BLOOD COAL EXPORT FROM NORTH KOREA

Pyramid scheme of earnings maintaining structures of power
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The North Korean Economy and Export: Pyramid Scheme of Earnings supported by human-chattels

The North Korean economic structure is an exploitative structure resembling a pyramid. It is similar to a large financial pyramid fraud, where the top does not invest the earnings, but requires the constant flow of resources from below to support spending. The regime’s system of earning revenues relies heavily on slavery and compulsory labor and extortion of goods. It is in many ways akin to mafia-type operations that use a shady network of foreign trading partners, and export goods often obtained through criminal methods. Much of the revenue generated is foreign currency that the government uses to trade with international partners, rather than reinvest in domestic infrastructure and services.

The pyramid of earnings starts with the Leader and his dedicated shadow government, the secretive Third-Floor Secretariat. The highest orders of the pyramid are distributed through the State Affairs Commission, the Executive of the Supreme Assembly and the Politburo of the Party. The State Affairs Commission is the most powerful actor in North Korean politics. It is chaired by the North Korean Leader Kim Jong Un, and includes top officials from the Ministry of State Security, Ministry of Public Safety, Korea People’s Army (KPA), and Ministry of Foreign Affairs. Top officials from these Ministries sitting on the State Affairs Commission also hold positions in all executive bodies of the State. This practice maintains the tight nexus of economic exploitation and human rights crimes administered by the state: true to North Korea’s model of the planned economy, planning orders for quotas of goods and mobilization of free forced labor are sent to all levels of society through all Cabinet Ministries, law enforcement agencies, Party organs, as well as other institutions of social coercion and mobilization under them (Neighborhood Watch Units, Women’s Union, Youth League, etc.).

Over the last 50 years, the North Korean regime has perfected its economic system based on citizens’ submissions of quotas of goods that are exported to earn foreign currency. In addition to normal industrial or agricultural output in government-assigned jobs each citizen must provide unpaid compulsory labor and donate quotas of goods from his or her private income. Labor and goods are organized through various channels, be it local organs of the Workers’ Party of Korea, the Korea Democratic Women’s Union (Women’s Union) and other political associations for which membership is obligatory; Neighborhood Watch Units (Inminban), hospitals, schools, or officials in the black markets. State organs either benefit directly from uncompensated labor and goods, for example in mobilizing free labor to build new apartments in Pyongyang, or sell submitted goods in exchange for foreign currency, without committing funds or resources to build infrastructure or provide services for the common people.

This system is a heavy burden on the informal grassroots economy, driven primarily by women’s development and entrepreneurship. As the breadwinner in many families, one woman is required to submit goods and perform forced labor several times by different government agencies. A woman who trades on the black market to provide for her family following the effective collapse of the state rationing system in the 1990s, pays daily taxes to officials at the market. She must donate resources through the Women’s Union which is her assigned political institution, again through her Neighborhood Watch Unit that is the smallest surveillance unit of government administered across approximately 30–40 families, and – if she has children at school – submit money and goods imposed on her children there. Other members of the family are not exempt from submissions of goods or forced labor, but much of the psychological and financial burden of submitting goods and providing labor falls on the woman of the family as breadwinner, wife, mother, and daughter. This is especially the case since the Arduous March of the 1990s brought about the collapse of rationing system and wages for men who are obligated to work in government agencies, and forced women to build black markets and trading networks which generated more family income than their husbands.

Women’s Union units throughout the country enforce obligatory weekly ideological sessions, coerce goods and mobilize free forced labor among the housewives unemployed at official state institutions. Each unit has been reported to be assigned tons of beans, corns, berries, mushrooms, cooking oil, bricks, gloves for workers, etc. The Neighborhood Watch Units are connected to the Ministry of State Security (every Head of Neighborhood Watch Unit reports to the MSS secret police and is considered a secret informant by the local residents) will also mobilize all of the residents of each unit to provide similar quotas. Children who attend school must provide goods through each school assigned its own quotas. This includes wires, copper and iron utensils as metal for building tanks, and rabbit skins for production of soldiers’ uniforms or gloves. Children who cannot provide resources do not attend schools.

The Cabinet Ministries and Party organs also need to create a reserve budget for public or military infrastruc-
tution. For example, if the North Korean Leader orders new apartments in Pyongyang, or orders construction of a road in the region he passed through, the funds do not come from a central budget. Various Ministries are called and each gets an assignment to produce quotas of materials and labor to build the portion assigned to them. The burden is passed down to the citizens as a planning order. This is where unpaid compulsory labor is required to fulfill orders of an assigned portion of an apartment, a restaurant, length of road, or railroad that has been given to each Ministry. The People's Army sends military personnel to construction projects; the Women's League receives orders from Party organs to send women to labor on government and military construction projects; children and youth are directed to work on farms, or gather wood, pebbles, sand for construction projects, and other small materials. Laborers do not receive payment or food; they must bring their own lunch or go without food while working on these assignments.

The system of extortion is compartmentalized so that different government agencies are unaware of how much citizens are required to provide to any other agency. This practice disguises the fact that resources submitted go to the same entities at the top of the pyramid. The resulting extortion of goods and labor is extensive, as various organs impose large quotas on citizens at the same time.

Quotas of products for export are also met through the enslaved labor of men, women and children in detention camps owned and operated by the Ministry of State Security/MSS (secret police) and the Ministry of Public Safety/MPS (police). These are the same camps where the magnitude of crimes against humanity has been reported in the last two decades by NGOs and documented by the UN Commission of Inquiry for DPRK. These two agencies of societal oppression each own a vast network of detention camps, including political prison camps. The camps maintain slave labor to extract mineral resources and produce other primary and secondary industry products. Detainees are brought to camps to provide slave labor primarily by the Ministry of State Security, and they are usually of low class (songbun). Their descendants are ascribed the same songbun and also live in conditions of slavery, or akin to slavery, often in mining areas.

The largest production sites are the vast political prison camps (Kwalliso) where resources are mined on a large scale for export, while farming is used to feed the detainees, guards and officials and assure a degree of self-sufficiency. Prisons (Kyoobsawo) conduct similar operations at smaller scales. These agencies also retain control over seemingly innocent mining towns next to camps named Workers’ Districts (Rodong jagu) which are often old political prison camps, and where political prisoners who have received amnesty are still forced to live and work. Some MPS prisons and MSS political prison camps are placed in areas with the best agricultural and mining sites in the country, indicating that detention facilities are a key contributor to North Korea’s domestic and international trade.

In turn, the People’s Army sends its lower-ranking soldiers as unpaid mining and farming labor for both domestic use and exports. It has been found to ‘lend’ soldiers to MSS and MPS political prison camps to be used for labor or transport of goods, and deploys them to construction projects for the government and the military. This demonstrates one of the many connections between the military, law enforcement agencies, and the systemic labor exploitation in political prison camps.

Everything that is valuable is exported, causing constant shortages in the country. For example, there is an abundance of coal export and steady provision of coal-generated electricity for coal mines, but a constant lack of coal for homes, hospitals or schools outside Pyongyang. Citizens are required to fish, gather fruits and herbs, and produce home goods for submission and export while most of them are still malnourished and suffer from lack of necessities.

