

# Hammer, Sickle, and the Shamrock: North Korea's Relations with the Workers' Party of Ireland

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## **Hammer, Sickle, and the Shamrock: North Korea's Relations with the Workers' Party of Ireland**

From the 1970s to the 1980s, North Korea, an anti-colonial revolutionary state, sought and established close relations with a variety of non-state actors also dedicated to anti-colonialism. The Workers' Party of Ireland (WPI) was one such group and viewed North Korea, officially known as the Democratic People's Republic of Korea (DPRK), as a fellow divided nation with a fervently anti-imperialist worldview. Through a series of visits to North Korea in the 1980s, the WPI's leadership formed a close alliance with the Korean Workers' Party (KWP), the ruling party in the North Korean government. Although the WPI disagreed with the KWP's authoritarian grip on power in North Korea, they supported the DPRK's call for Korean reunification and sent a few members to the DPRK for military training. This article explores a facet of North Korean foreign policy that has received little attention in the historiography of the DPRK and argues that while the WPI and KWP saw similarities in the historical experiences of Korea and Ireland, WPI members ultimately viewed the DPRK's version of socialism as undesirable and unsuitable for Ireland's situation.

**Keywords:** North Korea, Workers' Party of Ireland, Kim Il Sung, Juche, Korean Workers' Party

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## Introduction

During the 1970s and 1980s, North Korea, officially known as the Democratic People's Republic of Korea (DPRK), interacted with a variety of non-state actors, from the Japanese Red Army to the Workers' Party of Ireland (WPI), in an attempt to strengthen its reputation abroad as a bastion of Third World socialism and non-alignment. As China began to embrace the global market system and the Soviet Union became bogged down in a war in Afghanistan, North Korea clung to its identity as a small socialist nation that did not abandon the path to Third World revolution.<sup>1</sup> A wide range of organizations traveled to the DPRK and became enthralled with its radical ideology of Juche (self-reliance), its commitment to Third

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I would like to thank Gregg Brazinsky and the three anonymous reviewers for their helpful comments on ways to improve earlier versions of this article. I would also like to thank the former WPI members who replied to my inquiries and assisted me with my research. Paddy Woodworth was especially helpful and gracious with his time.

<sup>1</sup> Charles Armstrong, *Tyranny of the Weak: North Korea and the World, 1950-1992* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 2013), 168-207.

World internationalism, and its fervent anti-American and anti-capitalist worldview. The ruling party in North Korea, the Korean Workers' Party (KWP), embraced these groups as partners in the global anti-imperialist movement and used them as a channel to disseminate propaganda abroad.

In this article, I will focus on the WPI and its relations with the KWP.<sup>2</sup> Each party had different reasons for establishing relations with the other but both shared a common ideological affinity to anti-imperialism and anti-colonialism. In addition, both parties represented a specific cause in a divided nation. Viewing capitalism rather than sectarian politics as the ultimate hurdle to a united Ireland, the WPI championed "Peace, Democracy, and Class Politics." As one of two ruling parties on the Korean peninsula, the KWP promoted the removal of American troops from South Korea and, beginning in the early 1970s, proposed the Confederal Republic of Koryo, which would represent a unified Korea at the United Nations and allow both South Korean and North Korean political structures to remain in place. Championing Korean reunification as one of its main policy goals, the KWP may have developed a special affinity to political parties from other divided nations.<sup>3</sup> During a September 1984 luncheon in Pyongyang with members of the WPI, North Korean and KWP leader Kim Il Sung highlighted commonalities in the

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<sup>2</sup> The WPI was originally known as the Official Sinn Féin and had close links to the Official Irish Republican Army. Some members of the WPI were also members of the Official IRA. The definitive work on the WPI is Brian Hanley and Scott Millar, *The Lost Revolution: The Story of the Official IRA and the Workers' Party* (Dublin: Penguin Ireland, 2009). For more on the origins of "the Troubles" and Irish paramilitary groups, see David McKittrick and David McVea, *Making Sense of the Troubles: The Story of the Conflict in Northern Ireland* (Chicago: New Amsterdam Books, 2002). In his informative article on Sinn Féin's foreign policy, political scientist Martyn Frampton explains that Sinn Féin did not want to build a new Ireland based on the North Korean model but the interactions with the North Koreans were part of "the republican perception of themselves, as belonging to a world-wide axis of opposition to the so-called 'colonial' states." See Martyn Frampton, "Squaring the Circle: The Foreign Policy of Sinn Féin, 1983-1989," *Irish Political Studies* 19, no. 2 (2004), 43-63.

<sup>3</sup> Rudiger Frank's recent work on North Korean-East German relations also supports this argument. See Rudiger Frank, *Nordkorea. Innenansichten eines totalen Staates* (Berlin: Deutsche Verlags-Anstalt, 2014).

historical trajectories of Korea and Ireland. Kim Il Sung said that both the Korean and Irish people “are still suffering from national division because of the policy of occupation pursued by outside forces.”<sup>4</sup>

The two foundational texts on North Korea’s foreign policy are Robert Scalapino and Chong-Sik Lee’s *Communism in Korea* and the more recent book by Charles Armstrong, *Tyranny of the Weak*.<sup>5</sup> While a Cold War-era lens clouds Scalapino and Lee’s book, Armstrong offers a fresh perspective on the history of North Korea’s foreign relations. Armstrong devotes a chapter to North Korea’s interactions with the First and Third Worlds in the 1970s and argues that Kim Il Sung’s insistence on self-reliance and refusal to join the global economy ultimately conflicted with Pyongyang’s global engagement. Armstrong’s book fulfills a much-needed gap in the historiography of North Korea but does not adequately address the DPRK’s relations with non-state actors. While there has been a plethora of scholarship published on North Korea’s nuclear program and status in the international community as an isolated nation, the North Korean leadership’s support of non-state actors remains under-researched.<sup>6</sup> This article aims to shed light on a little known but revealing episode in North Korean history when Pyongyang crafted a niche in the international community as a state sponsor of non-state actors.<sup>7</sup> Although

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<sup>4</sup> Kim Il Sung, “I Wish Your Party Success In Its Cause of Building a New Ireland,” *The Pyongyang Times*, September 29, 1984, 1.

