

1972**A Visit to the DPRK: A Report from the Delegation of
the American-Korean Friendship and Information
Center to the Democratic People's Republic of Korea****Citation:**

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Summary:

A report on a North Korean sponsored tour of Pyongyang made by staff and supporters of the AKFIC in 1972.

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A Visit to the DPRK

A Report from the Delegation of the American-Korean Friendship and Information Center to the Democratic People's Republic of Korea

AS OUR plane approaches the city of Khabarovsk, we can see eastward the silver threads of the Amur River under the morning sun, parting and rejoining. Khabarovsk lies in the far east of the Soviet Union, 200 miles from the Pacific Ocean. It is some 200 miles east and north of Peking.

When we land in Khabarovsk, we are in the Far East for sure: the Russian language comes from Mongoloid faces. We halt for the usual hassle with customs. Soon we are aboard a new plane, bound for Pyongyang, the capital of the Democratic People's Republic of Korea.

Three of us are in the party: Joseph Brandt, Executive Director of the American-Korean Friendship and Information Center (AKFIC), formed in New York City early in 1971; Joseph Walker, a Vice-Chairman of the Center, journalist and New York editor of *Muhammad Speaks*; and Howard L. Parsons, Chairman of AKFIC. We have been invited to visit the DPRK from August 9 to August 25, as guests of the Korean Society for Cultural Relations with Foreign Countries

As our plane flies southward along the coast of the Sea of Japan (Koreans call it East Sea) toward Pyongyang, we know we are nearing a critical region in human geography and history. The peninsula of Korea - now divided into two countries- lies between capitalist Japan and the great land mass of socialist China. The DPRK borders on both the People's Republic of China and the Soviet Union. We are flying to a country impoverished and degraded for decades by Japanese and Western colonizers. It lost one million people in the U.S. war of aggression in 1950-1953. Since the few Americans have visited the DPRK and not many have kept pace with developments there. But we know that during that time the people of the DPRK have created their own socialist society which we would soon see for ourselves.

Our plane moves in low over North Korea in sight of dark blue-green mountains tossed like waves in a turbulent sea. We can make out orchards and cornfields and some "people of the white dress" following their bullock-drawn plows and carts or riding bicycles. Our plane touches down at the small airport, and people stop work to watch. A large poster of Kim Il Sung meets our gaze as we walk to the terminal to be met genially by two of our many hosts, Zi Chang Ik, Vice-Rector of Kim Il Sung University, and Kim Ung, Vice-President of the Korean Society for Cultural Relations with Foreign Countries.

Soon we are driving to the city, and a great greenness of fields, grass, and trees greets us everywhere. Flowers line the road. Bicycles and trucks move busily around us- but no automobiles. Our own cars(Soviet-made), and others for special governmental use, are the only ones we see during our visit.

Kim Ung is quick to recall the destruction of Pyongyang by U.S. imperialist forces. In the war, when the city had 400,000 inhabitants, 420,000 bombs were dropped on it, levelling everything. The people remaining there lived underground. Now, after much labor by all citizens, the city has risen from ashes and is a thriving metropolis of more than a million. We pass the stadium (the football team has played in London), the big complex of buildings comprising Kim Il Sung University (built by voluntary contributions of peasants from their sales of rice), and a school whose playground is filled with happy, romping children.

I tell my host we look forward to the day when we can welcome our Korean friends to the U.S. as cordially as they have welcomed me here. He smiles broadly and shakes

my hand.

We walk in the streets of Pyongyang and see crowds of people seriously and quietly going about their business, waiting in long queues for crowded buses or trolley buses, going to or coming from work, shopping, taking their children by the hand to or from nursery school, lugging their sleeping babies on their backs. Most women wear dark skirts and white blouses, shirts. We later learn that much of the clothing is made of vinylon, a synthetic invented by a Korean. The children are in uniform, some wearing the red or green kerchiefs of young Pioneers and related groups. A few sandals appear; plastic shoes are the rule. The people are calm and purposeful. We draw a few inquisitive looks.