The exploitation of North Korean citizens is maintained by the financial arrangements of state agencies. Since the 1980s, each Ministry and other governmental agency has received full responsibility to generate their own operating expenses while also submitting foreign currency to the Third-Floor Secretariat and for the personal use of the Leader. Ministries and agencies with access to minerals or land could easily use their industrial or agricultural output to produce exportable goods. However, other agencies, including public servants without ready access to exportable goods, must devise other strategies to meet their operating expenses and foreign currency submission quotas. For example, the Ministry of Foreign Affairs was reported to ‘borrow’ agricultural labor force for foreign labor from Horticulture Institute for a portion of the workers’ salaries for its own use; individual diplomats may smuggle goods or arrange business contacts for domestic agencies for a price; or charge and keep a transportation fee when receiving humanitarian aid.

Each Ministry and Party entity has its own trade companies to find and pursue opportunities to generate funds. Companies are only allowed to trade in certain amounts of certain resources if they have a license (waksu) given by government. Trade companies buy goods and mineral products in amount limited by waku licence. If, for instance, they need to acquire mineral products, they are not limited to obtain them from the mine owned by their own agency (be it the Ministry, Party organ or the Military), but rather maintain complex business network between them to obtain products at the competitive price and to maximize their own and their agency’s profit. Trade companies compete fiercely at every stage to financially support their state agency. They must have strong performance from the previous year so they can receive waku again.

There is no transparency or scrutiny over the state’s revenue and expenditure. The leadership monopolizes all political and economic institutions, and receives large profits from their trading companies, while citizens remain underserved by the state infrastructure and are constantly being chased for submission of goods and provision of free, compulsory labor. As such, the North Korean system of exploitation is a modernized form of feudalistic slavery; entirely dependent on tributes paid to the Executive bodies of the North Korean regime and ultimately to the North Korean Leader.
Connection between production and export of minerals, military industry and human rights-related crimes

This pyramid economic system of North Korea is also directly linked to the production and proliferation of weapons, including weapons of mass destruction. In a unique system in the world, the North Korean MSS (secret police) and MPS (police) which operate all types of detention facilities, including political prison camps which use slavery to produce goods for export, as well as the Ministry of People’s Army have a large number of foreign trade companies that possess exclusive licenses to export sanctioned mineral products, animal and agriculture products originating from society and detention facilities. These companies also trade with companies owned by Bureau 39 or the Second Economic Committee, which export narcotics and weapons. This is a joint economic and criminal venture that competes for largest profits at the highest cost for the society.

The Ministry of State Security also operates a separate MSS Customs Office, and its largest operations are in Nampo Port, the closest sea port to Pyongyang and the port which receives the most humanitarian aid shipments. The MSS Customs Office conducts operations for protecting the secrecy of goods exported by Bureau 39 and the Second Economic Committee. These are agencies known to be directly implicated in breaches of United Nations Security Council sanctions. Bureau 39 of the Korea Worker’s Party is a slush fund for the Leader and top officials, and the Second Economic Committee produces nuclear, biological and chemical weapons of mass destruction. MSS officers also sail on North Korean ships, which are the only ships permitted to transport goods from the Second Economic Committee and Bureau 39. These measures ensure that no one has access to special cargo hidden by the Second Economic Bureau and Bureau 39 in so-called ‘dark rooms’.

This investigation wishes to draw special attention of the international community, including business community, to the connection between minerals extraction and export, and systematic persecution and discrimination. Mining and exporting minerals, which remain some of North Korea’s largest exports even after Security Council sanctions, are dependent on multigenerational policies of persecution and discrimination confining people of low socio-political class to mining labor. The basis of this discriminatory class policy was developed by the regime shortly after the Korean War and has been passed down to create a permanent underclass bonded to mining labor and no freedom to choose an education, occupation or residence. Minerals originating from North Korea are produced under system arguably in breach of international criminal law that has no respect for human life and labor standards; degrades international competition and pricing; practices the worst forms of discrimination; and commits numerous human rights crimes, including modern forms of inherited slavery. States and companies purchasing goods and resources originating from North Korea further sponsor such crimes.

1. Extract industry labor in North Korea is reserved for people of the lowest socio-political class under a system created by the regime and enforced by MSS (secret police). The system is inherited, which means that generations of people in North Korea are unable to escape the bondage of mining labor. These persons have been discriminated against based on their ancestors’ attributed political opinion or belief under the songbun (thodae) system and inherit the stigma together with many social restrictions. Citizens of low class are restricted from access to higher education, and are not allowed to change residence or to take jobs other than physical labor in their assigned mine. Generations of people are born, live and die in the mining zones and experience the worst types of persecution and discrimination throughout their lifetime. Individuals who have been accused of committing a political crime (which usually only amounts to exercising basic human rights and freedoms) are also forcibly displaced to detention camps where they are assigned the worst jobs.

2. The minerals are commonly produced in kyohwaso detentions and kwalliso political prison camps run by MPS (police) and MSS (secret police) and are extracted in extreme conditions of slave labor, including lack of food, hygiene, rest, education, and medical assistance, and very low safety and environmental standards. These Ministries remove all agency from individuals over their lives and can arbitrarily decide which detainees live and which die. The MSS and MPS profit from detention production with minimal operating costs by providing the output to their own trading companies for export, that creates profit that continuously sponsors such an inhumane detention production system. These Ministries also submit their assigned quotas in foreign currency to the top leadership of the country.

3. Much of the anthracite and gold produced in South Pyongan Province is mined in the vast land covered by political prison camps and detentions: Camp 18 in Bongchang-ri, Bukchang County, Camp
of their low songbun, they are often forcibly relocated to other mines or areas of production on closed mines. They are completely restricted from changing residence, job, or attaining higher education.

4. The innocently named Labor Districts (Rodong jagu) in the vicinity of political prison camps where large extract industry is concentrated are often remaining parts of former political prison camps or detentions that existed on the same site. Labor Districts house people who are ‘released’ prisoners and other political enemies who were banished as a punishment. While not theoretically a detention camp any longer, the areas house generations of people born there who cannot escape their bondage of low songbun/thodae and mining labor. Areas formerly segregated as political prison camps were renamed Labor Districts while housing the same families, requiring the same labor, and being staffed by exactly the same personnel with a mere change in title. In practice, Labor Districts have similar conditions as the political prison camps they once were.

5. The Prisoners Area of Camp 18 in Bongchang-ri, Bukchang and the Released Prisoners Area of Camp 18 in Tukchang Labour District also houses children born to prisoners in the camps or banished with their families as guilty by association. Children from the young age of seven are used in mining work, such as collecting mud and preparing it as adhesive for explosives, or collecting daily quotas of 20-25 kg buckets of coal that have fallen off the coal wagons. Children receive only basic education for half of the day until they reach 16, after which they usually have to work in the mines unless they are identified to have a particular skill. Even when released with their families, they often remain to grow and work in the mines of the Released Prisoners Areas. Pregnant women also work in the mine shafts until their pregnancy is visible, afterwards they are reassigned to loading units outside of the shaft.

