

Meaning and Outlook of the 3rd Party Delegates' Conferences

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On June 26th, the Politburo of the Central Committee announced that a delegate's meeting of the Korean Workers' Party would be held in early September. This will be the 3rd such meeting; the previous two occurred in 1958 and 1966. The announcement clarified that the main purpose of this meeting would be "to elect the leading apparatus of the Workers' Party." The Party Delegates' Conference is convened irregularly between Party Congresses. It has been held two times previously, in March 1958 and October 1966. The conference called by the Central Committee in 1958 wrapped up the purges of October 1956 and approved the 1st Five Year Plan. The 2nd conference made replacements on the Central Committee and introduced a new general secretariat system in the Party.

The function of the Party Delegates' Conference is to debate and decide on urgent matters concerning Party line and strategy, and also to expel representatives or candidates who are unable to perform their duties and to fill the resulting vacancies. These functions are distinctly different from the functions of the Party Congress. Under regular conditions all major agenda items are handled by the Party Congress, as the leading Party apparatus; the Party Delegates Conference is known to deal with drastic changes or personnel problems within the party. This conference, as the 3rd such meeting in 44 years, has 3 major purposes.

The first is to strengthen the Party and improve its policy functions. North Korea has not had a Party Congress since the 6th Party Congress in 1980. Further, there has not been a general meeting of the Central Committee since 1993. In the interim, there has been almost no reorganization or reassignment of positions of Central Committee representatives (substitutes), Politburo Standing Committee members, and Politburo members (substitutes). Therefore, at this Party Delegates' Conference, like the one in 1966, a meeting of the Central Committee will be convened immediately after electing permanent members and substitutes to the Party Central Committee. Then, via

elections for the leading Party apparatus, personnel changes will be made to the Standing Committee, the Politburo, the Secretariat, and the Party Censorship Committee.

The second objective is to normalize the functions of the Party, solidify “Party rule,” and stabilize relations between the people and the Party. A Rodong Shinmun editorial on June 30th stated that this meeting would “have tremendous value in promoting the people’s faith in the party and strengthening the harmonic unity of the people and the Party.” Thus it appears that the intention is to normalize the operations and decisions of the Party.

The third objective is to solidify support for the succession plan within the Party. The June 30th editorial stated, “The guidance of the Korean Worker’s Party is the lifeline of the military-first revolution and the root which secures the prosperity of all the people of all generations,” adding, “This Party Delegates’ Conference will enable the KWP to definitively guarantee its leadership in revolution and construction, and to proceed even more rapidly in constructing a strong, prosperous nation.” The emphasis on “all the people of all generations” suggests that, superficially, this conference is for the purpose of electing the leading apparatus of the Party, but its ultimate objective is to normalize the functions of the party and reorganizing personnel in order to cement the succession system.

If such is the case, what personnel changes and political agendas can we expect North Korea to adopt? First, after naming substitutes to the KWP Central Committee Politburo in line with the election of the “KWP leading apparatus,” they will convene the 22nd General Meeting of the 6th-term Party Central Committee, at which point they will likely hold elections related to the leading apparatus of the KWP. At present, Kim Jong Il is the sole remaining member of the Standing Committee selected at the 6th Party Congress, while there are only 4 permanent members of the Politburo, including Kim Young Nam, Kim Young Ju, and Chun Byung Ho. We can expect that Kim Jong Il, Kim Young Nam, Jo Myong Rok, Choi Young Rim, and Kim Young Chun will be elected to the Politburo Standing Committee, while NDC members Oh Guk Ryul, Chun Byung Ho, Kim Guk Tae, Kim Ki Nam, Choi Tae Bok, Jang Sung Taek, (Yi Yong Mu), Yang Hyung Sub, Hong Suk Hyung, Kim Kyung Hee, Yi Kil Song, Kim Byung Ryul, Ju Sang Sung will be appointed as regular members of the Politburo outside of the Standing Committee. There is a high probability that some Cabinet Vice-Ministers will be selected as substitute Politburo members. One point of contention is whether or not the Politburo Standing Committee will continue to exist. Since the Standing Committee was created in order to back up Kim Jong Il’s succession, it is possible that it may be eliminated.



At present the Secretariat has 4 active members: ChunByung Ho, Kim Guk Tae, Kim Ki Nam, and Choi Tae Bok. Considering the actions at the 6th Party Congress, it can be anticipated that they will probably fill in about 10 vacancies there. Influential individuals include Kim Yang Gon (South Korean and international affairs), Hong Suk Hyung (the economy), Jang Sung Taek (security), and Yi Gwang Ho (sciences). A key issue is whether intended successor Kim Jung Eun will be appointed to the secretarial position in charge of organizational issues; all that can be said at present is that it is highly likely that Kim Jong Eun will at least be given some secretary-level position.

Second, it seems probable that the 7th Party Congress will be convened in 2015. North Korea is offering no formal explanation as to why they have been unable to hold a 7th Party Congress. However, when Kim Il Sung was still alive, he indicated that the 7th Party Congress would be held after “improvement in the people’s livelihood,” so it would likely be scheduled for 2015, the point at which the food situation is supposed be resolved along with improvements in various affairs including the nuclear issue, DPRK-US relations, inter-Korean relations, DPRK-China relations. So in part this Party Delegates’ Conference may share the business of the 7th Party Congress, but it will probably not act as a substitute for it. It appears this Conference will act as more of a stepping-stone to the 7th Party Congress in 2015. If the process proceeds normally, at this conference Kim Jong Eun will be appointed to a secretarial position in charge of organization, and then preparations for the 7th Party Congress will be made with focus on the successor issue.

Third, there will probably be some amendments to Party doctrines and rules. The Party showed its intention to revise its rules at a series of talks - the Inter-Korean Presidential Summit in June 2000 and the “Media Executives’ Delegation to North Korea” which occurred in August of the same year. It is likely that the “Regulations of the Korean Workers’ Party” (the complete text, plus Chapter 10 Article 60) will be abridged. During the August 2000 meeting with visiting media executives, Kim Jong Il said that party regulations “are not immutable. They can be changed at any time,” and that Party doctrine “is something that was created immediately after liberation, in the ‘40s, so it contains many radical and militant expressions.” Thus Kim Jong Il bluntly indicated his will to revise the Party doctrine (text). However, Kim Jong Il also said that because “many of the Party cadres have worked with the President and are now of an advanced age,” Party doctrine “cannot easily be changed” and “If it is changed, many people will have to be removed from their posts,” and “If that happens, they will say that I am purging them.” Thus he revealed his belief that eliminating Party doctrine would not be easy. Pointing at these statements, observers predicted that Party regulations would be revised from level of the 1998 “Kim Il Sung Constitution.” The 1998 revised constitution established a ‘Preface’ which named it the “Kim Il Sung Constitution,” and the main text of the



Party regulations reflected this in various ways as well. For instance, it named Kim Il Sung “the Eternal President,” and added key phrases such as “the fulfilment of Kim Il Sung’s teachings,” “the complete succession of the Juche revolutionary achievements,” “revolutionary military spirit,” “a strong, prosperous socialist nation,” “united as one body,” and “by our people together.” However, while it is unknown whether mention of “songun ideology” will be included, it has already been reflected in the April 2009 revision, and thus it could certainly become a guiding principle of the Party.