From time to time the children march briskly in columns along the street or sidewalk, lustily in a park decorated with gladioli, cannas, geraniums, and other flowers and shrubs, the children gather in clusters, play hopscotch, joke and giggle. They go by groups into the theater to see performances and to practice their own music and drama.

The shops are filled with goods—hardware, medicine, fish, fruits, vegetables. Here and there we catch the strong smell of fish. (The DPRK has the third largest maritime industry in the world; hence one reason for its vigilance about invasion of its waters.) A yeasty fragrance tells us fresh bread is nearby. We see an abundance of large peaches, apples, oranges, and melons in the shops. They are open till 10 p.m. for late-shift workers returning home, among them women with babies on their backs. Students and office workers are carrying the inevitable briefcases.

Early in the morning shirtless workers in formation walk or run along the broad and autoless streets, chanting and singing in unison. The spirit of revolutionary fervor is everywhere. Huge, vivid, militant posters call for loyalty and denounce U.S. imperialism. The point is not lost on us. Aside from a few Western guests in our hotel, we are the only Caucasians in a sea of Asians, and probably the only Americans in the country. This is a different world from Western Europe and the U.S.—more populous, optimistic, and more revolutionary.

One evening, several on our hotel floor are gathered around the TV looking at the recent musical performances by visiting Cambodians at the National Theater. The artists perform a drama of the victory of the national liberation forces in Cambodia, who have liberated seventy percent of the country. The TV audience's applause is like a sudden thunderstorm. People here speak of their solidarity with other Asian forces fighting U.S. imperialism. No one considers victory to be anything but inevitable. Being here where the first major battle against postwar U.S. imperialism was fought, we feel keenly the issues, and the high morale of the resisters.

A Land of Youth

MOST of the people on the streets do not seem to be older than forty. The war took a heavy toll among the elderly. These are industrious people, devoted to their country's reconstruction. They must be hard-working to have rebuilt their bombed-out cities and created a new agriculture. For years many worked around the clock, taking time out only to eat and sleep.

Why would they do it? One reason is the children. At our request we are taken to a school—the Si Nan Dong Baby Nursery and Kindergarten. Indoors and outdoors, the babies are being breast-fed. Colored plastic toys dangle from their playpens, some moving, some moved by nurses. The babies are alert, crawling toward us, going eagerly into the arms of entering nurses.

We are led into some ten classrooms. Children raise the roof with din as we enter. "Here come the Americans! Welcome!" In one room the children are reciting the story of Kim Il Sung's life, guided by colored pictures of significant episodes in his life. Everyone speaks reverently of "our beloved and respected leader." That devotion is natural: he and the Korean Communists (he leads the Workers Party) were principal leaders of the guerrillas against the Japanese, the resistance against the U.S. aggression, and the activity of the socialist reconstruction after the war. He and the other party leaders have visited hundreds of factories, farms, schools, hospitals, and other places to provide "on-the-spot guidance" on problems ranging from the harvesting of rice to the development of national music.

The children are learning addition. The teacher holds up pictures, each showing a tank, and groups them in various combinations. The children, individually and collectively, add up the number of tanks and shout out the answers.

As we enter one class the children with crayons are drawing pictures of a tank firing and running over two enemies. When they finish they present their work to us and ask us to give it to our children at home. There is no doubt in this country about who the enemy is. The southern border and coasts must be fortified against repeated provocations from the U.S.-supported Park Chung Hee government.

But militant defense of the socialist farther-land is not the only virtue inculcated in this school. For an hour we are entertained by children performing an elaborate singing and dancing drama. In colorful costumes and careful make-up, and with piano accompaniment, the players portray the story of a young boy playing in a meadow. Heedlessly he kicks a rabbit; the flowers and the other rabbits reproach and reject him. But in time he grows contrite, and soon all are dancing and singing harmoniously and happily.

As we depart, the children clutch our hands and shout, "Good-bye! Come back!"

The wealth which the DPRK possesses in its children has its base in the material improvement of the society. So we are taken to the Industrial and Agricultural Exhibit. Here, we are told, is an exhibit of the effort to embody the principle of Juche (pronounced Choo-chay), or independence, described to us later by Kim Chol Hee of the Institute of Philosophy as "the most correct Marxist-Leninist principle" leading to revolutionary success.