6. The system of songbun enforced by MSS (secret police) also determines mining jobs in the so-called social mines. Social mines are mines that are run by government enterprises where civilians provide the physical labor force, but such labor is reserved for civilians of low class. Our investigation has found that the primary category of low songbun mining jobs is constituted by thousands of South Korean prisoners of war who were not released after the Korean War. This songbun has been passed down to their children and grandchildren who are bonded to labor in coal, lead, zinc, magnesite and other mines. They are completely restricted from changing residence, job, or attaining higher education.

7. All miners and their families are often bartered from production site to production site. As a result of their low songbun, they are often forcibly relocated to other mines or areas of production on closed former camps. This was the case with a group of families of South Korean prisoners of war working in social mines forcibly relocated to mines vacated by MSS Camp 22 in Hoeryong, North Hamgyong Province when the prisoners were relocated elsewhere in 2012, or when released prisoners from MPS Camp 18 were sent to production areas of the previously closed Camp 17, which became magnetite mining area still managed by MPS.

8. All of the companies attached to the Ministry of State Security (MSS), Ministry of People’s Safety (MPS), Korean People’s Army, the Worker’s Party of Korea and its specialized Departments and Bureaus, the Cabinet, General Reconnaissance Bureau (including their intelligence units operating through foreign companies, including intelligence units such as United Front Department, operating through Chongryon in Japan and targeting South Korea) must meet quotas assigned to submit sums of foreign currency to the top leadership. They have complex inter-connections and trade and compete with each other due to the restricted licenses (waku) that allow them to trade in specified products, particularly mineral trading. They must make enough profit from these sales to meet both their operating costs and submit foreign currency according to the quota. They lose these profitable licenses if they do not fulfill the financial quotas. These companies also receive orders of luxury goods and military components to purchase abroad. The MSS (secret police) and MPS (police) submit their output as a share in foreign currency earning to the Third-Floor Secretariat where Bureaus 35(now believed to be a part of General Reconnaissance Bureau), 38, 39 and the Personal Secretariat of the Leader are located.

9. The extract industry, including operations conducted under conditions of human rights crimes, has been financing continuous increases in military expenditure of North Korea since the 1970s. Extract industry production, including in detentions and political prison camps, cannot be separated from military development and proliferation of weapons for two major reasons. The first is that all trade companies, Ministries and agencies are interconnected, including through the multiple positions the top personnel hold across the highest bodies of the State. The second is that trade companies which sell narcotics or military products have licenses for other mineral products produced by MPS (police) and MSS (secret police) detentions or other Cabinet Ministries, such as the Ministry of Coal.

10. So-called social mines are often attached to important military and chemical weapons complexes. Secret military production factories that may be innocently called “Tractor Factory” or “Pig Farm” have been reported to have their own underground military production and are serviced by their own coal mines through conveyors that transport coal directly from the mine to the factory. Similarly, low songbun persons and their offspring are attached to these mines. Such special complexes operate their own forced labor detentions, separate from town and district detentions operated by the MPS police. These special detentions are only for the workers of the special complexes, and are enforced when workers are late for their shift or steal food because they are starved.
There have been several media articles in recent months increasingly criticizing sanctions for having a dire impact on average North Korean citizens. None, however, discuss the implications of lifting sanctions and allowing for free trade of minerals and agricultural goods extorted from citizens or obtained through slavery labor in detentions. None also discuss how the North Korean oppressive quota system that is linked to export suppresses any possibility of development or reforms in North Korea.

One perspective on sanctions is that they largely contribute to the situation of deprivation, and that the ‘impoverished’ regime practices extortion due to the lack of resources caused by extensive restrictions on trade. We claim that it is first and foremost the pyramid feudal system, which requires and depends on exploitation, and supports redirection of money away from country infrastructure. This system has been intact for decades and has evolved over time, benefiting from hereditary leadership and total control of the society.

The North Korean economic system, based on extortion of quotas of goods from citizens, has never been analyzed as a major factor to the mass starvation and deprivation of citizens. Testimonies gathered by various organizations from North Korean citizens escaping the country since the 1990s, inform of ever-increasing quotas. One of our organization’s early reports gathered accounts of children reporting very high dropout rates from schools in late 1990s, during the worst famine in the history of the country, due to hunger and inability to provide quotas of materials and labor organized by schools. When the unofficial private market economy developed as a coping mechanism for starving families following the collapse of rations, the authorities both sanctioned and restricted the black markets. The regime created regulations to send officials who gather daily taxes on stallholders. Citizens, in majority women, became largely independent from the state by relying only on the market economy to provide for their families. The North Korean regime responded by placing increasingly large quotas through the Korea Democratic Women’s Union to tap into women’s private resources, again taking away from its citizens. As such, even when citizens were able to improve their own lives, the regime exploited positive developments not of its own design by increasing quotas as the easiest form of earning profit. This practice was confirmed through our three rounds of reports on women’s rights from the late 1990s to 2016. The most shocking were the answers that nobody dared to boycott these feudalistic practices, nor raise complaints: most did not understand the concept of making a complaint against a State organ with the purpose of improving conditions for all stakeholders.

Much of this information has been viewed separately by external actors and often interpreted either as a coping mechanism designed by hard-hit institutions amid the collapse of rationing system, or as an abuse of power of corrupt officials, teachers, doctors, and people in other positions of power. While corruption indisputably exists, it must be understood as a natural consequence of the parasitic top-down chain system in which every Ministry, every institution, factory, school, and hospital is required to provide quotas of goods. Everyone in the country, even doctors, teachers, or diplomats who by the specific nature of their job cannot produce goods are required to provide their individual quotas to their own institution and pass orders down to the people they themselves control: patients, students, staff, and so on. Only the average citizen has no one lower to pass these requirements further down. These citizens scrape together their own resources, illegally cross the border to China to access resources not available in North Korea, or resort to stealing from state-owned resources to provide what they do not have. It is a vicious cycle that deprives the population of agency that could otherwise lead to reforms and development of the country.

This system has been and still is a ticking bomb. This massive pull on resources from people seems to be one of the key contributing factors that led to the North Korean Holodomor of the 1990s, in which an estimated 1 to 2 million people died of hunger. This situation is liable to repeat itself as the North Korean system becomes increasingly exploitative: similar to the pyramid earning scheme, the regime needs ever larger resources to support increasing spending, particularly in keeping pace with the resource demands of military research, development and testing.

The North Korean system was devised this way to ensure its sustained operation and longevity despite economic hardships, sanctions, or lack of investments in the development of the country. As long as the citizens are heavily controlled while being exploited to support domestic consumption by the leadership, and as long as the world buys blood products extorted through the slave labor of political prisoners, the North Korean regime can sustain such an economy for many years without the need for reforms or investments.

