

**September 5, 1956**

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

**Citation:**

"Report by N.T. Fedorenko on a Conversation with Ri Sang-jo, Ambassador of the DPRK to the USSR", September 5, 1956, Wilson Center Digital Archive, RGANI, Delo 5, Opis 28, Delo 412, Listy 224-228. Obtained by Nobuo Shimotomai and translated by Gary Goldberg. <https://wilson-center-digital-archive.dvincitest.com/document/113564>

**Summary:**

The Ambassador of the DPRK to the Soviet Union reports on the mishandling of critics during the August and September Plenums, and testifies "to the existence of the most negative consequences of the cult of personality in the DPRK."

**Original Language:**

Russian

**Contents:**

Translation - English

FROM THE JOURNAL OF  
N. T. FEDORENKO

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

[Handwritten at the bottom of the first page: "To the archives. The letter of Ri Sang-jo was distributed to members of the CC CPSU Presidium. See of 6 and 15 September 1956 [[SIC, a caret at the bottom of the reproduced page suggests that a document reference was inserted at this point]] for the decision on the question of the situation in the DPRK] [signatures and dates are off the reproduced page].

[handwritten in the left margin:  
"To Com. Ponomarev; [M. Suslov]"

I received Ri Sang-jo at his request.

1. Ri Sang-jo made a request to pass to N. S. Khrushchev his personal written statement about the situation in the KWP in connection with the plenum that was held. Ri Sang-jo added at the same time that if N. S. Khrushchev was not in Moscow, he asked that this statement be passed to A[nastas]. I. Mikoyan.

Having noted that the statement he delivered contained a request for N. S. Khrushchev or A. I. Mikoyan to receive him, Ri Sang-jo said that in the event such a conversation took place CC KWP member Kim Sunghwa, who had come to Moscow to study at the Higher Party School, could serve as interpreter.

Ri Sang-jo expressed the hope that the CC CPSU and CC CCP [Communist Party of China] would help the Workers Party of Korea in the difficult situation that had arisen as a result of the hasty and unjustified repressions committed by the CC KWP leadership against comrades who expressed criticism.

2. Ri Sang-jo asked whether it was true that the CC CPSU had sent instructions to Nam Il via Ambassador Com. Ivanov forbidding criticism of Kim Il Sung in view of the fact that this would damage the authority of Kim Il Sung and indicate criticism of the political line of the KWP. In reply to my question as to where and when Nam Il spoke about such instructions, Ri Sang-jo replied that Nam Il referred to the existence of these instructions at Presidium meetings and at the CC KWP Plenum.

Ri Sang-jo replied that he personally knew nothing about such CC CPSU instructions.

3. Ri Sang-jo repeated with indignation that Nam Il and Pak Jeong-gae deceitfully used the name of the CC CPSU in order to help Kim Il Sung and Choe Yong-geon take revenge on the comrades who criticized the leadership of the CC KWP.

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. Ri 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-geon declared that there were no harmful

consequences of the cult of personality in Korea. Such a statement was sharply contradicted by the facts, Ri 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, Ri Sang-jo stressed, testified to the existence of the most negative consequences of the cult of personality in the DPRK.

5. Ri 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. Ri 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. Ri Sang-jo added that he had decided to return to the DPRK although he knows that reprisals await him there. Kim Il Sung, in Ri 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, Ri 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 Ri Sang-jo's letter to Com. N. S. Khrushchev.

DEPUTY USSR MINISTER  
OF FOREIGN AFFAIRS  
/N. FEDORENKO/

30 copies were issued/ng  
Nº 286-nf  
5.IX.56

Dear Comrade N. S. KHRUSHCHEV!

I hope you have received a report from Pyongyang in which you were informed of those serious events that are occurring in the Workers Party of Korea. You probably well know that our party has committed serious mistakes and blunders in its activity. Therefore, some comrades pointed out his shortcomings to Cde. Kim Il Sung in the form of comradely criticism in order to eliminate the mistakes and shortcomings. He was also subjected to comradely criticism at the CC Presidium meeting. However, he did not take the opinions of the comrades into consideration. Then this issue was raised at the CC Plenum held on 30 August, at which severe party criticism developed.

The substance of the criticism at the plenum comes down to the following:

The cult of personality in our party was subjected to criticism at the plenum in order to overcome the consequences of the cult of personality of Kim Il Sung.

Those sycophants and careerists who spread the cult of personality in every way were subjected [to criticism] at the Plenum. Workers on the ideological front who

falsified the history of our party under the influence of the cult of personality were also subjected to criticism at the plenum. The comrades who were critical at the Plenum pursued only one goal: to eliminate the serious consequences of the cult of personality in our Party and completely ensure intra-party democracy and collective leadership in complete accordance with the Charter of our Party.

However, the comrades who were in power took revenge on those who courageously and in a party way offered criticism directed at the elimination of the consequences of the cult of personality and the elimination of the serious shortcomings in our party.

Several CC members, including CC Presidium members who had a wealth of experience in revolutionary struggle, were unjustifiably expelled from the party. These events created a serious and complex situation inside the party.

In those conditions where intra-party democracy is not being ensured, it has become impossible not only to eliminate the shortcomings in the party through internal strength but also [has become] impossible to prevent events that very negatively reflect on the activity of the party.

In connection with the above I submit my personal recommendations to the CC CPSU, which I request be seriously considered. Please send a senior official of the CC CPSU to Korea to convene a CC Plenum of the [Korean] Workers Party at which all members of the CC should be present, including those who were expelled. The intra-party situation is to be studied at such a plenum more deeply and comprehensively and specific steps worked out directed at removing the shortcomings in our party.

If such a possibility is precluded, then please invite to Moscow senior representatives of the CC of the [Korean] Workers Party and those comrades who were 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.

/RI SANG-JO/

3.IX.56