<sup>5</sup> Robert Scalapino and Chong-Sik Lee, *Communism in Korea*, vols. 1 and 2 (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1972); Armstrong, *Tyranny of the Weak*.

<sup>6</sup> The notable exceptions are Joseph Bermudez, *Terrorism: The North Korean Connection* (New York: Taylor & Francis, 1990); Terence Roehrig, “North Korea and the U.S. State Sponsor of Terrorism List,” *Pacific Focus* 24, no. 1 (April 2009), 82-106.

<sup>7</sup> The Black Panther Party and the Japanese Red Army are two other non-state organizations that had close links to the North Korean government in the early 1970s. For scholarship on these topics, see Benjamin R. Young, “*Juche* in the United States: The Black Panther Party’s Relations with North Korea, 1969-1971,” *The Asia-Pacific Journal*, vol. 13, issue 12, no. 2 (March 30, 2015), <<http://japanfocus.org/-Benjamin-Young/4303>> (Accessed September 15, 2015); Patricia G. Steinhoff, “Kidnapped Japanese in North Korea: The New Left Connection,” *Journal of Japanese Studies* 30, no. 1 (Winter 2004), 123-142.

many of these organizations were seen within their own movements as too radical, Pyongyang sought ties with socialist groups, such as the Black Panther Party, Japanese Red Army, and the WPI, all of which supported class struggle, Third Worldism, and anti-imperialism.<sup>8</sup> Most of these organizations were also fiercely nationalistic, a characteristic which certainly attracted the ultra-nationalistic leadership in Pyongyang.<sup>9</sup> Through their alliances with these non-state actors, the North Korean government hoped to co-opt others into supporting their call for Korean reunification and Kim Il Sung's brand of socialism. Despite North Korea's geographic position as a small nation amongst superpowers in Northeast Asia, the state was able to project an extraordinary amount of power beyond its borders and appeal to non-state actors, such as the WPI, who shared similar viewpoints on matters of sovereignty and economics.

## Kim Il Sung and Third Worldism

North Korea's support of non-state actors began with Kim Il Sung's disenchantment with the two dominant economic orders of the world in the mid-1950s, Western liberal capitalism and the Soviet bloc's Council for Mutual Economic Assistance (COMECON). As James Person has noted, Kim Il Sung feared that as a COMECON member the DPRK would be expected to merely export raw materials to the Soviet Union.<sup>10</sup> Not wanting to place the North Korean people in a semi-colonial position within the socialist bloc, Kim Il Sung rejected both economic structures

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<sup>8</sup> Hugh Pearson, *The Shadow of the Panther: Huey Newton and the Price of Black Power in America* (Reading: Addison-Wesley, 1994); Patricia Steinhoff, "Hijackers, Bombers, and Bank Robbers: Managerial Style in the Japanese Red Army," *Asian Studies* 48, no. 4 (November 1989), 724-740.

<sup>9</sup> For more on North Korea's ultra-nationalist ideology, see B. R. Myers, *The Cleanest Race: How North Koreans See Themselves and Why It Matters* (Brooklyn, NY: Melville House, 2011).

<sup>10</sup> James F. Person, Introduction to "New Evidence on North Korea in 1956," *Cold War International History Project Bulletin* 16 (Fall 2007/Winter 2008), 447-454 <<https://www.wilsoncenter.org/publication/bulletin-no-16-fall-2007winter-2008>> (Accessed April 14, 2015).

and focused on crafting alliances with other postcolonial and newly independent nations, which also sought an alternative to Soviet-style socialism or American-style capitalism.

Viewing the postcolonial nations of Asia, Africa, and Latin America as the vanguard of a new international order, Kim Il Sung began to champion Third Worldism in the mid-1960s. Kim hoped to use the international body representing the Third World, the Non-Aligned Movement (NAM), to support the North's position in the struggle for legitimacy between Seoul and Pyongyang as the sole government representing Korea at the United Nations.<sup>11</sup> Thus, North Korea had two objectives, an internationally minded goal and a more localized one, when it came to Third Worldism. The first was the development of a new international order that placed anti-imperialism and anti-colonialism at the forefront of its platform. The second was the chance to use the support of Third World nations to gain an upper hand over Seoul in the battle for UN votes. So, this evokes the question: why did the North Korean leadership establish close relations with non-state actors who had no representation at the United Nations and were not from the Third World?

After the revolutions of 1968, First World radicals viewed the Third World with optimism hoping that this global project could provide an alternative to Western capitalism or Soviet communism.<sup>12</sup> While the People's Republic of China was most popular amongst First World radicals in the 1970s, North Korea with its independent streak and Juche ideology also attracted the gaze of First World radicals. As part of the DPRK's global publicity campaign for peaceful reunification of the

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<sup>11</sup> Armstrong, *Tyranny of the Weak*, 180; Adrian Buzo, *The Guerilla Dynasty: Politics and Leadership in North Korea* (Boulder, CO: Westview Press, 1999), 99; Bradley K. Martin, *Under the Loving Care of the Fatherly Leader* (New York: Thomas Dunne Books, 2004) 137; Joon-kyu Park, "U.N. and North Korea: The Origin of the Korean Question," *East Asian Review* 1, no. 3 (Autumn 1974), 238-266.