Thus, when discussing the benefits of lifting sanctions, the basic question that the international community
needs to ask is: who does this entire mineral export benefit? If we look at the yearly planning order of one political prison camp producing anthracite, the volume of coal North Korea has been able to produce does not make sense vis-à-vis the reported complete lack of coal for hospitals and schools over decades, and reports of shortages of electricity in the Summer of 2019, unless we take into account various witness statements that most of the coal has been used for export to earn foreign currency quotas for the regime.

If the sanctions regime worked, there should have been more supply left for domestic consumption. The opposite is happening. If sanctions reduced demand for North Korean coal and resulted in diminished domestic production, it should also be visible on the satellite photos. However, both this and other investigations have observed that production is continuing or even expanding in some mining areas, especially after 2016 when the most severe sanctions on coal and other mineral products were imposed. Our investigation confirmed expanding perimeters of what was known as MPS Camp 18 Prisoners Area in Bukchang, with all mines operating and cargo trains running. The adjacent Released Prisoners area in Tukchang Labor District presents similar satellite imagery. If the production reported by prisoners in Bukchang is correct (8 million tons), the South Korean official estimates of a recent total of 21.6 million tons of coal production in North Korea seem low, even when we adjust the numbers for a decreasing level of production.

In addition, there are too many sets of contradicting data. The following example reveals the large discrepancies that create even more questions:

The ROK’s Korea Statistical Information Service reports that North Korea produced 31.06 million tons of coal in 2016 (out of which 21.7 million tons was anthracite and the rest lignite). According to the U.S. Energy Information Administration, North Korea exported about 25 million in the same year. According to the same two sets of data, it produced 27 million tons in 2015 while exporting about 22 million tons. Unless North Korea holds onto large reserves, the coal remaining for domestic use would amount to approximately 5-6 million tons. Yet the yearly consumption of Bukchang Thermal Power Plant alone is reported to be 5 million tons of anthracite.

What about both anthracite and lignite coal for other domestic usage? What about other power plants, heavy industry, military complexes or elite houses which use coal for heating? While power shortages were reported for public usage, the miners in social mines, military complexes and detention facilities reported that mines had electricity 24 hours in order to maintain three 8-hour shifts with rare outages of electricity.

North Korea surely must have lower actual production than capacity for various reasons, including non-mechanization, outdated machinery, etc. However, the ROK official data show surprisingly large discrepancies between estimated yearly production capacity and actual production. The ROK data derived from the Korea Economics Energy Institute list 77 anthracite mines, but provide data for only 18 mines. For only 18 out of 77 anthracite mines the data list yearly production capacity of about 19.85 million tons, while actual yearly production is reported to be about 1.8 million tons. This suggests North Korean mines are producing only 10% of their full capacity. This official data do not include the names of mines in the Bukchang Camp.

The President of the United States reportedly said after the failed Hanoi Summit that North Korea “wanted the sanctions lifted in their entirety”. This is the key matter for the regime, because it will allow the continuation of the slavery system of production and easier access to the foreign markets to sell their blood products. Similarly, in August 2019, the South Korean government announced a contribution of approximately $1.18 billion USD to its Inter-Korean Cooperation Fund to implement a peace economy, including $403 million to infrastructure construction. The stated intention of the increase in contributions was to work towards a unified economy as a precursor to a unified peninsula.1 The North Korean government has a systemic practice of intergenerational discrimination that determines allocation to jobs, working conditions, and living conditions. In addition, the regime uses unpaid compulsory labor of women and children on infrastructure, military and development projects. Without enforcement and verification of international labor and human rights standards and genuine reforms that will abolish this parasitic feudal chain and free resources for investments and development, lifting sanctions or providing economic development funds without verifiable change will never lead to the improvement of the situation of North Korean citizens. It is also questionable that it will lead to the de-militarization of North Korea.

Sanctions have had a limited impact on North Korea’s economy and weapons development activities. They limit or prohibit trade in a long list of goods and services, but the companies that contract with North Korea’s trading companies are smaller and more agile than the large institutions that attempt to comply with Security Council sanctions. Smaller companies can conduct more informal transactions and otherwise go undetected in conducting financial activity with and through larger institutions such as international banks. This goes double for North Korea’s trading companies, which are only granted a license (‘waku’) to trade in a small quantity or portion of a good or workers. The transactions are comparatively small, facilitating transfers of mostly cash, goods and workers, but there are many of them under each institution.

Some goods are exempt from sanctions as long as they are not used to fund nuclear and other weapons development. Our research has revealed that all North Korean labor, goods, and funds submitted to the Kim family through the Third-Floor Secretariat are intermingled by that agency. Each Ministry and agency has special sections that generate goods for foreign currency earning, which is in turn managed by special Bureaus of the Party, such as Bureau 35 (which is known to have become a part of the General Reconnaissance Bureau), Bureau 39 (which manages slush funds for the leadership) and Bureau 38 (which generates funds for the Leader and elites). They all belong to the Third-Floor Secretariat. In a practical sense, it is impossible to disentangle funds for weapons development from funds derived through the labor exploitation of North Koreans. In effect, trade of some goods not prohibited by Security Council sanctions still contribute to the Kim family’s weapons development and depend on systematic and intergenerational human rights violations.

Some companies under the Korean People’s Army, MPS (police) and MSS (secret police) fully own and trade production in their mines; in other instances the license (‘waku’) decides how much company can trade from the given mine and provides the rest to other companies that possess such license, such as companies that

generate funds for Bureau 39 or Second Economic Committee.

● AFTER THE UN REPORT OF THE COMMISSION OF INQUIRY, THE UN RESOLUTION ON THE SITUATION OF HUMAN RIGHTS IN THE DPRK HAS ENCOURAGED YEARLY DISCUSSION ON THE HUMAN RIGHTS SITUATION AT THE UN SECURITY COUNCIL. NKHR CALLS ON THE UN SECURITY COUNCIL TO DISCUSS, AS A MATTER OF URGENCY, THE CONNECTION BETWEEN HUMAN RIGHTS CRIMES (INCLUDING PRACTICES AKIN TO MODERN FORMS OF SLAVERY UNDERPINNING THE MINERAL INDUSTRY AND MINERALS EXPORT OF NORTH KOREA) AND FUNDING FOR MILITARY DEVELOPMENT AND PROLIFERATION OF WEAPONS.

● THE INTERNATIONAL COMMUNITY SHOULD RECOMMEND THAT THE UN SPECIALIZED AGENCIES AND RELEVANT HUMAN RIGHTS BODIES INVESTIGATE THE SYSTEM OF MODERN PRACTICES OF SLAVERY IN NORTH KOREA, ITS USAGE IN MINERAL INDUSTRY IN SOCIAL MINES, MILITARY COMPLEXES AND POLITICAL PRISON CAMPS AND OTHER DETentions OF NORTH KOREA, AND INTERNATIONAL BUSINESS AND EXPORT OF PRODUCTS OBTAINED THROUGH SLAVERY PRACTICES BY COMPANIES OF MSS (SECRET POLICE), MPS (POLICE), KPA (ARMY), SECOND ECONOMIC COMMITTEE, BUREAU 39, GENERAL RECONNAISSANCE BUREAU AND ITS RELATED INTELLIGENCE UNITS, INCLUDING CHONGRYON IN JAPAN AS TRANSNATIONAL ORGANIZED CRIME.