The exhibit is extensive and impressive. We see turret lathes, procedure machines, all-purpose lathes, program turning lathes, a gear-making machine, a program turret automatic lathe with high precision, an internal processing machine, a radial drill press, high-speed tungsten tools, projectors, calculators, models of hydroelectric dams, transistors, radios, television sets, a great variety of ores, and a model of the process for making phosphate and nitrogen fertilizers. The fertilizer is indispensable, especially since the northern part of the country, cut off from the agricultural south, has been forced to intensify the cultivation of the scarce arable land- where 80 percent of the land is forests and mountains.

We are shown a model of a plant for making the textile vinylon from limestone and anthracite and another model demonstrating how rayon is made from reeds. We see a synthetic made from timber, insulating material, and a synthetic resin. In the absence of cotton, grown in the warmer and wetter south, synthetic fibers are vital.

The revolution brought land reform, the distribution of land to the peasants, the formation of cooperative farms, and the abolition of farm taxes. The DPRK now claims to have the most intensive irrigation in the world. Electric lights are now in all farm houses. While chemicalization and mechanization have advanced, they remain

uncompleted tasks for agriculture.

“Chollima”-the name of the Pegasus-like horse of Korean mythology-describes the speedy progress of North Koreans in every aspect of their life. Displays of the rising production of chickens, eggs, fruits, silkworms, polyvinyl shoes, porcelain, and musical instruments (every child must learn to play one) show this. Progress in medicine is depicted. In 1969 there were 155 times as many doctors as in 1944, and preventive disease facilities have increased by a factor of 337.

The exhibit includes a machine for strip-mining coal, tractors for paddy fields, a rice-planter, a rice-harvester, a thresher, a fodder-crusher, a refrigerator box, a vinyl sewer pipe, a 25-ton truck, an excavator, a bulldozer, an electrical generator, a transformer. It all proves that necessity here has been the mother of invention. While the 13,000,000 people of the DPRK did have help from other countries, chiefly the Soviet Union, they stress their own independence and patriotic fervor. Figures in industrial and agricultural production are evidence that the DPRK's goals are being achieved- the development of an all-round economy with an integration of heavy industry, light industry, and agriculture; the establishment of a basis of raw materials; the use of modern techniques, and the development of cadres.

Progress in Cooperative Farming

WE GO NEXT to the Chong San Ri Cooperative Farm not far from Pyongyang. The Farm has 650 households and 1,100 living in individual apartments. For 3,000 acres there are 102 tractors, seven trucks, and 1,000 trailers. The Farm produces mainly grain-rice, corn and also vegetables, fruits, and pigs. The land is fully fertilized and irrigated. Everywhere are green fields, and drouth does not now affect the crops.

The director, Byon Chang Bok, a lively and attractive woman, guides us. She recounts the arduous struggles of the peasants under the oppression of Japanese landlords and U.S. imperialism. She sketches the trials of learning cooperative methods. “The first cooperative consisted of sixteen persons,” she says, “mainly women bereaved of their families by the U.S. war. We united all our means of production and distributed according to the amount of labor. The state provided food, fertilizers, funds, irrigation, and workers. Veteran cadres came from the city to help the inexperience women. In one or two years production increased 2.5 times. Thus the farmers could see how cooperation is the best way to improve production. So all the farmers began to join cooperatives, and in five years all the farms had become cooperatives.” She also relates how Kim Il Sung, visiting the farm, had made concrete suggestions about how to improve both production and education in communist ideas and morale.

There is a nine-year school here, one higher technical school, four clinics, eighteen doctors, and a new hospital about to open. There are radio and television sets in all the houses. We are shown one of the new apartments- four rooms (each about 12 by 8 feet) for a four-member family, plus a toilet and a small kitchen. Ten years ago each family had only two rooms. A central heating system runs under the floors. Production has increased many times since 1960; this farm produces five times as much as it needs and accumulates wealth to start new cooperatives. The ideological revolution has been a success. “So,” says the director proudly, “we don't envy the people in Pyongyang.”

