

May 30, 1956

**Report by N. T. Fedorenko on a Meeting with DPRK
Ambassador to the USSR Ri Sang-jo**

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Summary:

Discussions between Fedorenko and Ri Sangjo about the economic troubles in North Korea and potential Soviet aid, allowing the Ministry of Internal affairs to observe Soviet institutions, unrest in the KWP CC, and the power of Kim Il Sung

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Distribute to CC Presidium
members, candidate CC Presidium
members, and CPSU CC Secretaries
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FROM THE JOURNAL OF
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[handwritten: to
Cde[[s]]. Ponomarev
[[and Suslov]]
THE RECEPTION
of DPRK Ambassador in the USSR RI SANG-JO
on 29 May 1956

I received Ri Sang-jo at his request.

1. Ri Sang-jo reported that during his trip through Moscow on the way to the European people's democracies, Kim Il Sung is counting on meeting with the leaders of the Soviet government, at which time he intends to inform them of the difficulties being experienced by his country and to ask the Soviet Union for additional economic aid to the DPRK. During these meeting, the ambassador pointed out, the Korean delegation will raise the questions it has in order to discuss these issues on [their] return from Warsaw to Moscow after the Soviet Government has studied them.

Ri Sang-jo then said that Kim Il Sung's trip to the European countries of people's democracy has as its goal an expression of solidarity for the aid which these countries are giving. In the GDR and Czechoslovakia, Kim Il Sung also intends to discuss several issues concerning trade volume between these countries and the DPRK.

In reply to the question of what specific issues Kim Il Sung intends to raise in Moscow, Ri Sang-jo said that evidently this will be about the economic difficulties of the country and the difficult material situation of the population of North Korea. The Korean leaders, said Ri Sang-jo, informed Cde. Brezhnev about this when he was in Pyongyang and Cde. Brezhnev said that if there are requests of the Soviet Union then it would be advisable to raise them before the Soviet Government.

2. Ri Sang-jo asked whether I knew about the upcoming trip to the USSR of a delegation of officials of the DPRK Ministry of Internal Affairs in order to study the work experience of the corresponding Soviet institutions. At the same time the ambassador asked that the corresponding Soviet organs devote some attention to this delegation and familiarize it with the latest approaches in the work of the USSR MIA. The ambassador stressed that the Korean officials of the public security organs are in great need of assistance from Soviet comrades inasmuch as an erroneous method of operation of the organs has existed to date in the DPRK and this ought to be decisively changed. It would be very important, said Ri Sang-jo, for these officials to become deeply familiar with and master in practice the CPSU CC's approaches regarding the strictest observance of revolutionary legality. They would understand

what importance was attached to this question in the USSR and would draw the appropriate conclusions from this for their practical activity in the DPRK.

I replied to Ri Sang-jo that I will inform the appropriate organs about his request which, I hope, will offer the proper assistance.

3. In connection with the fact that Ri Sang-jo just returned from the DPRK, where he took part in the work of the KWP Third Congress as a delegate, I asked him to tell about the conditions in the country and how the Congress went.

Speaking about the conditions in the country, Ri Sang-jo stressed that the DPRK is experiencing very severe economic difficulties, a keen shortage of food, housing difficulties, a neglect of agriculture, etc. As regards the Congress, he continued, the KWP CC leadership thinks that the Congress "went well and revealed the complete unity of the party." But, Ri Sang-jo pointed out, this is only the official point of view of leadership of the KWP CC. Ri Sang-jo then said that as ambassador of the DPRK, he ought to have strictly limited himself to this information. However, in fact, Ri Sang-jo stressed, there are other opinions and sentiments about this question and as regards his, Ri 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 [Korean] Workers Party and the DPRK government.

The unfavorable state of affairs is primarily indicated, Ri Sang-jo pointed out, by the fact that there was no genuine criticism or self-criticism at the Congress and that the Congress did not at all take place in the spirit of the issues raised at the CPSU Twentieth Congress. The leadership of the KWP CC thinks that the shortcomings in the matter of observing the norms of party life and in other areas revealed at the CPSU Twentieth 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 leadership of the KWP CC also determined the entire course of the Congress.

However, many party members, including Congress delegates, said Ri Sang-jo, think otherwise but they decided not to say this openly at the Congress.

Moving then to an open discussion, Ri Sang-jo said that his position was quite delicate. As an ambassador he must not speak of these things, especially since he knows the point of view of the leadership of the KWP CC and he knows that one does not win plaudits for such conversations but, on the contrary, he also knows that as a party member he must talk with us about these issues openly and not conceal his opinions. Ri Sang-jo added at the same time that the leadership of the KWP CC knows his opinion since he has openly stated it and written about it to the KWP CC Presidium.

