

HAWAII STUDIES ON KOREA

# CRISIS in NORTH KOREA

The Failure of De-Stalinization, 1956



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type: a group of actual opposition members was followed to exile, prison, or the execution chamber by those who presumably knew about their plans and whom the first victims denounced under pressure and torture. The latter in turn were followed by their friends and associates, who might have known something. It meant that the number of purge victims kept growing continuously and at times very rapidly. Such witch hunts always have a tendency to develop into a self-perpetuating process.

Apart from the dissenting intellectuals, the main victims of these purges were party cadres accused of real or imaginary connections with Ch'oe Ch'ang-ik and occasionally Pak Ch'ang-ok, often by virtue of simply being members of the Yan'an or the Soviet faction (though, as mentioned above, the Soviet Koreans were seldom targeted at this early stage). As Yi Tae-p'il, vice-chairman of the Pyongyang City Committee, had told Titorenko in October 1957, one of the tasks of party organizations was to "expose unreliable elements."<sup>33</sup> And there appeared to be an abundance of "unreliable elements." For example, in the Ministry of Justice, as the deputy minister related to a Soviet diplomat in October 1957, "it is possible to say that in the legal, judicial, and procuratorial systems no leading official has retained his previous post." Among those who lost their positions in the legal system were the minister of justice and the attorney general themselves, who were both purged for being "too soft" on the counterrevolutionaries. Other victims of the purge included a deputy minister, the deputy attorney general, and the head of the Supreme Court, as well as some heads of departments in the Ministry of Justice (some of them were proclaimed "factionalists" whereas others were accused of lacking "revolutionary vigilance").<sup>34</sup> Such a development is not surprising, if one takes into consideration the significance of this ministry during the purges. In late 1958 a high-level North Korean executive told a Soviet diplomat that 3,912 members had been expelled from the KWP during the year from July 1, 1957 to July 1, 1958. Most of them were accused of being supporters of Ch'oe Ch'ang-ik.<sup>35</sup> Also, 6,116 KWP members died during this period, so that the number of dead and purged members combined (10,028) precisely equaled the number of newcomers (10,029). This meant that the KWP membership did not increase during this period (the KWP had 1,181,095 members and 18,023