Once more we are entertained by nursery school children-singing, playing the piano and accordion, and reciting verses about their leader's childhood. A four-year old sings cheerfully: “Socialism in our country is the best in the world.” For these children and their parents socialism is the best thing that has happened to their country in its 4,000-year history.

Scientific farms depend on factories. So we are taken through the Chollima June 4 Freight Car Factory in Pyongyang. In 1920 the Japanese had built a small factory here to exploit the natural resources, but it was destroyed when the Japanese retreated. The factory rebuilt by the Koreans was also destroyed by a million tons of U.S. bombs, and in 1956 the present factory was constructed. It covers 500,000 square meters (123 acres) and has 4,000 workers on two shifts, with an average age of thirty. More than one-third of the workers are women; we see young women operating cranes and other machines. Eighty percent of the women workers are housewives, and the factory has its own nurseries and kindergartens. The mothers with three children or more work only six hours a day and are paid for eight. Thirty percent of the women are in positions of leadership. Three thousand freight cars will be produced in 1971, and more than one hundred refrigerator cars. Some passenger cars are made, and locomotives are repaired. Cars are exported to Cuba, the Soviet Union, Mongolia, and other countries. We are shown a 1,050-ton hydro-pressure press, and a 200-ton four-wheel milling machine being built. An automated method for assembling freight cars is being installed. Whereas at one time a single manager was responsible for the factory, now a Party Committee of the factory is responsible. The factory has its own hospital, holiday homes, and recreation places. Professional artists perform at the factory, and the workers have their own acting groups and their own cultural halls in each workshop.

As we pass through the enormous noisy factory, workers stop to smile and wave warmly. Others are too intent hammering red-hot metal or milling steel to notice us.

Ryem Sung Ho, the vice-director of the factory, takes note of our journey "from the center of imperialism," and of our opposition to it. "The American-Korean Friendship and Information Center," he declares, "is precious support." He expresses thanks for the international militant support and solidarity of the people and progressive working class of the U.S. And he appeals for our help in unifying the Korean nation.

As Americans we must visit the Sinchon County Museum, a place of record of the crimes of U.S. imperialism in Korea and of the Korean people's resistance to it. During their 52 days of occupation in this country, in 1950, the U.S. armed forces killed more than 35,000 people, one-fourth of the country population. Here we are told story after story of merciless massacres, people alive, drownings, violations, tortures, and other atrocities. In one case hundreds of people, including old persons and unweaned babies, were herded into an air raid shelter and stripped naked; then gasoline was poured into the shelter through an overhead hole and fat of the victims. Many vertical lines mark the walls, grooves of the people's fingernails as they strove to claw their way out of the inferno. Such is the only one of many grim memorials of our government's ghastly depravity in Korea.

But the museum preserves the record of numerous noble heroes and heroines. In one instance, the U.S. troops, seeking information from a woman leader, Pak Yung Kyo, pulled out her nails, gouged out her eyeballs, and cut off her breasts. She did not yield. At one point she tried to cut her tongue with her teeth. Before her mutilated body was finally shot, she proclaimed: "The Workers' Party of Korea shall be eternal. I die by evil enemies, but my life shall be eternal in the Workers' Party of Korea. On my side I have the members of the Party and the people. My fatherland and comrades will take revenge. Long live the Workers' Party of Korea! Long live Kim Il Sung!"

People with whom we talked do not hate the American people for these crimes or for their country's continuing partition. But they do beseech us to get our troops out of South Korea. During our stay the news came that the Red Cross Society of the South had responded to the initiative of the Red Cross Society of the North to exchange personnel in order to locate relatives and develop correspondence. We have been encouraged by subsequent talks between the two sides.

The resilience of these Koreans in the DPRK is remarkable. During the two decades of back-breaking labor for all adults they have somehow managed to make opportunities for children and young people. Two-thirds of the children under five are now raised at state expense; 129 institutes and universities have been established since liberation.

Near Pyongyang we visit the Chollima Junghwa Middle School (ages 11-15). Nine years of basic schooling are not compulsory. Here 1,000 children receive uniforms and textbooks free. They study twenty subjects, including physics, geology, chemistry, and biology. We observe the students in their laboratories. Some sit in tractors and trucks, learning to drive; others study the mechanisms. There are classes in wireless, ideology, national revolutionary history, hospital care, art, music, and physical culture. All-round development, practice, arming the students with the revolutionary tradition, and service to society and the people are the keynotes. At the end we are entertained with a beautiful concert and are given a touching farewell in which the whole school participates.