Ri Sang-jo then stressed that a cult of personality of Kim Il Sung actually prevails in the DPRK, there is no collective leadership in the KWP CC, everything is decided by Kim Il Sung alone, and the people around Kim Il Sung fawn over him.

The presentation of the issues of the revolutionary liberation struggle of the Korean people is done extremely one-sidedly and is directed at glorifying Kim Il Sung. Ri Sang-jo said that during the struggle in Korea against the Japanese colonizers, many partisan formations were active and underground revolutionaries operated in the cities, but now they talk and write only about the partisan forces of Kim Il Sung. The Museum of the History of the Revolutionary Struggle of the Korean People in Pyongyang, Ri Sang-jo noted, has been in fact turned into a museum of the story of Kim Il Sung. The majority of exhibits and works of art in this museum are devoted to Kim Il Sung personally. A painful impression remains, Ri Sang-jo pointed out, when

you see how the results of the long years of the struggle of many workers and the heroic efforts of the people are ascribed to one person.

In the published works of Kim Il Sung, Ri Sang-jo continued, many articles have been published that were actually written by other people and, in particular, by some Soviet comrades. Biographic materials about Kim Il Sung abound in flattering epithets referring to him such as "iron commander," "great leader," "genius," "wise," etc. Some comrades in Korea, said Ri Sang-jo, compare the role of Kim Il Sung in the DPRK with the role of Mao Zedong in China, although it is clear that these are not comparable figures.

As one of the examples of what obvious distortions of reality the cult of personality of Kim Il Sung is bringing, Ri Sang-jo said that, judging from the biographical sketch of one of the handbooks, it seems that Kim Il Sung led the anti-Japanese liberation struggle of the Korean people even in childhood.

Describing the entourage of Kim Il Sung, Ri Sang-jo said that Pak Chang-ok, who earlier strongly glorified Kim Il Sung and took part in drawing up his biography, has now been subjected to "persecution" by Kim Il Sung. Whereupon, Ri Sang-jo added, the real reasons for the removal of Pak Chang-ok hardly consist of his "administrative style" or mistakes committed by him about questions of literature. These reasons might turn out to be of another kind.

Ri Sang-jo gave a critical description of such people in Kim Il Sung's entourage as [Minister of Foreign Affairs] Nam Il and Pak Jeong-ae, who showed themselves to be fawning and obsequious.

Describing the unpreparedness and casual approach to issues by leading Korean cadre, Ri Sang-jo told how the preliminary plan for construction sites was drawn up for inclusion in the national economic plan. This issue, which demanded detailed preliminary study, was discussed and decided by the leadership of the KWP CC in a casual manner: almost any enterprise that came into the head of the participants right there at the KWP CC Presidium meeting was scheduled for construction.

There are many underage [troops] and often simply incompetent cadres wearing high military ranks in the Korean People's Army, in the words of Ri Sang-jo. This creates serious doubt, said Ri Sang-jo, about how prepared these personnel are in the event of military surprises.

Ri Sang-jo said in passing that during the successes of the DPRK at the front in 1950, Mao Zedong warned Kim Il Sung that the possibility of an American invasion needed to be considered and appropriate ideological training conducted within the party for this circumstance, but proper attention was not paid to these warnings of Mao Zedong. Ri Sang-jo added that this fact is quite secret and three people in Korea know about it - Kim Il Sung, former DPRK ambassador to the USSR Ri Ju-yeong, and himself, Ri Sang-jo, who heard about this from Mao Zedong personally.

During the course of the conversation Ri Sang-jo at times spoke with great excitement; it was apparent that he is deeply worried over the abnormal situation in the KWP and in the DPRK government.

Several times during the conversation he stressed that there is a keen need for the CPSU CC to give substantive ideological and political aid regarding the dangerous blunders being made to the leadership of the KWP CC and to Kim Il Sung especially.

B. N. Vereshchagin, adviser to the DVO [Far East Department], was present at the

conversation.

DEPUTY USSR MINISTER OF FOREIGN AFFAIRS

/N. FEDORENKO/

[signature]

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[Handwritten at the bottom of the first page: "To the archives. The document was used in the preparation of recommendations to the leaders of the DPRK arriving in Moscow in June 1956. V. Gorbunov. 25/VII. I. Shcherbakov. 23-VII-56. [one illegible signature]."