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A bulletin of information and opinion from the
FREEDOM LEADERSHIP FOUNDATION, INC.

Volume I, Number 15

December 27, 1971

An Analysis of North Korean Propaganda

by Hal MacKenzie, FLF Research Associate

Hal MacKenzie recently returned from a trip to Vietnam, Japan and Korea, where he met with a variety of student, labor, academic and political leaders.

North Korea is known as the most hard-line Stalinist regime the world has ever known. The degree of regimentation that it exerts over its fourteen million people, the depth of its commitment to violent revolution, the extremes of the personality cult surrounding Marshal Kim Il-Sung are unparalleled by any modern Communist regime, and surpasses even Stalinist Russia in its heyday. While most other Communist regimes have covered their propaganda with a veneer of sophistication and legitimacy, North Korea's is unabashed in its vulgar glorification of Kim Il-Sung, the intensity of the abuse it heaps upon its rivals, and its extensive use of the "Big Lie" technique.

A prime example of the cultivation of Kim Il-Sung is his biography, published in 1969 by a Japanese publisher and advertised extensively in the *New York Times* and the *Times* of London. Even as outright propaganda, this document is amazing in its fantastic claims. For example:

"General Kim Il-Sung, the great leader of the 40 million Korean people, peerless patriot, national hero, ever-victorious, ironwilled, brilliant commander and one of the outstanding leaders of the international communist and working-class movement... who is capable of commanding the heavens and earth, an unrivalled brilliant commander, who, as it were, can shrink a large range of steep mountains at a stroke and smash the swarming hordes of enemies with one blow."

To legitimate Kim's claim of being the Messiah of the 40 million Korean people, the book unashamedly distorts Kim's background to portray him as coming from a revolutionary family, single-handedly defeating the Japanese in Korea, and personally building the Korean Communist movement with minimal help from Soviet Russia and Communist China. To refute all of the lies in this book would take too long here, but a true account can be had from *The Korean Communist Movement, 1919-1948*, by Dae-Sook Suh, Princeton University Press, 1967.



KIM IL-SUNG

"Great Leader" of North Korea

A perusal of *The People's Korea*, an English-language weekly published in Japan, reveals a continuation of the messianic theme. Every mention of Kim Il-Sung is repetitively followed by superlatives such as "respected and beloved leader," or "the great leader of the 40 million Korean people." The glorification of Kim is complemented by a corresponding vilification of his rivals, in particular South Korean President Park Chung-Hee. One article, headlined FILTHY OUTPOURING OF TRAITOR FULL OF LIES, reads as follows:

"Traitor Park Chung-Hee, the boss of the military gang, spun out a "commemorative speech" at a buffoonery called "independence day celebration" on the 15th, according to reports from Seoul. In this ugly torrent of jargon, the gangster waxed eloquent about "independ-

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Marxist-Christian Dialogue

A QUESTION OF FREEDOM?

The following was excerpted from Edmund Demaitre, "An Inconclusive Dialogue," *Problems of Communism*, September - October, 1971, pp. 44-7.

Humanism as an Approach

At first glance, this approach seems to be a reasonably simple and straightforward solution to the matter. On close examination, however, it becomes quite obvious that putting the emphasis on the "this-worldly" concerns of Christianity or turning Marxism into a social anthropology raises no less difficult questions than those posed by atheism or the opium theory; for if humanism is to provide the connecting link between the two worldviews, an agreement has to be reached on the basic issue at the core of every humanistic pursuit: freedom. In theory, both worldviews consider freedom the ultimate stage of human fulfillment. Christians are to arrive at that stage through love and justice; Marxists, by elevating their conscious activities to the apex through increasing cognition of the laws of nature and society. But for the Christian, freedom cannot exist without freedom of the spirit. The Marxist, on the other hand, deems the abolition of classes and the collectivization of the means of production to be the indispensable precondition for "leaping from the kingdom of necessity into the kingdom of freedom."^{*}

On this point, the dialogue must inevitably transcend the limits of metaphysical, anthropological or sociological speculations; to borrow Engels' metaphor, it has to leap from the realm of theory into that of *praxis*. If freedom means the fulfillment of the individual through self-creation, as neo-Marxists argue, how do those self-creating activities manifest themselves in Communist societies? The question is of critical importance since the answer affords the only criterion by which one can effectively gauge the prospects of the dialogue.

