of the CC KWP took a very strict and unfair position in relation to him. He indicated that he was not connected with any group. He was interrupted by the remarks coming from the Presidium and from the hall and was not allowed to continue speaking.

In closing, Kim Il Sung spoke, suggesting organizational measures in relation to

DOCUMENT No. 8

Memorandum of conversation with the charge d' affaires of the Chinese embassy in the DPRK, Chao Ke Xian

[Source: RGANI, Fond 5, Opis 28, Delo 411, Listy 344-346. Obtained and translated for CWIHP by James F. Person.]

From the diary of the ambassador of the USSR
In the DPRK, Comrade Ivanov V.I. for the period
From 11 to 29 October 1956.

“26” October 1956

MEMORANDUM OF CONVERSATION WITH THE CHARGE D' AFFAIRES OF THE CHINESE EMBASSY IN THE DPRK, CHAO KE XIAN

I received the charge d' affaires of the PRC in the DPRK, Comrade Chao Ke Xian, with the aim of informing him about a meeting with Comrade Kim Il Sung on matters related to the unofficial visit of A.I. Mikoyan and Peng Dehuai to the DPRK. I told Chao Ke Xian that in spite of promises of the Korean leadership given to Comrades Mikoyan and Peng Dehuai to publish the decrees of the CC KWP August and September Plenums, the Korean comrades published a pithy summary of the CC KWP September Plenum only after five days following the September Plenum, on 28 September. Two important items were discussed in this summary. The first item concerns self criticism of the KWP where it was pointed out that the decree on organizational issues of the CC KWP August Plenum was decided successfully, but the course of reaching this decision was absent. The second item contained a call to the party to observe Leninist norms and principles in party life.

Kim Il Sung explained that the first item was omitted consciously since the decree of the August Plenum was not published and in his opinion there is no need to report in the press that these decrees were rash. The CC KWP has never published its decrees on organizational issues and for this reason it is necessary to start publication with a good decree and not with a bad one. Regarding the second question related to the instructions of Leninist norms in party life, Comrade Kim Il Sung declared that the report about the

September Plenum of the CC was published without his involvement while he was away on vacation and that he regrets that the second issue was omitted.

Party, but were convinced of the opposite. Chao said also that rumors reached the Chinese embassy that Kim Chang-man belligerently declared to the opposition that no matter how hard they tried, we have an MVD and army.

I asked Chao what the Korean comrades undertook with regards to the request of comrade Peng Dehuai to release from confinement and send to China for studies Pak Il-u who was locked up in prison. Chao responded that so far, it seems nothing is known. Comrade Peng Dehuai, being with Kim Il Sung, communicated to him that if the Korean comrades do not require, but on the contrary, are troubled by the arrival of Pak Il-u and Pan Ho-san in Korea, then the Chinese government agrees to their return to China. As to the question where Pan Ho-san is, Chao answered that Pan Ho-san, like Pak Il-u, was also a Chinese Korean. He has achieved major accomplishments in revolutionary activities in North-eastern China, later he served in the Korean People's Army and commanded one of the armies. Presently, he worked as a simple laborer in a mine.

Chao informed me also that presently those who fled to China, Yun Kong-hum, So Hwi, Kim Chang-il, and Yi Pil-gyu, did not receive rations. The wife of Kim Chang-il turned to the Ministry of Culture and Propaganda but the minister did not receive her and directed her to the chief of the economic section, who performed her wedding, but he too refused to give rations.

I thanked Chao for the discussion.

In the evening I attended a reception organized by Kim Il Sung in honor of the Mongolian government delegation headed by Tsedenbal.

DOCUMENT No. 9

Memorandum of conversation with the Chinese ambassador to the DPRK, Qiao Xiao Guang, 5 November 1956.

[Source: RGANI, Fond 5, Opis 28, Delo 411, Listy 367-369. Obtained and translated for CWIHP by James F. Person.]

From the diary of the ambassador of the USSR
In the DPRK, Comrade Ivanov V.I. for the period
From 30 October to 14 November 1956.

“5” November 1956

MEMORANDUM OF CONVERSATION WITH PRC AMBASSADOR

and Yi Pil-gyu in an address to the CC CCP and CC CPSU they blamed the Korean leadership for destroying a number of notable party actors in the period after liberation and during the war; for leading the country and party with anti-democratic methods; for incorrectly appointing and cultivating leading cadres. In connection with this they considered Pak Chong-ae, Pak Kum-chul, Kim Chang-man, and Han Song-do individuals unqualified to occupy leading posts in the party; finally, they charged that the leadership did not carry out a struggle with Kim Il Sung's personality cult.

Qiao added that without having any materials confirming these statements, the CC CCP displayed understandable caution with regard to the indicated letter.

I informed Qiao Xiao Guang that the Korean leadership released Yi Sang-jo from his duties as ambassador of the DPRK in Moscow and requested from the Soviet government an agreement on Yi Sung-pal, working nowadays as the director of the educational department of the CC KWP. According to the Korean friends, Yi Sang-jo refuses to return to the DPRK and in all likelihood will remain in the PRC.

To my question if the Chinese embassy had the decree of the August Plenum of the CC KWP on organizational matters, Qiao answered that they did not have it, but the delegation of the KWP to the VIII Congress of the CCP delivered the above decree to Mao Zedong.

Present at the meeting was the first secretary of the embassy, Samsanov G.E.

The meeting was translated by the translator of the Chinese embassy, Won Bao-min.