● THE LIFTING OF SANCTIONS ON EXPORT OF MINERALS SHOULD BE CONDITIONED UPON NORTH KOREA’S IMMEDIATE ACCESSION TO THE INTERNATIONAL LABOR ORGANIZATION AND RATIFICATION OF ITS MAJOR CONVENTIONS, IN PARTICULAR:
  - NO. 29 FORCED LABOR CONVENTION AND NO. 105 ABOLISHMENT OF FORCED LABOUR LAYING OUT PRINCIPLES THAT FORCED AND COMPULSORY LABOR CANNOT BE OBTAINED AS A MEANS OF POLITICAL COERCION, OR EDUCATION, OR AS A PUNISHMENT FOR HOLDING OR EXPRESSING POLITICAL VIEWS, AS A MEANS OF RACIAL, SOCIAL, NATIONAL OR RELIGIOUS DISCRIMINATION, AND AS A METHOD MOBILIZING AND USING LABOR FOR THE PURPOSES OF ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT
  - NO. 138 MINIMUM AGE CONVENTION AND NO. 182 WORST FORMS OF CHILD LABOUR
  - NO. 111 DISCRIMINATION CONVENTION
  - NO. 87 FREEDOM OF ASSOCIATION AND NO. 98 RIGHT TO ORGANISE AND COLLECTIVE BARGAINING CONVENTION

● THE LIFTING OF SANCTIONS ON COAL AND GOLD SHOULD BE TIED TO VERIFIABLE AND PERMANENT ABOLISHMENT OF THE MSS AND MPS POLITICAL PRISON CAMPS AND DETentions WHERE THEY ARE MINED, IN PARTICULAR PRISONERS AREA IN BONGCHANG, BUKCHANG COUNTY (CAMP 18), AND ITS ADJACENT RELEASED PRISONERS AREA IN TUKCHANG LABOR DISTRICT, CAMP 14 AND CHOMA BONG CAMP IN KAECHON, AND KYOHWASO NO. 1 IN KAECHON WITH ITS SUBSIDIARIES IN SUNCHEON.

● THE INTERNATIONAL COMMUNITY SHOULD CALL FOR LISTS OF PERSONS EMPLOYED IN SOCIAL MINES AND MILITARY COMPLEXES IN NORTH HAMGYUNG AND SOUTH HAMGYUNG PROVINCES IN PARTICULAR: RYONGYANG AND KOMDOK COMPLEXES, AOJI RELATED MINING-MILITARY ENTERPRISES, EUNDOK, OBONG, SANGHWA, PUNGIN, TONGPO, HAKPO, KUKSHIM, AND KOGONWON MINES. THESE LISTS SHOULD INCLUDE NAMES OF MINERS’ PARENTS AND SHOULD BE VERIFIED BY INTERNATIONAL INSPECTORS AGAINST THE DATABASE OF SOUTH KOREAN CIVILIANS ABDUCTED DURING KOREAN WAR AND PRISONERS OF WAR. WE URGE THAT THE SOUTH KOREAN GOVERNMENT AND INTERNATIONAL COMMUNITY REQUEST THE RELEASE OF SOUTH KOREAN PRISONERS OF WAR AND CIVILIAN ABDUCTEES, AND THEIR SECOND AND THIRD GENERATIONS BONDED TO MINING INDUSTRY AND ALLOW THEM AND THEIR FAMILIES TO RETURN TO SOUTH KOREA, AFTER INDEPENDENT VERIFICATION OF THEIR WISHES.

● INDIVIDUAL STATES AND INTERGOVERNMENTAL ORGANIZATIONS SUCH AS EUROPEAN UNION SHOULD DEVELOP A WARNING SYSTEM FOR BUSINESSES AND THEIR SUBSIDIARIES OF THE HEIGHTENED RISK OF BEING INVOLVED WITH GROSS HUMAN RIGHTS ABUSES WHEN BIDDING FOR MINERAL RIGHTS IN NORTH KOREA, BUYING OR TRADING WITH ALL NORTH KOREAN COMPANIES AND THEIR REPRESENTATIVES, AND INTERMEDIARIES ABROAD THAT SELL SUCH PRODUCTS. STATES SHOULD REVIEW THEIR REGULATIONS AND ENFORCEMENT MEASURES THAT BUSINESSES INVOLVED IN SUCH OPERATIONS CONDUCT HUMAN RIGHTS DUE DILIGENCE BASED ON INDEPENDENT EVALUATION.

● NKHR CALLS ON THE ROK GOVERNMENT TO ADDRESS HUMAN RIGHTS CRIMES IN NORTH KOREA WHILE PROMOTING ITS VISION OF BUILDING A PEACEFUL AND PROSPEROUS PENINSULA. FOR THE SOUTH KOREAN GOVERNMENT TO COMMIT FUNDS TO JOINT ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT WITHOUT SCRUTINIZING THE LABOR THAT UNDERPINS IT, SHOWS A DISREGARD FOR THE DIGNITY AND HUMAN RIGHTS OF THE NORTH KOREANS PROVIDING THAT LABOR AND WOULD VIOLATE INTERNATIONAL STANDARDS RATIFIED BY ROK. CONDUCT RIGOROUS DUE DILIGENCE ON EXISTING OR PROSPECTIVE PARTNERS IN NORTH KOREA, INCLUDING PARTNERS AS TO THE DISBURSEMENT OF FUNDS FROM ITS INTER-KOREAN COOPERATION FUND. REQUIRE INDEPENDENT HUMAN RIGHTS AND FINANCIAL AUDITS AS A CONDITION OF ECONOMIC COOPERATION, AND ONLY COOPERATE IF IT CAN BE ESTABLISHED THAT WORK CAN BE DELIVERED WITHOUT SLAVE LABOR OR OTHER EGREGIOUS SYSTEMIC HUMAN RIGHTS VIOLATIONS.

● A CENTRAL SYSTEM OF DATA AND EVALUATION WILL BE NECESSARY TO ESTABLISH
RELIABLE ESTIMATES OF PRODUCTION OF COAL IN NORTH KOREA AND THE COUNTRY’S EXPORT SURPLUS. THERE ARE SUBSTANTIAL DISCREPANCIES IN NUMBERS BETWEEN SOUTH KOREAN OFFICIAL DATA OF NORTH KOREAN CAPACITY OF COAL PRODUCTION, ACTUAL PRODUCTION, REPORTS TO THE 1718 SANCTIONS COMMITTEE, AND OTHER COUNTRIES’ DATA SETS WHICH ESTIMATE HOW MUCH NORTH KOREAN COAL IS EXPORTED. THESE NUMBERS CREATE ADDITIONAL DISCREPANCIES WHEN TAKING INTO ACCOUNT THE PRODUCTION REPORTED BY WITNESSES WHO WORKED IN NORTH KOREAN MINES.