That many Christians have posed this question does not necessarily reflect their concern over the sincerity of the Marxist participants in the dialogue. It does suggest, however, serious misgivings about the ability of Communist societies, as they are known today, to develop constitutional, political and social mechanisms which would guarantee individual freedom in the Christian sense. Clearly, that kind of freedom cannot be fully enjoyed as long as the very concept of freedom is inseparably linked with the class struggle on a national as well as international scale — a struggle whose objectives and methods are determined by all-powerful party bureaucracies. In this regard, it has been pointed out that the Communists who show the greatest willingness to reinterpret the orthodox Marxist-Leninist concept of freedom belong to parties not in power and thus are not in a position to limit or extend the freedom of any persons except those subject to party discipline. In other words, the commitment of these Communists to humanistic principles based on respect for individual rights is strictly theoretical, even if sincere. Not even a theoretical reinterpretation of freedom has taken place in the Communist-run countries, especially the Soviet Union, which is supposed to serve as the model for the great bulk of those nations with preponderantly Christian populations.^{**}

The contrasting attitudes toward religion of Communists in and out of power are perhaps best illustrated by the polemics that have gone on between Italian neo-Marxists engaged in dialogue with Christians and Soviet theoreticians advocating strict adherence to a markedly atheistic position. Leonid Ilichev, at the time one of the Soviet party's chief ideologists, triggered the debate in 1963 with a report on ideological questions to the Soviet Central Committee. Urging the intensification of atheistic propaganda in the U.S.S.R., he asserted that "religion cannot but serve as a brake on scientific progress. . . and it supports a morality diametrically opposed to the principles of the moral code of the builders of communism."^{***} In refutation, Professor Lucio Lombardo Radice, a member of the Italian party's Central Committee and one of the most prominent participants in the dialogue, described the Ilichev theses as an over-simplification which "will be of little or no use today, just as it has been of little or no use in the past," and he stressed that the alienation of individuals living in Communist societies should not be ascribed to residues or survivals of capitalism typified by religion. If those "residues" had not disappeared from Soviet society, the cause of the resulting estrangement should not be sought in religion but rather in the conditions of inferiority in which Soviet citizens found themselves because they harbored "certain opinions which one cannot express or cannot fully express or can only express by giving up certain rights."¹

These conditions to which the Italian theoretician referred continue to prevail in most Communist-run states. The issue of religious freedom, it is true, has lost some of its acuteness in Yugoslavia, Hungary, Czechoslovakia, and even Poland; however, religious freedom cannot be looked at in isolation, it cannot be separated from other freedoms, if humanism is to provide the basis for an effective coordination of efforts directed at improving the human condition. Thus, the central issue of the dialogue remains unresolved, even though some of the problems raised by the dialogue have been settled. This judgment does not mean that the dialogue is either futile or superfluous. It only suggests that the exchanges are unlikely to yield lasting and positive fruits as long as the Communist systems persist in denying to the individual those fundamental rights whose possession alone can enable him to fulfill himself in accordance with either the Christian or the Marxist dispensation.

*Engels, *Anti-Duehring*, pp. 311-12.

**Indeed, Soviet theoreticians have recently urged the stepping up of atheistic propaganda, particularly in the republics inhabited by Muslims.

***Rinascita, July 4, 1964.

¹ Ibid.

Editor-in-Chief	D. Fefferman
Circulation Manager	E. Barros
Layout, Typography	S. Baum, I. Lima, C. Efav
Graphics	F. Johnson, M. Richardson, D. Carter
Writers	FLF Research Staff
Circulation	2,300

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CONVERGENCE? UNLIKELY

Milovan Djilas, famed Yugoslav ex-Party member, offers an interesting insight into the prospects for convergence of communism and democracy. Djilas' book, *The New Class*, is a classic and has caused significant controversy both in the West and in Communist countries, where it cannot be easily obtained.

In all of Eastern Europe, including the Soviet Union, totalitarianism is in a state of decay in most of its aspects. There is not a single significant creative Marxist in Eastern Europe—not one like Gyorgy Lukacs, now quite old and removed from social currents, or Leszek Kolakowski, one of the most subtle critics of dogmatism, who is now banned from his homeland. Whatever is creative today in Eastern Europe is critical of totalitarianism and of the reality of everyday circumstance. Totalitarian tendencies, however, have not disappeared; nor will they do so for quite a while. One cannot conclude that the Communist structure is evolving toward democracy just because Communists happen to refrain at times from using the methods of totalitarianism.

