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Memorandum of a Conversation with DPRK Ambassador to the USSR Ri Sang-jo on 16 June 1956

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Summary:

Conversation between DPRK Ambassador to the USSR Ri Sang-jo and Kurdyukov of USSR Ministry of Foreign Affairs. Ri is concerned about personality cult in DPRK, and argues that KWP leadership needs serious ideological help from CPSU CC; that is to say, help is needed from outside.

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MEMORANDUM OF CONVERSATION
WITH DPRK AMBASSADOR TO THE USSR, RI SANG-JO [RI Sang-jo]

16 June 1956

I received Ri Sang-jo at his request.

1. I familiarized the ambassador with the basic events included in the draft program of the visit of the DPRK government delegation to the USSR and asked him if he had any additional wishes to be included in the program. Ri Sang-jo said that he did not have any wishes except those previously expressed and already taken into consideration in the program.

2. Ri Sang-jo then said that if questions of a military and political nature are discussed along with economic issues in the conversations held between the leaders of the Soviet Union and the Korean delegation, then in his personal opinion, they ought to be discussed with the involvement of the largest possible number of members of the Korean delegation, for example, with all the members of the Korean Workers' Party who are in the delegation. If the discussion is to be held in a narrow circle with only Kim Il Sung, Pak Jeongae [Pak Jeong-ae], and Nam Il then, in Ri Sang-jo's opinion, the results of the conversation will be less than they ought to be since other leading Party officials will not be properly informed of the substance of the comments and the advice of the CPSU CC.

Ri Sang-jo said that the Workers' Party and its leadership need serious ideological help from the CPSU CC.

In reply to my question about the condition of the population in South Korea, Ri Sang-jo said that the economic situation in the South is somewhat better than in the

North.

The standard of living of a worker in South Korea (assuming that he has work), is higher than the standard of living of a DPRK worker; however, the real wages of workers in the South are somewhat less than they were under the Japanese. Ri Sang-jo then said that, according to his observations, the material well-being of the workers in the DPRK is about 10 times less than in the Soviet Union.

In connection with this, Ri Sang-jo said, the incorrect direction of the propaganda being waged in the DPRK draws attention to itself. Day after day this propaganda tries to convince the people of the considerable increase in their standard of living, which in reality isn't there. As a result, the people might stop believing such propaganda, which is divorced from reality, and it can cause irritation and unrest.

Returning to the questions of the situation in the KWP, Ri Sang-jo said that obvious distortions in the description of the history of the revolutionary struggle are permitted for the benefit of the cult of personality in Korea. The Museum of the History of the Revolutionary Struggle of the Korean People has been turned into a museum of the history of the revolutionary struggle of Kim Il Sung.

The partisan detachment of Kim Il Sung was only one unit of the revolutionary forces in the country and, moreover, far from the largest unit. Besides it, there was the partisan formation of [Former Minister of Industry] Kim Chaek [Gim Chaek] and the partisan forces under the command of the Communist Party of China, and the latter were 10 times larger than the detachment of Kim Il Sung. Therefore, when the participants of the revolutionary movement in Korea see that all the efforts are ascribed to one man, Kim Il Sung, they have a feeling of bewilderment.

The ideological value of such a museum and such an incorrect interpretation of the history of the revolutionary movement in Korea, said Ri Sang-jo, is quite dubious. The lauding of the role and efforts of Kim Il Sung sometimes has an anecdotal nature.

We expected, Ri Sang-jo continued, that a study of the materials of the CPSU Twentieth Congress within the Workers' Party would serve as an impetus to improving the intra-party situation and to correcting the existing mistakes of the KWP leadership. However, unfortunately the study of the materials of the Twentieth Congress in the KWP was done hastily and without the necessary depth. The shortcomings of the intra-party life of the KWP were neither criticized at the Congress nor after the Congress. Many members of the Workers' Party see and understand these shortcomings. They are inwardly dissatisfied with the situation in the party but decide not to openly criticize these shortcomings, fearing persecution.

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

The statements of several comrades of the KWP leadership that there were no violations of legality in the DPRK are incorrect, Ri Sang-jo continued. In 1954, for example, many serious excesses and incorrect pressure on the peasants and low-level cadres took place during the collection of taxes in kind. In conditions where only 5% of the peasants had extra bread, almost everyone was forced to hand over grain. There were many cases of suicide among low-level party cadres in the countryside in connection with this, after which they were expelled from the party for the "inability" to ensure the fulfillment of tax in kind assignments. For example, in the province of North Pyeongan [Pyongan] where Pak Jeong-ae [Pak Jong Ae] went and

where there were many people expelled, 130 people committed suicide.

Serious violations of legality were also committed in the security organs and "Japanese" methods were employed.

In connection with this, Ri Sang-jo said, it is very important that they work closely with the DPRK MIA delegation in the USSR at the present time and familiarize it with the goals concerning the strictest observation of revolutionary legality.

It would also be very important, Ri Sang-jo pointed out, to exert appropriate ideological influence on the delegation of Korean journalists arriving in the USSR. This could facilitate a correction of the tone of DPRK press propaganda on the issue of the attitude toward the South.

At the present time this tone abounds in useless cursing and does not have the needed flexibility, which harms the cause.

Speaking of the reasons for the large number of mistakes committed by the KWP leadership and Kim Il Sung, Ri Sang-jo said that to a considerable degree they might be explained by Kim Il Sung's insufficient theoretical training.

Kim Il Sung, said Ri Sang-jo, is a young leader with a good revolutionary past, but he studied little and does not have sufficient ideological training, and this leads him to mistakes.

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

Signed CHIEF OF THE FAR EAST DEPARTMENT OF THE
USSR MFA [Ministry of Foreign Affairs] I. KURDYUKOV

Authenticated: [illegible signature]

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