PART I
THE INTER-LINKED POLITICAL STRUCTURE OF STATE POWER, ECONOMIC COERCION, ENSLAVEMENT AND EXPORT
The inter-linked political structure

The System is devised so that officials sitting on the State Affairs Commission have multiple key roles in other Ministries and in leadership of the Party and the Supreme People’s Assembly. Decisions can be carried out more quickly and through various channels at the same time. This system is key when it comes to the economic coercion of forcing citizens to submit various goods that are then exported and limits number of top personnel involved in the foreign currency earning scheme, but also diversifies the channels through each key official involved in several structures can enforce the orders.

Ministries also perform duties that they would not perform under a strict division of responsibilities. For example, the Ministry of State Security (secret police) serve as a separate customs duties and protection service for Ministries and agencies that deal with military export, such as the Second Economic Committee, and Bureau 39, the Kim family’s exclusive slush fund. Bureau 35, which is suspected to have linked operations with the General Reconnaissance Bureau, Bureau 38, Bureau 39, and the Second Economic Committee, are all considered to be a part of the Third-Floor Secretariat.

The Chairman’s personal office in the Third-Floor Secretariat is the intermediary between the Chairman and the rest of the country, including the State Affairs Commission, the Politburo, and the Cabinet in which major Ministries are represented through officials who hold several government positions. The Third-Floor Secretariat is not displayed in the organizational structure of the North Korean government. It is invisible, but it has a “shadow” branch for every major Ministry and non-Ministerial state function, such as Party control.

The Third-Floor Secretariat performs the usual secretarial functions of a personal office, such as arranging state visits. Unlike other personal offices, it also contains expert advisory offices who help to maintain the myth that when the Chairman makes a domestic visit, he is an expert in all matters of the state from agriculture, through eye-surgery hospitals to military affairs. It will also inform the Chairman about the funds under its control so that he can order grants of money at will. The identities of the personnel of this office are strictly confidential, as is the information and resources it takes in. Both of these functions entrench the belief that the Chairman is omnipotent and omniscient. Given that the Secretariat formulates the policies, plans and expenditures for projects that the Chairman announces, North Korean Ministries play a more limited role than they do in most other countries. They develop policies and infrastructure plans with less information, have less discretion over financing, and their planning is always subject to the Chairman’s amendments.

The Third-Floor Secretariat’s other key function is to take in submissions of foreign currency from the Ministries and agencies according to the sums it sets. The amount that each agency submits is strictly confidential, as is the information and resources it takes in. Both of these functions entrench the belief that the Chairman is omnipotent and omniscient. Given that the Secretariat formulates the policies, plans and expenditures for projects that the Chairman announces, North Korean Ministries play a more limited role than they do in most other countries. They develop policies and infrastructure plans with less information, have less discretion over financing, and their planning is always subject to the Chairman’s amendments.
The comparative values of North Korean won and international currency are so different that the price of every product now attracts three different prices.

The government fixed price is the price of goods determined by the government at an artificially low rate so that, according to the communist philosophy, no citizen will go without essential goods and services. This includes both products for individual use, such as shoes and soap, and resources for national use such as coal and gas. This system has largely collapsed since the 1990s.

The black market price is the price attached to goods by the black market that arose from the mass famine called the Arduous March in the 1990s, when the government was unable to provide food at the government fixed price. North Korean sellers with access to goods set this price competitively, and the sale price can range from ten times to ten thousand times the government fixed price.

The export price is the contract price for selling goods to foreign companies. Exporting is more lucrative compared to even the black market price because of the stark difference in value between North Korean won and the preferred foreign currency, American dollars or Chinese renminbi.

Ministries, Party organs and their companies use whatever resources they can commodify to earn foreign currency and fulfil the planning order. The goods can be fresh produce if the Ministry or agency has rights to land, such as the military; they can be minerals if the Ministry or agency mines them, or factory-produced goods if the Ministry or Party organ operates them.

Those that have business overseas have a natural advantage. One interviewee who had work experience in the Ministry of Foreign Affairs told us that they use their exclusive access to humanitarian organisations as a revenue source. He gave us the example of charging a local transportation fee to the World Food Programme, ostensibly to pay for the internal distribution of food, and ordering Provinces to send transport to distribute the food without transferring that fee on. The Ministry would keep the fee and the Provinces would be able to distribute food for the price of sending trucks to the port to collect it. Where an embassy is involved in arranging for North Korean labor to be used in their host country, the embassy receives a fee from the profits. Individuals travelling on diplomatic passports can smuggle luxury goods for a fee, or they may charge a consulting fee to open doors for companies who would like to visit North Korea in the interests of doing business there. A Ministry may also incorporate a trading company or post an employee in an overseas friendly jurisdiction for a fee.
Some agencies, especially intelligence that belong to the Third-Floor Secretariat, operate in foreign countries and use variety of methods. The Reconnaissance General Bureau (RGB) has reportedly been combined with Korea Worker’s Party intelligence units, such as External Investigations and Intelligence Department (known as Bureau 35) and Operations Department which was responsible for abduction of South Koreans and other nationals. RGB subsidiary trading companies have few staff because it can sell weapons and military goods as part of its intelligence operations.

Under the Worker’s Party there’s a Foreign Communications Liaison Office. And then there’s Kim Yong-chol’s United Front Department, the Operations Office, Investigations Office and the Reconnaissance Bureau. There’s a few of these, and in total you call these the Foreign Secret Intelligence Service.

The Foreign Communications Liaison Office makes organizations. They make organizations in foreign countries including Korea. The United Front Department is a secret institution, but it acts legally. You make your own organizations, or you can also absorb existing organizations. By absorption, we mean officials, Committee Chairs, Secretary-Generals, assistant administrators, you win them over and make them one of yours and make it a North Korean institution. Any organization in South Korea or on earth is a potential target. The party doesn’t matter as long as it’s an organization that acts within legal boundaries.

As the witness mentioned, in the intelligence structure is also the United Front Department, which targets South Korea and its organizations and businesses, as well as manages the General Association of Korean Residents in Japan (Chongryon), through which several witnesses reported that it has connections to profitable Japanese businesses. While Chongryon has been primarily involved in displacement of over 90,000 Zainichi Koreans from Japan, its sister intelligence unit was conducting abductions of Japanese nationals and South Korean nationals. As a structure of North Korean government and its intelligence units, Chongryon has been receiving quotas of foreign currency to submit by selling North Korean produce, such as fur, berries or mushrooms popular in Japan. In the past, smuggling of products and cash was done by the ships that regularly cruised between Japan and North Korea, but they also meet on open sea to conduct ship to ship transfers. In November and December of 2019 for example, NK News reported two such transfers near Japan.2

What the Reconnaissance General Bureau has is, it has fighting units. It has planes and things like that. So they’ll promise the Japanese Yakuza to meet on the open sea at this day at this time. The Reconnaissance Bureau subsidiary companies don’t have a lot of people, but they earn several dozens of times the money that the entire Cabinet does combined.

