



## Evaluation of the Second Plenary Meeting of the Eighth Central Committee of the Workers' Party of Korea

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The Second Plenary Meeting of the Eighth Central Committee of the Workers' Party of Korea was held for four days from February 8<sup>th</sup> to 11<sup>th</sup>, 2021. It was an extension of the 8<sup>th</sup> Congress of the Workers' Party of Korea, the First Plenary Meeting of the Eighth Central Committee of the Workers' Party of Korea, and the 4<sup>th</sup> Session of the 14<sup>th</sup> Supreme People's Assembly of the Democratic People's Republic of Korea that were held in January. The meeting was convened to discuss and decide on plans for the tasks of 2021 that were mentioned during the Eighth Central Committee of the Workers' Party of Korea.

At this plenary meeting, five amendments were introduced, reviewed, and chosen. Specifically, the details of the first year within the five-year plan that was presented at the Eighth Central Committee of the Workers' Party of Korea, the issue of socially strengthening the struggle against non-socialism, the amendment of the rulebook of the Central Committee of the Workers' Party of Korea, the review of the <Explanation of the Rules of the Workers' Party of Korea>, and other 'organizational issues' were addressed. As shown in the purpose of the meeting, the discussion focused on issues related to the implementation of the 2021 economic plan, which was reported by North Korean leader Kim Jong Un for three days.

Notable points at the plenary session included the 2021 economic plan submitted to the party, changes in personnel, including a new director of the Economic Affairs Department of the Workers' Party of Korea, strengthening legal discipline, and presenting strong countermeasures against antisocialism and anti-socialist practice.

First, North Korea has critically reviewed the economic plan for 2021 since the party's 8<sup>th</sup> congress and proceeded with a new adjustment process. North Korea, which adopted the development and reinforcement strategy through the party's 8<sup>th</sup> congress, aims to in-

crease state control over resources and products in the economy, restore the balance between departments, and smoothly operate the production process. This is only possible if the government accurately understands departmental demand and guarantees necessary funds and materials. However, the cabinet mechanically collected data from each department and submitted a plan that does not reflect reality.

In order to narrow the gap between the party's intentions and the current situation and increase the feasibility of the plan, executives on the spot are invited to join the plan. However, such may result in creating demands beyond objective conditions of resource constraints. To make the most efficient use of limited resources, a plan that can enable the cooperation of industry-related departments needs to be developed. However, if the resources and funds needed for production are not guaranteed, there will be no successful result. North Korean leader Kim Jong Un also pointed out that material security measures for major sectors of the economy are insufficient and that the government cannot shift this responsibility to each unit for national leadership.

Second, at the plenary session, Kim Tu-il was replaced by O Su-yong, the newly appointed chairman of the Second Economic Committee, as the director of the Economic Affairs Department of the Workers' Party of Korea. It has been a month since a major personnel reshuffle--a total of 27 people--was carried out, such as the appointment of the vice-premier of the Cabinet. Considering that concrete economic results have yet to be confirmed, the personnel change is seen as a symbol that calls for responsibility for the failure to make a plan as proposed at the party's 8<sup>th</sup> congress. Along with this personnel reshuffle, the role of the military and the economic department in the process of implementing the plan is drawing attention. Considering the fact that the military has a duty to protect the nation and its people from both military and non-military threats and the fact that North Korea's military has supported the civilian economy, the military may strengthen its role in economic management and operation.

The recent change of personnel in the economic department, such as the appointment of the former Minister of the Light Industrial Department, who achieved the 2020 economic plan at the 4<sup>th</sup> session of the Supreme People's Assembly, as the vice-premier of the Cabinet, reflects the achievements of the task. Frequent personnel changes show the party's firm commitment to economic management to executives but turn into a double-edged sword in that they stick to short-term results.

Third, the need to strengthen legal control in order to eradicate nonsocialist- and anti-socialist- practices was emphasized. North Korea's economic plan is a law-based project that must be complied with, and it states that strong measures will be taken against violations. If power, bureaucracy, and corruption within the party are individual-level issues, the selfish behavior that does not meet the demands of the party is an organiza-

tional issue, and the cabinet has raised the latter as a more serious issue. In particular, shifting responsibility to the lower unit in carrying out an economic plan is equivalent to encouraging illegal behavior; therefore, responsibility and execution within the unit are required. Meanwhile, the published content did not specifically address issues related to market activities although it criticized anti-socialist and non-socialist practice. If controls on economic executives are tightened, however, market activities that are linked with illegal cooperation may shrink.

Enactment of new sector legislation that can increase production and construction efficiency was mentioned. Recently, North Korea has been continuing to carry out projects that reflect the changes in its laws, including revising and supplementing the Socialist Commerce Act and the Small Business Act in 2020. Economic laws are expected to be revised and supplemented again this year; it is expected that the direction and details will show the changes related to the North Korean economy.

In this plenary session, North Korea showed its efforts to innovate and the limitations of reality. The process of correcting the harmful effects of the convention that emerged from the establishment of the economic plan was disclosed. It seems that the Cabinet intends to innovate economic management and operation to further lead the lower unit to innovate; it also provides supporting evidence that this year's economic plan must be realized with results. This can be understood from North Korea's financial situation. The fiscal plan for 2021 presented at the fourth meeting of the 14<sup>th</sup> Supreme People's Congress shows that North Korea's budget revenue and expenditure growth this year is expected to be 0.9% and 1.1%, respectively—the lowest since Kim Jong Un's leadership.

Allocating resources to maximize the use of existing production capacity was prioritized rather than increasing production capacity through new investments from the aspect of economic management. Investing in metal and chemical industries to produce materials, parts, and equipment, and guaranteeing demand in agriculture and light industries, as was discussed at the 8<sup>th</sup> Congress, will stabilize the economy in the short term by maintaining the relatively successful supply of food and consumer goods.

When it comes to successful economic policy this year, the COVID-19 situation also functions as a major variable of the year. While thorough quarantine is a top priority this year, normalization of cultural activities, such as reopening the Yangdok Hot Spring Cultural Recreation Center in February, is taking place. Unlike last year, this year's plan seems to have been drawn up to reflect the quarantine. However, it is inevitable that foreign economic activities will resume in order to reduce the burden on the economy. Although the plenary session did not introduce any details, it is argued that important tasks related to foreign economy and tourism were presented. The process to resume

trade is getting prepared, although the time period may change depending on the COVID-19 situation. ♣

※ *Translator's note: This is a third party's unofficial translation of the original paper which was written in Korean. All references should be made to the original paper.*

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