<sup>12</sup> Max Elbaum, *Revolution in the Air: Sixties Radicals Turn to Lenin, Mao, and Che* (London: Verso, 2002).

Korean peninsula in the 1970s and 1980s, the North Korean government sent propaganda materials to a variety of anti-imperialist organizations and funded “friendship” societies in the First World.<sup>13</sup> The North Koreans also set up various “peace” conferences in the First World in an attempt to promote the works of Kim Il Sung and gain international support for a reunified Korea.<sup>14</sup> The North Korean leadership hoped to use anti-imperialist organizations in the First World as a channel to disseminate North Korean propaganda and promote Kim Il Sung abroad as a great communist theorist. Although oblivious to the little political power these organizations actually wielded in their home countries, the North Korean government hoped that these First World radicals, who were sympathetic to Kim Il Sung’s brand of socialism and call for Korean reunification, would gain high ranking political positions in the capitalist world and recognize the DPRK as the legitimate Korean government.<sup>15</sup> Pyongyang’s isolation in the international community resulted in the Kim family regime’s inability to understand how domestic politics in the West worked and often overestimated the actual power that radical social organizations, such as the Black Panthers and WPI, had in their domestic contexts. Pyongyang primarily used people-to-people diplomacy in the 1970s and 1980s as a way to spread their worldview and garner international attention for the movement to reunify the Korean peninsula under Kim Il Sung’s proposed Confederal Republic of Koryo structure.

As part of North Korea’s publicity campaign in the First World, the

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<sup>13</sup> A North Korean friendship society was even established in New York City in the early 1970s. Noam Chomsky was a member of this organization. See Brandon Gauthier, “The American-Korean Friendship and Information Center and North Korean Public Diplomacy, 1971-1976,” *Yonsei Journal of International Studies* 6, no. 1 (Spring/Summer 2014), 151-162.

<sup>14</sup> Alfred Pfabigan, *Schlaflos in Pjongjang* [*Sleepless in Pyongyang*] (Vienna: Brandstatter, 1986).

<sup>15</sup> For example, the North Koreans thought the Official IRA was a large revolutionary movement in Ireland with ample military equipment and popular support. As John Sweeney notes, “The Koreans thought that back home the Sticks [another title for the Official IRA] had a full-scale army, with tanks in the mountains, waiting for the revolution.” See John Sweeney, *North Korea Undercover: Inside the World’s Most Secret State* (London: Transworld Publishers, 2013), 206.

North Korean leadership established alliances with members of Western political parties. For example, German writer and leader of the German Green Party Luise Rinser visited the DPRK eleven times from 1980 to 1992 and met with Kim Il Sung forty five times during this same period.<sup>16</sup> Rinser became very close to Kim and spent an entire week in 1982 touring the northern provinces of the DPRK with the “Great Leader.” Rinser, who was well known for her memoir detailing her experiences in a women’s prison during Nazi rule, wrote a diary on her travels in North Korea.<sup>17</sup> This diary, which was translated from German to Korean, became popular amongst South Korean leftist dissidents during the democratization movement in the 1980s.<sup>18</sup> In her memoir, Rinser lauds North Korean socialism, which she sees as “socialism with a human face” and as “a model not just for the Third World.”<sup>19</sup> Rinser also describes North Korea as a paradise for workers and peasants where child abuse, robbery, murder, and political prison camps are nonexistent.<sup>20</sup>

In October 1981, Rinser brought Marxist philosopher and fellow environmentalist Rudolf Bahro to the DPRK. Bahro, who was deported from East Germany to West Germany in 1979 after he wrote a book criticizing Soviet-style socialism, was impressed by North Korea’s use of alternative energy sources and its lack of air pollution. After the trip, he said, “It is a lot of crap to put Hitler, Stalin, and Kim Il Sung in the same bag. I believe that he [referring to Kim Il Sung] is, in fact, a great man.”<sup>21</sup>

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<sup>16</sup> DPRK Embassy in Poland Bulletin No. 57, “President Kim Il Sung in Rinser’s View,” Date published unknown, <<http://krlld.pl/krlld/czytelnia1>> (Accessed February 23, 2015).

<sup>17</sup> Luise Rinser, *Nordkoreanisches Reisetagebuch [A North Korean Diary]* (Frankfurt: Fischer, 1986).

<sup>18</sup> The book in Korean was titled *Ruije Rinjō ūi Pukhan iyagi [Luise Rinser's North Korea Story]* (Seoul: Hyōngsōngsa, 1988). See Namhee Lee, *The Making of Minjung: Democracy and Politics of Representation in South Korea* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2007), 132.

<sup>19</sup> Rinser, *Nordkoreanisches Reisetagebuch*, 144.

<sup>20</sup> *Ibid.*, 101-102.

<sup>21</sup> “Alte Heimat,” *Der Spiegel*, November 2, 1981, <<http://www.spiegel.de/spiegel/print/>

Although the German Green Party never gained much influence in German politics in the 1980s, the North Korean leadership's ability to attract Western political organizations, such as giving free trips to the "People's Korea," was a tactic used to garner support for the DPRK in the capitalist world. These government-monitored trips showed only the best parts of the "workers' paradise" in North Korea and were used to depict the DPRK as the legitimate Korean state. Interactions like this may be eschewed as mere propaganda but the WPI's search for a socialist model resulted in a brief but intense relationship with the North Korean regime that went beyond simple gestures of solidarity.