A trade ship with drugs on it was going into Australia and they all got caught. Only the Captain would know that there were drugs on that trade ship. In the end that trade ship is a subsidiary ship of the Reconnaissance General Bureau. If you dig into where this trade ship goes, no one knows who it operates under, right? There are companies who have been approved for these special deals, and some companies that haven’t been. [Q: So does that company own that ship? Or is there a policy to charter them?] They can operate them themselves, or they could contract with foreign companies to be undercover. Recently the satellites have shown that two ships get put together to transfer oil. So that’s when they use foreign companies to contract on the black market.

Otherwise a Ministry or Party organ may have exclusive access to land, such as the Ministry of the People’s Armed Forces which has military bases where it can grow ‘white bellflowers’ (a pseudonym for opium) to produce drugs for export. It deploys military personnel to mines and factories to participate in the production of minerals and goods for export. The Military complexes often operate their own coal mines that practice intergenerational slavery.

The Ministry of State Security operates most of the known kwalli (political prison camps) in the country. The Ministry of People’s Security operates kyohwaso (reform through labor prisons) and rodongtalleyondae (labor detention facilities), and has had until recently one known political prison camp (No. 18 - a major anthracite production site). Each facility is a source of free forced labor used for mining; agriculture; production of limestone, bricks, wood, or cosmetics; light industry; and many other products that are produced there for domestic consumption and for export.

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In order for Ministries, Party, Military and Intelligence agencies to obtain the goods that can be exported by their companies, the goods have been extorted from private income of the citizens. This system of quota of goods has been perfected in the last four ~ five decades, but new developments also occurred that allowed the government to increase the quotas. Within the country, the North Korean government appears to tacitly accept that it cannot maintain its domestic economy without the operation of black markets. This has been abundantly clear since the rations system broke down during the Arduous March, leaving citizens with only private trade to turn to. Rather than outlaw it, the North Korean government regulates and taxes black market trading with a heavy hand.

Most of the traders are also married women without a government job and consequently are members of the Women’s Union. The Women’s Union is a Korea Worker’s Party association for women without government workplaces that administers political education. It requires women to submit goods or money and contribute labor as ordered by the government, so that many women are required to give up to the government a large proportion of their earnings.

A witness who was a Chair of Women’s Union in a District explained how the extortion system works:

In November 2017, the DPRK Delegation contradicted the UN CEDAW Committee’s information that the Women’s Union manages unemployed women.

The members of Women’s Union are people who don’t work. It’s housewives. If you work you join the Workers’ League, but we don’t go to work so you have to put us together into an association so we don’t do bad things. [Women’s Union] Committee Members can be Party members. Prefecture and Provincial Women’s Union Committee Chairs have to be Party members. In the Central [Pyongyang] Women’s Union there’s an Ideology Committee Chair and a Planning Committee Chair, like that. The Ideology Committee works on political ideology, and the Planning Committee organizes Women’s Union events.

Citizens’ submission of goods, money and compulsory labor

[Q: In November 2017, the DPRK Delegation contradicted the UN CEDAW Committee’s information that the Women’s Union manages unemployed women.] The members of Women’s Union are people who don’t work. It’s housewives. If you work you join the Workers’ League, but we don’t go to work so you have to put us together into an association so we don’t do bad things. [Women’s Union] Committee Members can be Party members. Prefecture and Provincial Women’s Union Committee Chairs have to be Party members. In the Central [Pyongyang] Women’s Union there’s an Ideology Committee Chair and a Planning Committee Chair, like that. The Ideology Committee works on political ideology, and the Planning Committee organizes Women’s Union events.

[Q: So the orders come from above and the lower levels carry it out?] Yes. The Women’s Union is very complicated and there are a lot of tasks. There’s also a lot of foreign currency earning.

[Q: What kind of foreign currency earning?] Silkworms. Women harvest silkworm cocoons. There are gadong silkworms and mulberry silkworms. With gadong silkworms you go up the mountain to break of gadong tree branches and grow your silkworms on them. Also bracken.

They don’t give you money. They say that “foreign currency earning is patriotism”. Kidney beans, for example, if they tell you 10 kilograms per person, you submit 10 kg. They sell it to China for foreign currency earning. Things like matsutake mushrooms, too. There’s a lot. You can’t prepare everything yourself, so you buy them on the private markets and submit those. I don’t exempt myself just because I’m the Committee Chair. If I don’t do it but tell other people to do it, they won’t listen to me, so I have to be a good example.

[Q: How do you know this is foreign currency earning? Who told you it was foreign currency earning?] They’re orders from the Party. The Central Women’s Union gives the orders. About foreign currency earning.

[Q: So every week? Every month?] For silkworms, there’s a silkworm season between May and August. They tell you to submit silkworm cocoons of however many kilos per person. At Thursday’s lecture we’ll gather the people together and tell them that for this round’s foreign currency earning we need how many kilos of silkworm cocoons, how many kilos of bracken, how many kilos of kidney beans... Five kilos of bracken per person, ten kilos of silkworms per person, etc.

[Q: If several dozens of people submit 5 kilos each, that’s a lot. Where does it all go?] It’s a lot. You take it to the Prefecture Women’s Union. The District Women’s Union takes it to the Prefecture Women’s Union. The Prefecture Women’s Union takes it to the Province Women’s Union and the Province takes it to Central [Pyongyang].
They only give you the ration tickets, not the actual rations. If you only collected these ration tickets one family would be entitled to several tons. They promise we'll get rations someday. Some families will still keep them, thinking they'll eventually get rations. I suppose now they'll have given up on that thought even if they've kept the tickets.

My Committee alone had 50 members.

There's a Women's League Committee Member in the District Women's Union, an Ideology Committee Member and a Planning Committee Member. Three or four of them will come at once and once you get several tens of kilos they'll take it away in cars and three-wheeler trucks.

We mention every Life Review Session, like “this person has submitted” and “this person hasn't submitted yet”. Then the person who hasn't submitted is embarrassed and is forced to pay. The authorities get everything.

All citizens are also part of their local Neighborhood Watch Unit of approximately 30-40 families. The Neighborhood Watch Unit also demands submissions of goods. All families with children must submit goods to the school for the children to attend. Not only are these submissions a time or financial burden on North Koreans, they can also involve goods that are difficult to obtain, such as metal or rare plants. However, due to the relentless pressure and fear of punishment, North Koreans continue to submit. A person who was Neighborhood Watch Unit Leader said:

They take scrap iron on a regular basis. The People's Unit and Women's Union both give assignments. The big factories don't have steel, so you take scrap iron and put it in the blast furnace to use. You can pick up scrap iron or steal it.

You go to a junkyard that specializes in scrap iron. Or every house submits separately and they hand in their receipts to me. I collect them, take them to the local Party office and report that our People's Unit have finished our assignment. With gloves, the leader gathers them up and takes them to the local Party office in a bunch. The local office takes them to the District office and the District office takes them to the construction site by train.

Similarly, a local Neighborhood Watch Unit leader said that the government is passing on its promise to give people housing on the citizens' labor:

A lot of discharged soldiers come but there are no houses, so the People's Unit citizens build houses for them. The furniture factory or city planning tell you to build two houses, so you have to build them. The government is supposed to provide housing, but in reality, it doesn't exist.

