

COMMUNIST Affairs

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Biography

Kim Il

With the death on March 9 1984 of Kim Il the Korean Workers' Party (KWP) has lost the most senior surviving associate of President Kim Il Sung. In a regime that has experienced a rapid elite turnover his continuity in office, having been a member of all six KWP Central Committees, was matched only Kim Il Sung himself.

Born Pak Tök-san in North Hamgyöng Province in 1910 Kim Il ('Kim number one') joined the Chinese and Korean guerrillas fighting the Japanese along the Korean border of Manchuria in the 1930's, eventually becoming a member of the First Route Army which had come under the command of Kim Il Sung. With Kim Il Sung he retreated to the Soviet Union about 1941 possibly as a company commander in Kim's unit which was reorganised and stationed near Khabarovsk. Some reports claim he then received education or military training in the USSR until 1945, although it is also said he returned to Manchuria on an undercover mission after only a short time in the Soviet far east. In either case he was already a member of the Kapsan guerrilla faction which came to dominate the KWP in the 1950's under Kim Il Sung's tutelage.

Returning to Korea in 1945 he helped organise support for Kim Il Sung in the north and participated in the 1946 conference which inaugurated the KWP, becoming a member of the KWP Central Committee and its Standing Committee. Kim Il was also a member of the First Supreme People's Assembly (of 1948) and all subsequent Assemblies. He also became Political Commissar of the new Korean People's Army (KPA) founded in the same year, ultimately attaining the rank of lieutenant-general. During the reverses suffered by the KPA in the closing months of 1950 Kim Il with other party and military figures was criticised and dismissed from his posts at the Central Committee plenum held in December. Allegedly he objected to the

Soviet failure to provide sufficient aircraft to interdict US bombing of the north, but unlike some others he returned to prominence at the KWP Central Committee plenum of August 1953, becoming a member of the 5 man Political Committee.

From 1953 Kim Il held high party and state positions becoming in the 1960's number three in the hierarchy (after Kim Il Sung and Ch'oe Yong-gön). In the KWP Kim Il was Vice Chairman and then Secretary (Kim Il Sung being Chairman and then Secretary General) until 1980 when for reasons of illness and old age he relinquished the latter post, though remaining as the second ranking member of the Politbureau and Presidium. In the state administration Kim Il early distinguished himself as a specialist in agriculture, overseeing the collectivisation programme of 1954, and becoming Minister of Agriculture from 1954 to 1957. He also achieved prominence as a general administrator serving as Vice Premier from 1954 and becoming the effective head of the state apparatus as First Vice Premier (1959) and then Premier (1972), a post he held until his resignation for health reasons in April 1976. In the more honorific realm of the Supreme People's Assembly Kim Il was latterly Vice President and a Member of the Central People's Committee. He also served as Chairman of the Committee for the Peaceful Reunification of the Fatherland.

As chief of the state bureaucracy Kim Il often adopted the role of economic and planning spokesman at KWP Congresses, though he sometimes performed an international role, leading the KWP delegation to the 1960 meeting of Communist parties in Moscow. A capable administrator Kim Il was identified entirely with the views of his leader as is evidenced in the extraordinary continuity of his political career.

James Cotton

Book Reviews

Stephen P. Dunn. *The Fall and Rise of the Asiatic Mode of Production*. (Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1982) 154 pp. £4.95.

The title of Dunn's monograph is an ironic riposte to the notorious chapter 9 of Wittfogel's *'Oriental despotism'*. 'The Rise and Fall of the Theory of the Asiatic Mode of Production' contained the latter's charges that Marx committed 'a sin against science' and that Lenin crippled a truth which Stalin attempted to veil by textual liquidation. Dunn is principally concerned to document the history of the Asiatic mode of production's (AMP's) career in Soviet marxism and the early portion of the monograph successfully casts doubt on Wittfogel's simplistic account of its exit in the 1930s. He achieves the latter by showing that the anti-*Aziatchiki* had theoretical as well as 'political' objections to the AMP.

Dunn charts the disinternment of the AMP after World War II as the product of difficulties encountered by Soviet scholars in the application of historical materialism; in particular, in working with the concept of a universal slave-holding society. This is interesting both as a criticism of standard interpretations of Soviet intellectual debate and an illustration (possibly) of Gouldner's idea that the AMP is the historical materialist's recurring (Kuhnian) anomaly.

Dunn classifies himself as a neo-*Aziatchik* (one who does not see the AMP as a social order through which all peoples must pass) and in philosophical terms he is a naturalist who views historical materialism as in some respects homologous with Darwinian evolutionism. These views are somewhat at odds with Dunn's apparent endorsement (p.xiii) of Hindess and Hirst's *'Pre-capitalist modes of production'*. Hindess and Hirst vehemently rejected the AMP, nihilistically rejected the possibility of a scientific approach to history *in toto*, and would certainly engage in epistemic polemic with Dunn's philosophy of science.

Dunn has done non-Russian readers and researchers in the domain of pre-capitalist social orders admirable service by writing an excellent *précis* in the history of ideas. Unfortunately, another mode of production determined the price of this paperback which would have had its value enhanced by a bibliography separated from the otherwise lucid and pertinent notes.

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Dennis Jeambar. *Le P. C Dans la Maison* (Paris: Calmann-Lévy, 1984) 210 pp. ISBN: 2 7021 1294 3, 64 F.frs.

There has been a general and vague impression that the four Communist Ministers in Mauroy's Socialist governments have been good Ministers ('on top' of their briefs, formal, restrained and above all non-ideological). This book does not quarrel with the public image, but states that it is only half the story: the other part is the quiet systematic 'white-anting' of the state structure, that is the emplacement of PCF nominees in key positions. The book reviews the activities of the four Ministers and the position in France's state-run TV networks and gives detailed evidence about the nomination of placemen. Although punctious to a fault, the PCF has made maximum use of patronage opportunities to create client networks (or extend existing ones) similar to those set up in 1945 in, for example, other state sectors. When the PCF leaves government, so it is argued, it will not be easy to dismantle these groups of clientalia.

Jeambar's book is a very important piece of research and will be used for reference purposes by those interested in Communism in power. The major failing is the lack of comparative perspective: the Communists evidently are using their opportunities but how different is this from other parties of the