## Irish in North Korea

In 1922, the American travel writer E. Alexander Powell said, "Korea is the Ireland of the East. The more I consider the comparison, the better I like it." Powell went on to note similarities in the peasant cultures of Ireland and Korea. Powell explained, "The peasantry of both countries are ignorant, simple, patient, industrious, good-natured. Both are prone to use intoxicants to excess on occasion. Both are extremely superstitious with a terrified belief in the existence of spirits, goblins, and demons."<sup>22</sup> Little did Powell know that sixty years later an alliance would be formed between the workers' parties of North Korea and Ireland. During his 1984 trip to North Korea, WPI President Tomas MacGiolla said, "Though very far apart geographically, our two countries are close, very close, in our historical experiences."<sup>23</sup> While a shared history of domination by neighboring countries may have provided a rhetorical reasoning for the

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d-14342965.html> (Accessed April 2, 2015).

<sup>22</sup> E. Alexander Powell, *Asia at the Crossroads: Japan, Korea, China, Philippine Islands* (New York: The Century Co., 1922), 101.

<sup>23</sup> Tomas MacGiolla, "Let Me Assure You We Do All in Our Power to Assist You in Every Way," *The Pyongyang Times*, September 29, 1984, 1.

establishment of an alliance between the KWP and WPI, the Irish radicals were most likely attracted to DPRK's status as a Third World socialist nation with a fervently anti-imperialist ideology.

Although the Irish Republican movement had been in contact with members of the North Korean government since 1976, the relationship took off in September 1983 when two members of the WPI, General Secretary Sean Garland and Director of International Affairs Sean O'Cionnaith, visited the DPRK.<sup>24</sup> After arriving in Pyongyang, Garland and O'Cionnaith met Kim Yong-nam, minister of foreign affairs. They then visited various schools, health care facilities, and factories throughout the country. The two men were particularly impressed by the port of Nampho and told the theoretical magazine of the WPI, *Workers' Life*, after their trip that "the standard of living is quite high and the shops are well stocked... the people are well dressed and there were no indications of the sort of poverty that we witness daily in this country [referring to Ireland]."<sup>25</sup> This message must have pleased the leadership in Pyongyang and reinforced their notion that the North Korean people have "nothing to envy" in the world due to the DPRK's supposedly benevolent socialist system.<sup>26</sup>

In North Korea, Garland and O'Cionnaith also voiced their displeasure that the 70th conference of the Inter-Parliamentary Union (IPU), an international organization of parliaments from independent states designed to promote peace and democracy, was going to be held in Seoul, South Korea. These two members of the WPI issued a statement in Pyongyang on September 22 announcing that the WPI would not attend this event and "that the decision of the IPU to hold its conference in Seoul of south Korea is an insult to and mockery of all people of the world who

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<sup>24</sup> Hanley and Millar, *The Lost Revolution*, 462.

<sup>25</sup> *Workers' Life* (Feb. and Aug. 1984) cited in Hanley and Millar, *The Lost Revolution*, 462.

<sup>26</sup> The "Nothing to Envy" slogan became the title of a noteworthy book on North Korean defectors from the city of Chongjin. See Barbara Demick, *Nothing to Envy: Ordinary Lives in North Korea* (New York: Spiegel & Grau, 2010).

aspire after human rights, democracy, and freedom.” The statement by the WPI stated, “The present Seoul regime is a tool of the US imperialists for the execution of their colonial subjugation policy and is little different from the Pretoria regime of South Africa.”<sup>27</sup> The WPI had adopted North Korea’s line that the South Korean government was a lackey of the United States.

After returning from North Korea, Garland told Paddy Woodworth, who was a freelance journalist and a WPI member from 1974-1984, that he admired the health care and education system in the DPRK but that the personality cult was too excessive and wasteful.<sup>28</sup> Woodworth was going to write an article for the *Workers’ Life* on the odd personality cult surrounding Kim Il Sung’s regime but Garland reprimanded him. Garland said to him, “Ah come on now Paddy, I’m looking for support from these people.”<sup>29</sup> Garland told Brian Hamley and Scott Millar in an interview that they “weren’t under illusions” about the reality of life in the DPRK. However, they sympathized with the situation of a small, isolated country that was also divided and “were trying to do what they could themselves.” However, Garland grew frustrated with the North Korean government’s costly campaign to popularize Kim Il Sung abroad as a great communist theorist. For example, he told the North Koreans “that putting full-page ads into the *Irish Times* of Kim Il Sung’s thoughts was a waste of money because nobody f-----n’ read them.”<sup>30</sup>

During the late 1970s and early 1980s, the North Korean government placed full-page ads touting the exploits of Kim Il Sung and the success of the Juche ideology in many Western newspapers, such as the *Irish Times*, *New York Times*, *Washington Post*, and *Boston Globe*.<sup>31</sup>

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<sup>27</sup> “Statement of Irish Workers’ Party Delegation,” *The Pyongyang Times*, October 1, 1983, 6.

<sup>28</sup> Author’s Skype interview with Paddy Wordworth (February 14, 2015).

<sup>29</sup> Hamley and Millar, *The Lost Revolution*, 462-463.

<sup>30</sup> *Ibid.*, 462.

