

June 8, 1956

Memorandum of Conversation with Choe Chang-ik

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Summary:

Deputy Prime Minister of DPRK, Choe Chang-ik, discuss the unhealthy situation in the Korean Worker's Party and the North Korean government. Choe argues that there is nepotism within the personnel selection process and that a cult of personality exists within the KWP. Choe also expresses concern regarding the difficult economic situation in the DPRK.

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DIARY

Ambassador of the USSR in the DPRK, Cde. Ivanov V.I.
For the period from 24 May to 11 June 1956.

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8 June

I received Deputy Prime Minister Choe Chang-ik at the dacha at his request. In the conversation Choe said that he intends to express his opinion about the unhealthy, in his view, situation which has developed in the leadership of the party and the government.

During the conversation Choe noted that established procedure does not even give him, a deputy prime minister, an opportunity to meet with foreigners. Only the Minister of Foreign Affairs has this right. However, like several other senior officials, he is concerned about a number of issues of party and government policy which he would like to share.

Choe thinks that they have developed an incorrect and even harmful practice of selecting and assigning senior personnel. The selection of personnel is guided not by Marxist-Leninist principles, personnel are not selected for their professional and political qualities, but continue to be selected according to the principle of where they came from. In the process they continue to divide workers into groups: Soviet-Koreans who arrived together with [Former Vice Chairman of KWP A.I.] Hegai; Chinese Koreans headed by [Former Minister of Internal Affairs] Bak Il-u, the partisans headed by Kim Il Sung, and local Koreans and Koreans who arrived from the South. The proportion of representatives of a particular group is taken into account when promoting workers. In his opinion, such a practice of selecting personnel engenders nepotism and a struggle between groups, which weakens the work of the party and government apparatus and does not promote the consolidation of the unity of party ranks.

Recently a great many people have spoken at plenums and at KWP CC Presidium meetings about Hegai, about the fact that he permitted nepotism in the selection of personnel and wrecked party organizational work. However, the party was led by the Political Council, which should be responsible for the mistakes which were made in governing the country. The leaders of the party themselves are afraid to admit the mistakes which have been made and blame Hegai for everything. There were many shortcomings in Hegai's work but he was a capable and energetic worker and he could have been set straight. The majority of senior officials correctly understand the reasons for the mistakes which had been made but are afraid to speak about this since they are held accountable for this.

At the same time Choe noted that essentially all the Soviet-Koreans are being discussed during the discussion of Hegai's mistakes, which is incorrect and harmful. Some Soviet-Koreans made a number of mistakes in their work and they needed to be set straight, which was not done in a timely fashion but it does not provide grounds for acting against all Soviet-Koreans, who for the most part carry out the responsibilities with which they are entrusted courageously and skillfully.

Choe Yong-geon [Choe Yong-gon], [Chief of the Party Cadre Department] Pak Geum-cheol [Pak Kum Chol], Han Sang-du [Han Sang Du], and several other leaders are not taking into account the situation which developed after the liberation of the country when workers arrived from various places and did not know one another or have experience in party and government policy. In such a situation the KWP CC and Hegai in particular had a correct attitude toward the Soviet-Koreans who were tested and trained for party work, and this produced favorable results. It needs to be borne in mind that there were a great many resentful and dissatisfied workers at that time and now, 10 years later, Hegai, Pak Chang-ok [Pak Chang Ok], and others are accused of nepotism for having promoted Soviet-Koreans to leadership posts.

Choe Chang-ik also pointed out that he also cannot agree with the fact that Hegai's work and his mistakes are tied to the activity of [Former DPRK Foreign Minister] Pak Heon-yeong [Pak Hon-Yyong] and Yi Sung-yeop [Yi Sung-yop]. These are bad people, enemies of our people, and Hegai's mistakes ought not be equated with their malicious activity.

