

June 23, 1955

**Report from Yu. Komarov to the Chargé d'affaires of
the USSR in the DPRK**

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Summary:

Komarov reports on his trip to North Pyongan, Kangwon, and South Hamgyong, specifically on the food shortage, its impact on the living conditions of workers, and private trade.

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TO THE CHARGÉ D'AFFAIRES OF THE USSR IN THE DPRK
Cde. S. N. LAZAREV

Report

I made a trip throughout individual districts of the provinces of North Pyongan, Kangwon, and South Hamgyong with G. N. Matyasov, Adviser to the Minister of Heavy Industry, and visited the cities of Muncheon, Hamheung, and Heungnam. The purpose of the trip was familiarization with the progress of agricultural work on the scene, with the state of private trade in peripheral centers of the DPRK, and with the living conditions of the workers of large industrial enterprises. The trip coincided with the mass replanting of rice seedlings. Traveling along the above route I had an opportunity to observe the labor of Korean peasants. It was rarely possible to see how two or three people work in the field (probably, a single family). In the majority of cases the replanting was done collectively in groups of 9-10 to 25-30 people. On Sunday and weekdays everywhere students of various schools and technical schools, servicemen, and workers of industrial enterprises were working in the fields in their own part-time farms.

The condition of winter barley and wheat is good everywhere; however, there are signs indicating a shortage of mineral fertilizer. The shoots of spring grains, vegetables, and other crops are good but the long lack of rain is beginning to show, especially in the regions of Hamheung and Heungnam.

[Handwritten at the bottom of the first page: to Cde. V. I. Petrukhov]

On the 10th of June we inspected the non-ferrous metals plant of the city of Muncheon, 12 km north of Wonsan. The plant was built by the Japanese, and is located on the seacoast, surrounded by a workers settlement.

It was partly destroyed during the war and right now the main production departments have been repaired. The main product of the plant is crude lead. The equipment is obsolete but is being replaced through deliveries from the Soviet Union. For example, recently a modern sintering machine made by a Sverdlovsk plant arrived. It still has not been installed, and individual parts of it have been dumped on the plant's premises uncovered and in disorder. This threatens the machine with damage since its installation is not expected soon. Cde. Matyasov advised the chief engineer to gather up all the parts of the machine in one place and to take steps to protect [it] from rain and dust. The Embassy leadership let Cde. I. A. Nikonov, the GUYeS authorized representative, is aware of the fact of the negligent attitude toward valuable Soviet equipment.

The same day I took part in a long conversation between Cde. Matyasov and the chief engineer, the chief of the technical production department, and the deputy plant director. The first two graduated higher educational institutions in the Soviet Union and speak Russian. I asked about the workers' lives, their supply of food and manufactured goods, and their salaries. They readily answered my questions posed in the course of the conversation, which was mainly on industrial subjects.

The following also surfaced in the course of the conversation:

The food situation is serious. The grain ration is not issued regularly, but for several days at once; lines form at the stores where the ration is issued. Rice was not issued at all in the last 12 days, being replaced by millet in the same weight quotas. Workers have not been getting vegetable oil for over two months, and fish (salted and fresh) and vegetables are issued in extremely insufficient amounts. There has been no salt for a long time.

At the same time the worker cannot buy the shortfall in grain on the market since the prohibition on private trade in cereal products has still not been lifted. Grain is sold under the counter but at high prices (rice from 120 to 200 won per kilogram). Fish is cheaper in this region than regions farther from the sea but nevertheless it is rarely available to a worker in the market.

(For example, in the smelting shop, workers get 1500 to 1900 won but fish in the market cost 130-150 won? per kilogram).

Food in the plant cafeteria is mainly prepared from wild grasses and early vegetables, without vegetable oil; the cafeteria does not receive fish and meat.

The plant's part-time farm is often worked by manual laborers and office workers during working hours. The production of the part-time farm is distributed between those manual laborers and office workers who work on it. The farm has few livestock. They raise pigs and sheep, but in connection with the lack of pasture the situation of feed is serious and meat yield is very small.

The plant has a fishing team composed of workers but since it does not have a motorized craft its catch is limited to the coastal zone and yields a small quantity of fish.

The sharp contrast between the housing situation of the workers and the provision of the plant administration with housing is evident.

Three residential buildings (for approximately 350-400 people, provided that there is a high degree of crowding) are being built for the workers, and small brick houses are being built near the plant but they are solving the issue of housing for workers, the majority of whom live in mud huts or in primitive dwellings. At the same time the plant management has built good brick four-room houses for itself with a bath, kitchen, and enclosed veranda. A statement by the chief engineer of the plant who wanted to occupy the house in which the Soviet specialists lived in and after their departure, the acceptance officer of the Trade Mission, is typical in this regard, "It is improper for me to live in the house in which I live right now in front of the workers". By the way, this was a good house, of the same type as the houses of the shop and department chiefs, but he the chief engineer supposedly needed to live in the same house as the director and Party organizer. This statement is characteristic of Korean managers, who attach great importance to personal authority; the servility and sycophancy still left over from the time of Japanese rule are preserved to a considerable degree in relations between managers and ordinary workers. In a conversation with the acceptance officer of the Trade Mission the same chief

engineer said that, "The new and old get along here".

The plant management pays little attention to the creation of normal conditions for the employees' work: there is not enough work clothing, the safety equipment is poorly maintained, there are no rooms with amenities (not to mention a bathhouse, there is no shower, which is absolutely necessary for metallurgy workers); for drinking they receive the water brought into the shops for industrial needs.

On the 11th of June, we arrived in the city of Heungnam. We inspected the copper electrode factory. The organization of production and the working conditions of the workers are similar to those we observed at the plant in [Munchon].

It only ought to be noted that at the present time, in conditions of the poor organization and insufficient assurance of normal labor for the workers, the factory management is working on an assignment from the Ministry of Heavy Industry: begin the production of "pobedit [Translator's note: a tungsten carbide alloy]" by June 15. The factory laboratory is still just conducting pilot work to obtain it and there is no place to install the equipment, but the management considers this to be completely realistic. This fact can serve as an example of how Korean industrial managers have a light-hearted attitude toward solving problems requiring a serious approach and mobilization of material resources.

On the 12th of June we inspected the Heungnam Chemical Works, paying special attention to measures to ensure normal working conditions for workers engaged in repairing works and in the shops of enterprises which are already operating. Observations showed that concern about the workers is essentially very poorly exhibited: in the cafeteria the food consists of grasses and vegetables, in the majority of cases without vegetable oil, and there are no rooms with amenities. The workers change clothes before and after work right at the workplace. In connection with the lack of showers they wash under the open sky or in the drainage pits used in the shops for industrial needs. These shortcomings will exacerbate the workers' situation with the arrival of cold weather.

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As already indicated above, one of the goals of the trip was familiarization with the state of private trade in the peripheral centers of the DPRK.

Private trade is essentially absent along the entire length of the route from Pyongyang to Heungnam, both in district centers and in such cities as Hamheung and Heungnam. Food is only traded at the bazaars (predominantly vegetables, and dried and salted fish in small amounts). There is absolutely no meat, grain, very little vegetable oil, and soy products on sale. The private trade network, which was specialized for sale of ready-made clothing, fabrics, shoes, haberdashery, and other manufactured goods, has shrunk considerably. For example, in such a densely-populated city as Hamheung, it is impossible to see a single private shop, and here and there craftsmen occasionally work to repair shoes.

A majority of private cafeterias, various shops, and stalls selling food are closed in connection with the prohibition on the sale of grain products.

23 June 1955

[signature] (Yu. Komarov)

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Drafted by Komarov

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