<sup>31</sup> Benjamin R. Young, “How North Korean Ads in Western Newspapers Backfired,” *NK News*,

Pyongyang paid exorbitant fees for these full-page ads, which were mainly seen as outlandish by Western readers. However, the North Koreans were very deliberate with the content of their ads in the *Irish Times*. For example, a February 22, 1979 full-page ad in the *Irish Times* features a large portrait of Kim Il Sung and a report from the 30th anniversary celebration of the founding of the DPRK. The report, titled “Let us smash the two Koreas plot and peacefully reunify the country,” endorses dialogue between North and South Korea and an end to the division on the Korean peninsula.<sup>32</sup> The placement of an ad promoting Korean reunification in an Irish newspaper is no coincidence. This was most likely an attempt by Pyongyang to sway the Irish public, who were also members of a divided nation, to support the DPRK’s call for peaceful reunification. The WPI may have assisted the North Korean government with placement and payment for these ads in the *Irish Times*. However, the peak of WPI-KWP relations would not come until the mid-1980s.

The year 1984 was a busy year for WPI-KWP relations as the North Korean ambassador to Denmark, who had arranged Garland and O’Cionnaith’s 1983 trip to the DPRK, visited Ireland in June and met with several Irish businessmen and representatives from semi-state enterprises.<sup>33</sup> In late September, WPI President Tomas MacGiolla, Vice President Seamus Lynch, and Garland were invited to North Korea. In Pyongyang, they had a luncheon with Kim Il Sung, the supreme leader of North Korea, and Hwang Jang Yop, the North Korean intellectual who designed the Juche ideology. In a speech during the luncheon, Kim highlighted that “both the Korean people and the Irish people have a bitter past when they were oppressed and maltreated under the colonial rule of the imperialists.”

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September 27, 2013, <<http://www.nknews.org/2013/09/how-north-koreans-ads-in-western-newspapers-backfired/>> (Accessed April 12, 2015).

<sup>32</sup> Kim Il Sung, “Let us smash the two Koreas plot and peacefully reunify the country,” *Irish Times*, February 22, 1979.

<sup>33</sup> Hamley and Millar, *The Lost Revolution*, 463.

Kim continued, “Active in these similar socio-historic conditions, our two parties have energetically struggled for the national and social emancipation of their peoples under the banner of independence, sovereignty, and socialism.”<sup>34</sup> MacGiolla also gave a speech echoing many of the same points articulated by Kim Il Sung. MacGiolla stated, “Our enemy is the same: Imperial Capitalism. In your case it was first Japanese imperialism then the imperialism of the United States, in our case it was British imperialism which is now the puppet and client state of the U.S. imperialists just as Japan is today.”<sup>35</sup> However, the KWP-WPI alliance was not solely based upon a recollection of similarities between Korean and Irish history. The two sides both supported revolutionary socialism and nuclear disarmament.

The luncheon speeches by Kim Il Sung and MacGiolla illuminate the ways in which each party saw the other. Both imagined the other as partners in the nuclear-free, Non-Aligned Movement. MacGiolla said, “We are convinced that the best interests of the Irish people would be served by joining the Non-Aligned Movement and working with your country in this organization to secure peace and justice for humanity.”<sup>36</sup> Kim Il Sung and MacGiolla tried to position their respective countries as members of a new anti-imperialist international order composed of small postcolonial states united around the key concept of self-reliance. Both imagined themselves as champions of sovereignty and in conflict with liberal capitalist hegemony. During his luncheon speech, MacGiolla said, “We have in Gaelic as I’m sure you have in Korean, many phrases and sayings about people’s struggles. One which comes to mind and I think very applicable to our parties and peoples, ‘Ar troid, bhur troid, Bhur

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<sup>34</sup> Kim Il Sung, “I Wish Your Party Success In Its Cause of Building a New Ireland,” *The Pyongyang Times*, September 29, 1984, 1.

<sup>35</sup> MacGiolla, “Let me Assure You We Do All in Our Power to Assist You in Every Way,” *The Pyongyang Times*, September 29, 1984, 1.

<sup>36</sup> *Ibid.*

troid, ar troid.’ Translated this means, ‘Our fight is your fight, Your fight is our fight.’”<sup>37</sup>

MacGiolla hoped to implement a self-sufficient economic system in Ireland, like the one championed in North Korea. He lamented, “In the Irish Republic, which is independent and free from occupation, we have not achieved social, economic, or cultural freedom. We have a capitalist economy which is dominated by American monopoly capital.”<sup>38</sup> By identifying that the Irish Republic was free from traditional colonialism but stuck in a new form of colonialism, liberal capitalism, MacGiolla is looking to North Korea for an alternative economic system based on localism rather than globalism.

Provisional Irish republican and Sinn Féin political party member Gerry MacLochlainn, who previously spent two years and eight months in a British prison for conspiracy to cause explosions, also saw admirable features in the North Korean system. While MacGiolla focused on the alternative economic system advocated by North Korea, MacLochlainn promoted the ideological output of North Korea, namely the Juche ideology and the concept of Chajusǒng (political independence). MacLochlainn gave a Spring 1985 seminar in London that connected the concepts of Juche and Chajusǒng to the situation of Ireland. MacLochlainn said that the Provisional movement of Irish republicanism had remained true to Chajusǒng since the movement upheld the dignity of the Irish nation and did not succumb to the influence of foreign powers. However, MacLochlainn said that the WPI had abandoned Chajusǒng since the party accepted a two state solution in Ireland and “were still trapped within flunkeyism.” MacLochlainn questioned the party’s commitment to self-reliance and national dignity. He said the WPI “stand as supporters of partition in our country, they stand clearly and unashamedly as supporters

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<sup>37</sup> MacGiolla, “Let me Assure You We Do All in Our Power to Assist You in Every Way,” *The Pyongyang Times*, September 29, 1984, 2.

<sup>38</sup> *Ibid.*, 1.

of imperialism in Ireland.”<sup>39</sup> MacLochlainn’s engagement with North Korean ideology shows the ways in which the Provisional movement portrayed themselves as being closely aligned with the principles of Juche: self-reliance, self-dignity, and independence.