Choe expressed the opinion that at the present time a number of workers have been elected to the KWP CC Presidium who cannot meet the demands imposed on their professional and political qualities. Jeong Il-yong, Pak Kum-chul, and [Deputy Chairman of the KWP CC] Kim Chang-man [Gim Chang Man] are regarded as such workers. They do not have the necessary education and work experience and handle the responsibilities with which they are entrusted poorly. Along with their poor training and insufficient experience they have strongly developed negative features such as sycophancy and servility. They are not able to take a principled position when discussing thorny issues. He considers the promotion of Jeon Dong-hyeok [Jon Tong Hyok] to the post of Deputy Prime Minister especially unjustified. His relatives worked in the Japanese police, and a number of kinsmen are in the South at the present time. In his opinion, a majority of senior officials have a negative attitude toward the promotions of the above officials.

Choe then expressed the opinion that the work of the KWP Third Congress had not been permeated by the spirit of the CPSU Twentieth Congress. The Communist Party of the Soviet Union showed an example for all Communist and workers' parties of how to disclose existing shortcomings and mistakes in [their] work and to struggle to eliminate them. At the same time there was essentially none of the necessary criticism and self-criticism at the Third Congress which would have promoted the consolidation of our party.

Before the Congress Pak Geum-cheol gave instructions not to make critical comments, reportedly under the pretext that the delegates from [foreign] Communist parties in attendance might draw the wrong conclusions about the internal political situation in the KWP. The speeches of all the speakers were examined for this purpose in the Central Committee Organizational Department and several delegates who wanted to make critical comments against the Central Committee were not permitted to speak.

Choe also considered it wrong that almost nothing was said at the Congress about the role of the Soviet Union in the liberation of Korea at the same time as a number of senior officials were essentially speaking against Soviet culture under the pretense of combating formalism and dogmatism.

The leadership of the Central Committee tried to prove that there is no cult of personality in the party and that the KWP observes Leninist principles of collective leadership. The harmful consequences of the cult of personality in Korea are associated with the work of Pak Hon-Yong in the South and with the work of Hegai in the North. Choe Chang-ik thinks that this is wrong. He considers unjust the accusations made against Minister of Culture Ho Dong-suk [Ho Dongsuk] that

allegedly for sycophantic reasons, monuments and busts of Kim Il Sung were set up in the country at his instruction or that at his initiative squares and parks were named for him or that he was extolled in the press and literature. In fact there was a decision of the Political Council about these issues and the editor of the journal Novaya Koreya [New Korea] was removed and expelled from the party for reducing the excessive praise of the personality of Kim Il Sung.

There were attempts at the Congress to discuss the issue of the cult of personality in the KWP. For example, [DPRK Ambassador to the USSR] Ri Sasng-jo sent a note to the Presidium of the Congress that much work is being done in the Soviet Union to eliminate the consequences of the cult of personality of Stalin and that it would be desirable to examine this question with regard to the KWP. However no steps were taken about this note.

At the present time all of Kim Il Sung's proposals at meetings of the Central Committee Presidium and the Cabinet of Ministers are adopted without question and therefore no opportunity is given to other officials to make proposals and if anyone tries to speak his comments are called into question and impossible working conditions are created for him.

Speaking of the difficult economic situation of the population, Choe expressed the hope that the DPRK would be given the necessary aid during the trip of the Korean government delegation to the countries of the people's democracies and the Soviet Union.

At the same time Choe Chang-ik thinks that the situation which has been created in the party urgently requires that the CPSU CC help improve the situation, for he does not see the necessary forces inside the party which could put the situation right and ensure the further development of our party and country.

Choe said that the CPSU CC and the Soviet government have enormous experience in building Communism which the KWP lacks and therefore they ought to learn from the CPSU. He also expressed a desire that Kim Il Sung be given the necessary advice. He noted in the process that Kim Il Sung takes a close look at such advice and it would produce favorable results.

At the end of the conversation Choe expressed his desire to visit the Soviet Union and requested that he be given assistance in this.