Of course, Communists, otherwise firmly against foreign inimical forms, are themselves becoming "infected" by the stratification of their own society. Certain groups and segments remain actually Communist only by origin and certain links — for conformist or tactical reasons — with the worn-out but still ruling structures. Thus in Yugoslavia, in the

highest echelons — there it is perhaps most pronounced — one finds in addition to Communist-bureaucrats also Communist-democrats and Communist-nationalists. . . .

For the time being there is no likelihood of a political and social convergence of the Communist structures with democratic structures. It is true that the *technologies* in Communist and Western countries do develop in the same direction: this surely brings the West and the East closer. One can possibly conclude that this phenomenon moderates the rigidity and lessens the dogmatic nature of a Communist structure; even so, this still does not change it into a democracy. There is process in the rejuvenation of nations and societies: the decay of one form is the foundation for the birth of another. Most certainly, the new structures which grow out of the soil of Communism will be more open, and potentially more conciliatory toward Europe and the United States. At least at the beginning, they will, I think, retain directions and peculiarities in many respects different from those found in the West. Communism, although it is by its dogma internationalistic, is becoming in its realization nationalistic. It is obvious that the world is increasingly unified through free differentiation and not through forced equalization. Nothing confirms this more for our times than the decay of Communist totalitarianism.

(Excerpted from "Is Communism Evolving Into Democracy?", by Milovan Djilas. *Freedom at Issue*, May-June, 1971, pg. 12)

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An Analysis of North Korean Propaganda

(continued from page 1)

ence," "self-sustenance," "national identity," and so on and so forth, which are not suited at all to the treacherous attributes of his gang."

The "Big Lie" remains an all-pervasive aspect of North Korean propaganda, as can be seen in this quote from the radical newsweekly, the *Guardian*:

"As mass opposition was developing inside South Korea to Rhee's tottering dictatorship, he made one final, desperate attempt to become ruler of all Korea. . . on June 25, 1950, units of the U.S.-controlled South Korean army crossed the 38th parallel, guns blazing. . .

The DPRK immediately repulsed the attackers and began pushing toward Seoul." (10 Sept. 1970)

Ordinarily, home-grown North Korean propaganda would be dismissed by most people in the West as the ravings of an insanely paranoid regime. However, there is a heavily financed effort on the part of leftist and Communist groups in America to spread high-quality pro-North Korean propaganda, with all the legitimacy they can muster from pro-Communist professors and front-group leaders. On February 27, 1971, a full-page ad appeared in the *New York Times*, paid for by the "American-Korean Friendship and Information Center," urging the pull-out of American troops and equipment from South Korea. The AKFIC executive board includes such prominent leftists as Prof. Howard H. Parsons, Ruth Gage-

Colby, Joseph Brandt, and Herbert Aptheker. The AKFIC has since come out with a fat, "scholarly" magazine called "Korea Focus," featuring thinly veiled articles blaming the U.S. and South Korea for all of the tensions in Korea, and lauding the "peace" moves of the Kim Il-Sung regime against the South.

Furthermore, a full *two* page ad appeared in the Vancouver *Sun* on June 26, 1971, paid for by the "Friends of the Korean People," featuring a prominent picture of "President Kim Il-Sung, Great Leader of Forty Million Koreans," over an interview of Kim by the "Democratic Youth League of Finland." North Korean "friendship" groups are also active in France, England, Germany and Japan.

The Black Panther Party paper dedicated a full issue to Kim, lauding him as a great leader of the Third World revolution. A new commune has appeared in Berkeley, calling itself "Chollima" after the title of the industrialization movement in North Korea. Korean residents throughout the U.S. have recently received high-cost pamphlets and hard-bound books of the "works" of Kim Il-Sung with no identifying marks or union labels. Pro-North Korean literature has also appeared on campuses coast to coast with no identification.

One shudders to think that such a blatantly tyrannical and violent regime as Kim Il-Sung's has such an extensive public relations effort in its behalf. It reflects similar attempts after World War II to "sell" the brutal dictatorship of Stalin to the West — an attempt which was, alas, all too successful. If the truth about the North Korean regime were fully communicated to the world, then Kim Il-Sung and his "lackeys" in the West would receive only the disdain that they deserve.

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