While Sinn Féin had fewer direct ties to North Korea than the WPI, the party still sent members to North Korea and offered messages of solidarity to their Korean allies. In 1986, Sinn Féin sent a letter to the North Korean government supporting their struggle for the reunification of the Korean peninsula under the rubric of the Confederal Republic of Koryo.<sup>40</sup> Sinn Féin President Gerry Adams visited the North Korean ambassador in Denmark, who had seemed to develop an affinity for the Irish, during an April 1987 speaking tour in Scandinavia. Adams and the ambassador celebrated the 75th birthday of the “Great Leader” Kim Il Sung together.<sup>41</sup> After the 1988 Seoul Olympic Games, the North Korean leadership wanted to outdo South Korea by hosting the World Festival of Youth and Students, a gathering of various international socialist movements and organizations, during the following year.<sup>42</sup> Sinn Féin sent a delegation of students to this event. According to a report in the Sinn Féin newspaper, *An Phoblacht/Republican News*, “While in Korea, the Sinn Féin members will have the opportunity of meeting with the youth wings of the government parties in most newly emerging countries of the

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<sup>39</sup> Gerry MacLochlainn, *The Irish Republican and Juche Conception of National Self-Dignity are One and the Same: Paper presented to the Seminar on the Juche Idea* (London: Mosquito Press, 1985).

<sup>40</sup> “Sinn Féin Letter to Korea,” *Ireland’s War* (June 1986) cited in Liam O’Ruairc, “From Havana to Pyongyang: First in a series examining Sinn Féin’s international links,” *The Blanket* e-magazine (Winter 2002), <<http://indiamond6.ulib.iupui.edu:81/pyongyang.html>> (Accessed May 2, 2015).

<sup>41</sup> “Gerry Adams visits Scandinavia,” *Ireland’s War* (April 1987) cited in O’Ruairc, “From Havana to Pyongyang,” *The Blanket*, <<http://indiamond6.ulib.iupui.edu:81/pyongyang.html>> (Accessed May 2, 2015).

<sup>42</sup> Sergey Radchenko, “Sport and Politics on the Korean Peninsula: North Korea and the 1988 Seoul Olympics,” *Wilson Center- North Korea International Documentation Project* (NKIDP) e-Dossier no. 3 (December 2011), <<https://www.wilsoncenter.org/publication/sport-and-politics-the-korean-peninsula-north-korea-and-the-1988-seoul-olympics>> (Accessed April 22, 2015).

Third World, with labor and socialist parties in Western Europe, the USA, Canada, Australia and New Zealand.”<sup>43</sup> Influential members of Sinn Féin such as Gerry MacLochlainn, Sheena Campbell, and John Doyle may have also attended the 1989 youth festival in Pyongyang.<sup>44</sup> Due to the presence of delegations from many international political organizations at this event, the North Korean leadership attempted to present itself to the world as a legitimate and powerful government that has the ability to compete with a resurgent South Korea. However, North Korea’s ubiquitous and wasteful personality cult dissuaded many Irish republicans from supporting the DPRK’s position as the legitimate Korean government.

## Propaganda, Nuclear Politics, and Military Training

Despite the Irish republican perception of North Korea as a fellow anti-colonial revolutionary actor, many WPI members internally criticized the DPRK government as authoritarian and North Korean propaganda as laughable. According to Woodworth, no one in the WPI actually viewed life in North Korea as admirable. The Soviet Union was in fact more widely discussed amongst WPI members.<sup>45</sup> Former member of the WPI’s International Affairs committee Colm Breathnach said that the WPI knew the North Korean propaganda “was a load of shit. And they’d laugh at it in private. I think where the ideological thing came in was, what they really bought into was the so-called anti-imperialist element, an element of ‘look, whoever is really hostile to the Yanks must be on the side of the angels.’”<sup>46</sup> Breathnach explained that the North Koreans had sent them

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<sup>43</sup> “Sinn Féin delegation at World Youth Festival,” *An Phoblacht/Republican News*, June 29, 1989.

<sup>44</sup> In his brief article, O’Ruairc notes that MacLochlainn, Campbell, and Doyle attended the 1989 festival but I could not find this information in the *An Phoblacht/Republican News* article that he cited. See O’Ruairc, “From Havana to Pyongyang,” *The Blanket*, <<http://indiamond6.ulib.iupui.edu:81/pyongyang.html>> (Accessed May 2, 2015).

<sup>45</sup> Author Skype interview with Paddy Wordworth (February 14, 2015).

<sup>46</sup> Colm Breathnach quoted in Tom Farrell, “Rocky Road to Pyongyang: DPRK-IRA Relations

propaganda books and “just for a laugh” Breathnach would occasionally read these North Korean publications. However, Breathnach notes that nobody else in the WPI read them and interactions with the North Koreans “were for more pragmatic reasons.”<sup>47</sup> So what were these “pragmatic reasons?”

Woodworth notes that the WPI identified with the DPRK’s opposition to nuclear weapons.<sup>48</sup> Today, the North Korean leadership boasts about its nuclear weapons program and ability to strike the U.S. mainland.<sup>49</sup> However, in the 1980s, the DPRK government’s position on nuclear weapons was radically different as Pyongyang proposed a nuclear weapon free zone on the Korean peninsula. Due to the placement of American nuclear weapons in South Korea, the North Korean government held an international conference for denuclearization and peace on the Korean peninsula in 1986, which attracted delegations from over 80 non-aligned and communist nations.<sup>50</sup> Two members of the WPI, Sean Garland and Proinsias De Rossa, attended this conference. According to Woodworth, the WPI thought the U.S. was reckless and unpredictable with nuclear weapons and were “playing nuclear chess” in South Korea.<sup>51</sup> The General Secretary’s Report from the 1987 WPI delegate conference explains, “The continued United States occupation and domination of South Korea is

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in the 1980s,” *NK News*, May 17, 2013, <<http://www.nknews.org/2013/05/the-rocky-road-to-pyongyang-dprk-ira-relations-in-the-1980s/>> (Accessed January 15, 2015).