We also go through the Pyongyang Childrens' and Students' Palace, a recreational hall where 10,000 students come daily to participate in one or more of the 200 study groups. Two hundred permanent teachers work here. Children are instructed in the nature and history of imperialism, particularly Japanese and American, and in the exploitation of landlords and capitalists. There is instruction in military knowledge and skills. We watch a team of girls mount an anti-aircraft weapon and fire it, and another group assemble rifles and fire them at moving targets. We see classes in ballet, embroidery, sculpture, acrobatics, instrumental music, wireless, radio assemblage, the use of various machines, the study of trucks and automobiles, hydroelectric power, tanks, and tractors. Kim Il Sung is quoted: "We do not have a king in our country, but children are king, and so we have a palace for them."

Our visit to the DPRK was enriched by excursions to Mangyangdae, the birthplace of Kim Il Sung and now a national shrine; Bonghwa-Ri, the home of Kim Hyong Jik, the father of Kim Il Sung who had organized resistance against the Japanese; he Pyongyang Music College, with moving demonstrations by young people; a performance of "Sea of Blood," a large scale musical dramatization of the liberation movement which on the capacious stage of the National Theater so stirred the people that the drama often seemed indistinguishable from the cheering and weeping audience; the Fatherland Liberation War Memorial, which accented the fighting qualities and long struggle of the Korean people for liberation, as well as the gravity of the Pueblo and DC-121 incidents; the People's Hospital of South Pyongyang Province, a marvelously humane institution the new Kim Il Sung University, with its fine laboratories and serious students; the beautiful Diamond Mountains(Kumgang-san); and the wide harbor and generous hosts of Wonsan. Significant also was our meeting with Kim Il, the First Deputy Prime Minister- a seasoned revolutionary, charming, incisive, and unswerving in his determination to secure the removal of the foreign U.S. troops from Korea. Kang Ryang Uk, president of our host Society and Vice-President of the Supreme People's Assembly, and many others made our stay instructive, uplifting, and delightful.

Leaders underlined the urgency of the 8-point program adopted by the Fourth Supreme People's Assembly of the DPRK in April, 1971, calling for peaceful unification of the country: withdrawal of U.S. troops from South Korea and application of the principles of self-determinations; reduction of the armed forces of North and South Korea to 100,000 or less; abolition of the South Korea-U.S. Mutual Defense Pact and similar treaties; free and independent North and South general elections to establish a unified central government ; political freedom for all persons and groups and release of political prisoners; establishment of a transitional Confederation of North and South Korea, leaving the present social systems intact; exchange and cooperation in trade, economics, science, culture, the arts, physical culture, correspondence, and travel; and political consultative meetings of North and South

Korea by all political parties and public organizations to negotiate the above.

To see these Korean people and their works was inspiring-these people who, crushed and exploited for so long in their distant and recent history by conquerors and imperialists, have won for themselves a place in the sun and are pressing on, with devotion and dignity, to lay down the foundations of a prosperous and truly human society. So it was, when we distributed buttons and literature calling for the freeing of Angela Davis, that all understood and all supported her cause.

But as we left the Land of the Fresh Morning, our feeling of friendship with these people was tempered by the recognition that we were leaving a land still wounded and divided by U.S. imperialism. For two decades now a burden has lain on the American record and the American conscience- which many Americans have not known or would like to forget. Our government launched an unwarranted, barbarous war against the Korean people, left through the U.N.) a peace treaty unsigned, and nurtured the evil seeds of a parasitic and despotic South Korean government.

It is time to awaken the American conscience to a divided Korea. It is time to withdraw all U.S. and other foreign troops and equipment still in South Korea under the flag of the UN. It is time for the UN itself to dissolve its Commission for the Unification and Rehabilitation of Korea. It is time to leave Korea to the Koreans, once and for all, now and forever, so that they may frame and fulfill their future as they see fit.