<sup>47</sup> Breathnach quoted in Farrell, “Rocky Road to Pyongyang,” <<http://www.nknews.org/2013/05/the-rocky-road-to-pyongyang-dprk-ira-relations-in-the-1980s/>> (Accessed January 15, 2015).

<sup>48</sup> Author’s Skype interview with Paddy Wordworth (February 14, 2015).

<sup>49</sup> James Pearson, “North Korean Photo Reveals ‘U.S. Mainland Strike Plan,’” *NK News*, March 29, 2013, <<http://www.nknews.org/2013/03/breaking-north-korean-photo-reveals-u-s-mainland-strike-plan/>> (Accessed April 17, 2015).

<sup>50</sup> Rodney Katz, “Nuclear Weapon Free Zone Proposals: Strategic Implications for the United States,” *A Report Prepared under an Interagency Agreement by the Federal Research Division, Library of Congress* (November 1986), 7.

<sup>51</sup> Author’s Skype interview with Paddy Wordworth (February 14, 2015).

another flashpoint for possible world war.”<sup>52</sup> In 1988, the party conference’s General Secretary Report reiterated, “The continued US domination of South Korea, the presence of over 40,000 US troops with thousands of so-called tactical nuclear weapons, makes the Korean peninsula a major flashpoint in the world.”<sup>53</sup> Meanwhile, the WPI did not believe the Soviets would ever use nuclear weapons due to their experiences during World War II and the massive loss of Soviet lives during that conflict.<sup>54</sup> Behind the scenes, North Korean scientists and engineers were busy building the regime’s own nuclear program in the 1980s.<sup>55</sup> However, the North Korean leadership’s superficial commitment to nuclear disarmament earned praise from Western radicals, such as the WPI.

Despite agreeing with North Korea’s stance towards nuclear disarmament, De Rossa came back from this conference unenthusiastic about life in North Korea.<sup>56</sup> He said it was “a completely unreal society and unreal situation, where people were basically treated as children not as adults at all.”<sup>57</sup> However, he saw the WPI-Korean Workers’ Party relationship as a necessary part of the broader friendship between the

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<sup>52</sup> Workers’ Party of Ireland, “Ard Fheis Annual Delegate Conference - 1987 : General Secretary’s Report” (1987). *Materials*. Paper 24. <<http://arrow.dit.ie/workerpmat/24>> (Accessed February 17, 2015).

<sup>53</sup> Workers’ Party of Ireland, “General Secretary’s Report to the Workers’ Party Ard Fheis, Annual Delegate Conference 1988” (1988). *Materials*. Paper 14. <<http://arrow.dit.ie/workerpmat/14>> (Accessed February 17, 2015).

<sup>54</sup> Author’s Skype interview with Paddy Wordworth (February 14, 2015).

<sup>55</sup> The DPRK sought assistance from the USSR in 1985 to build a nuclear power plant. See “Report, Embassy of Hungary in North Korea to the Hungarian Foreign Ministry,” *NKIDP Digital Archive* (March 9, 1985), <<http://digitalarchive.wilsoncenter.org/document/110142>> (Accessed March 25, 2015).

<sup>56</sup> According to a report from the U.S. government, the nuclear disarmament conference in Pyongyang “concluded with the signing of a declaration which condemned the U.S. military presence in South Korea and attempted to present Pyongyang as the more peace-oriented of the two Koreas.” See Katz, “Nuclear Weapon Free Zone Proposals,” 7.

<sup>57</sup> Hamley and Millar, *The Lost Revolution*, 483.

Soviet Communist Party and the WPI.<sup>58</sup> In 1997, De Rossa appeared in the Irish High Court suing the *Sunday Independent* newspaper for libel. The cross-examiner for the *Sunday Independent* brought up De Rossa's recent history with the WPI and noted that party had established relations with authoritarian regimes like North Korea, which "was hardly in reform mode" and had "an appalling oppressive party." De Rossa agreed that the KWP was an oppressive party but it was not beneficial to isolate entire nations.<sup>59</sup>

While the WPI were sympathetic with the KWP's calls for nuclear disarmament on the Korean peninsula, a more practical reason for the WPI's close relations with Kim Il Sung's regime was the training offered by the DPRK's military. In October 1988, six members of the WPI's paramilitary branch, which was cryptically referred to as "Group B" in a key WPI document, flew from Ireland to Pyongyang via Moscow. In a military training camp 30 miles north of Pyongyang, the six Group B members were taught kidnapping techniques, explosives detonation, Korean martial arts, and learned that the best way to kill a man was to "stab a man in the back of the neck, and then twist, cutting into the cerebral cortex."<sup>60</sup> For two months, these six Irishmen woke up at 6 a.m. every morning for fitness training. The training in North Korea ended when two of the Irishmen got in a fight. British journalist John Sweeney interviewed one of the six Group B members who trained in North Korea. According to this anonymous Group B member, "It was the worst place I ever went to. The poor bastards believe they are living in Utopia."<sup>61</sup>

While many WPI members later criticized the dystopian nature of

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<sup>58</sup> Ibid.

<sup>59</sup> Christine Newman, "Cross Examination Frustrates De Rossa," *The Irish Times*, March 1, 1997, <<http://www.irishtimes.com/news/cross-examination-frustrates-de-rossa-1.47786>> (Accessed February 3, 2015).

<sup>60</sup> John Sweeney, *North Korea Undercover: Inside the World's Most Secret State* (London: Transworld Publishers, 2013), 206.

<sup>61</sup> Sweeney, *North Korea Undercover*, 209.

North Korean society, Breathnach explains that he had “never heard anyone, including De Rossa, say anything about these things until 1989-1990 when the WPI began to unravel anyway. [Breathnach] heard people laughing at it as if, ‘Oh ho ho, those f-----n North Koreans’ kind of thing. But [he] never heard any kind of critique.”<sup>62</sup> In the 1980s, most WPI members viewed North Korea as an isolated socialist nation with a dictatorial leadership that limits the freedoms of its people. On the other hand, they were also fond of North Korea’s anti-imperialist platform and sympathized with its calls for nuclear disarmament. In 1990, Breathnach proposed that the WPI sever ties with this “one-family dynastic state,” which he described as “Orwellian.”<sup>63</sup> However, Garland and a few of the top officials in the party dismissed Breathnach’s proposal and continued their dealings with the North Korean government.

## Conclusion

At the party conference in 1988, the WPI declared, “Our efforts to assist the Korean people in their struggle are on a number of fronts, cultural and political. As with so many areas of our activity, the need to combat the distortion and lies peddled about the Korean struggle is one of the most important.”<sup>64</sup> However, the WPI-KWP relationship may have went beyond the cultural and political fronts as Sean Garland, the driving force behind the WPI-KWP relationship, may have been helping the North Korean government disseminate high quality counterfeit U.S. dollars, known as “supernotes,” in Great Britain and Eastern Europe. At the 2005

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<sup>62</sup> Breathnach quoted in Farrell, “Rocky Road to Pyongyang,” <<http://www.nknews.org/2013/05/the-rocky-road-to-pyongyang-dprk-ira-relations-in-the-1980s/>> (Accessed January 15, 2015).

<sup>63</sup> Hamley and Millar, *The Lost Revolution*, 564.

<sup>64</sup> Workers’ Party of Ireland, “General Secretary’s Report to the Workers’ Party Ard Fheis, Annual Delegate Conference 1988” (1988). *Materials*. Paper 14. <<http://arrow.dit.ie/workerpmat/14/>> (Accessed February 17, 2015).

WPI conference in Belfast, Garland was arrested on charges that he had aided in the distribution of one million dollars' worth of North Korean-made supernotes, which were meant to undermine and disrupt the economy of the United States.<sup>65</sup> Garland was later released on bail but U.S. authorities continued to try to extradite Garland. In 2011, the Irish High Court finally dismissed the U.S. application to extradite Garland.<sup>66</sup>

As the Soviet system crumbled from within and the WPI reassessed their commitment to Marxism-Leninism in the early 1990s, "the Korean struggle" was no longer seen as critically important by the WPI's international affairs committee. According to former WPI member Martin Lynch, "It was clear that, at the time, knowledge of relations with North Korea was kept to a handful of people at the very top."<sup>67</sup> Tony Heffernan, the former press officer for the WPI, recalls that the topic of North Korea was not a priority for WPI members in the parliament.<sup>68</sup> North Korea clearly did not become the Marxian model for most members of the WPI. However, the North Koreans were able to get the WPI on board with their calls for Korean reunification and the denuclearization of the Korean peninsula. Despite its "Orwellian" society, North Korea represented certain values that attracted the WPI: self-reliance, anti-imperialism, and Third World socialism. North Korea's relations with non-state actors, such as the WPI, open a new way of viewing the Kim family state. While isolated by nations of the so-called "Free World," the North Korean

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<sup>65</sup> "Leader of Irish Workers' Party and Official Irish Republican Army Arrested in United Kingdom on U.S. Indictment Charging Trafficking in Counterfeit United States Currency," *U.S. Department of Justice Press Release* (October 8, 2005) <[https://web.archive.org/web/20051014220354/http://www.justice.gov/usao/dc/Press\\_Releases/2005\\_Archives/Oct\\_2005/05370.html](https://web.archive.org/web/20051014220354/http://www.justice.gov/usao/dc/Press_Releases/2005_Archives/Oct_2005/05370.html)> (Accessed March 12, 2015); "US Says North Korea Forged Dollars," *BBC News* (October 13, 2005), <<http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/asia-pacific/4337610.stm>> (Accessed April 4, 2015).

<sup>66</sup> "Garland 'delighted' as extradition to US denied," *Irish Independent* (December 22, 2011), <<http://www.independent.ie/irish-news/courts/garland-delighted-as-extradition-to-us-denied-26804527.html>> (Accessed May 16, 2015).

<sup>67</sup> Author's communication with Martin Lynch (February 17, 2015).

<sup>68</sup> Author's communication with Tony Heffernan (February 25, 2015).

leadership devoted a significant amount of financial resources to influencing First World radical movements, like Irish Republicanism. While the DPRK leadership's global publicity campaign ultimately failed, it contests the label of the DPRK as a "hermit kingdom." The Cold War was a competition between heavyweights, chiefly the United States, the Soviet Union, and China, but the radical ideological orientation of a small power such as North Korea allowed it to punch above its weight class in the international order and confront hegemonic powers. Although the Kim family's personality cult later left many Western supporters disenchanted with the DPRK's version of socialism, the radical politics of Pyongyang initially appealed to non-aligned political movements, such as Irish republicanism.

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