In the same manner, the Women's Union, and other Party organs or Ministries mobilize unpaid compulsory labor. A government official said:

For example they're building a Ryomyong Avenue in Pyongyang. And the task [kwa-op] will go to the Pyongyang's First Secretary. Then, he'll mobilise the organs under his Party. Then he splits that up, then they'll divide within each area again and give the People's Neighborhood Watch Unit too, then the People's Neighborhood Watch Unit in the street, the Women's Union器官, the women will go out to their own assigned area. South Korea or other countries will first set a budget when they do their work. They'll set a budget, they'll make the money, then with that budget, how much the materials will cost and how much the labor will cost to build something, and they'll build a budget so if you can only give the labor costs for ten people, you can only mobilize ten people. North Korea is the opposite. It's a wartime mobilization system. When they're doing big constructions, a hundred thousand people are mobilized but it's a system where they don't even give you a cent and mobilize several hundreds of thousands of people.

They have to bring their own lunchboxes.

[Q: Do those people receive food or anything?] They have to bring their own lunchboxes.
We have set out above that Ministries and agencies are responsible for both submitting a set sum of foreign currency to the Third-Floor Secretariat and for meeting the annual planning order from the Planning Committee. These Ministries and agencies do not receive operating funds and must generate their own to maintain their staff and buildings and to have reserve funds for the government construction projects.

North Korea’s economic system is enabled not just by the complex corporate structure which supports the government’s activities. There is also a concept called waku, which translates loosely to exclusive license, that determines which company has sole trading rights over a good, portion of a good, or labor. The waku fee (or licensing fee) is determined as a proportion of the value of the goods or labor being traded, and it is payable to the government as the quota of foreign currency required.

Each Ministry, Party and Military organ does not have the direct right to export. It must establish wholly-owned trade companies to gain trading rights. These rights are given through the license (waku), and it is renewed every year as long as the Ministry or other governmental organ is able to submit the amount of goods or funds required. To conduct their business, Ministries, Party and Military organs can establish any number of small trading companies which also compete. The diversification of the government-run economy allows it to escape accountability, transparency and international sanctions.

Trading companies use this license to form contractual relations with any Ministry that provides goods or labor, and with the purchaser of those goods or labor. The government distributes waku to control trade in North Korea without enacting complex regulation: agencies are granted a certain number of waku every year so they can be financially independent from central government, but waku are withdrawn if their companies fail to submit the full waku fee.

Despite North Korea having the highest per-capita population of soldiers in the world, its military activities are supported by the private trade of the army’s trading companies, enabled by central government using the waku system. Because trading companies have to compete with each other to trade under the best conditions, North Korea’s financial activities can be said to be just as competitive as the companies in any capitalist country.

In the case of coal, the detention camp or mining enterprise which owns the mine has no trading rights of its own. These institutions were described as ‘working bees.’ The government agency which the detention camp or mining enterprise reports to has the trading rights, or rather its companies. Several trading companies compete with each other to win the right to negotiate deals with foreign purchasers on behalf of the government agency. In exchange for the coal, the trading company may request money, always in foreign currency and preferably always in cash, or goods, such as diesel or drinking water. The trading company and the government agency both receive a portion of the profits, and the agency that operates the coal mine receives enough materials to maintain the mine and its labor.

Any economic trade conducted by a North Korean agency or company is highly competitive. Every separate order can be filled by a separate trading company depending on who can negotiate the best terms. Trading companies resort to creative techniques to gain an advantage over other companies. The only limit on trade is the waku system, which only imposes an upper limit to the goods that can be traded but does not provide rules for how the trade should be conducted.
PART II

SLAVERY PRACTICES IN MINERAL INDUSTRY
The songbun system determines who will work in the mines

MSS (secret police) is a primary agency that turns citizens into detainees and bonded laborers sent into the mining industry. The system is based on songbun, or thodae as it is known by North Koreans, which is a discriminatory class system developed after the Korean War that divides people based on their ancestry, their attributed political opinion and religious beliefs, or imputed crimes amounting to exercising basic human rights and freedoms. Songbun is hereditary and based on extended family relationships: a person does not make one's songbun by being politically pure and compliant. Each North Korean is born into their songbun through their grandparents, parents, and extended relatives.

The system created classes of people that could be removed from society either by execution, or by banishing them to political prison camps and other detentions where mineral industry and export production is operated both by MSS (secret police) and MPS (police). Since MSS is a primary government agency enforcing such classification, it also defines who will be sent as a low-songbun laborer to the so-called social mines and special complexes operated by the Ministries of the Cabinet, Military organs and Party Bureaus. Since both detention mines and social mines operate using labor force defined by songbun and the system is hereditary, it created a mechanism for successive generations to work in the mining industry as bonded laborers. The children and grandchildren of political prisoners, South Korean Prisoners of War, and Zainichi Koreans displaced from Japan have been confined to the same mining areas, denied access to higher education, to choose different occupation, and are under threat of political detention because they inherited the enemy class of their parents or grandparents.

Songbun is the root of discrimination. People of low songbun are assigned to mine labor, whether in detention or not, because it is the most physically difficult class of job; the human rights violations they suffer are a result of their songbun and incidental to the nature of their work. But the system works also in the opposite way: it gratifies those that have been classified as the loyal class and grants their children with privileges. One former government official explained how someone can have government jobs that are reserved only for the loyal class:

North Korea divides its citizens into several different classes. The highest classes, the best jobs, it’s the rule that only one class can take those jobs. So North Korea has a family relationships diagram for all people.

If I want to become a diplomat, from me you need to look at the relatives from my father to six degrees of relations out. To look at your mother’s line you need to look at her parents, their children who are your mother’s siblings, and the children of these siblings. That’s four degrees of relations. Then if I’m married, my wife. My wife’s line to four degrees of relation. So among these people they look if there is anyone who have betrayed the government, committed crimes of treason, opposed the government system, committed a normal crime and is in prison, there must be no one like that in there.

There must be no one from South Korea amongst them. My mother and father may have been born in North Korea but my grandfather or grandmother may have been born in South Korea, right? That’s not allowed. Then people who have come from Japan to North Korea. That’s the first prohibition.

To put it simply, this is the Workers’ Party of Korea policy on elites.
For the officers of the Ministry of State Security, detention is considered a “lucky” alternative when a political crime is attributed to a person. An interviewee who worked in the MSS explained the system which determines which political criminals are detained and which are killed. Working in the Data Analysis Office of the MSS, this interviewee explained that the function of that Office is to apply North Korean laws to determine who should be killed and who should be saved.

You check how many relatives within five degrees of kinship are members of the Workers’ Party of Korea. If the number of Workers’ Party of Korea members are 80% or more, you let them live. If it’s less than 20%, you kill them.

The witness however claimed that MSS does not kill people arbitrarily, but follows North Korean laws when deciding to kill people, to send them off to political prison camps or to lessen their crime and send them to ‘normal’ prisons or labor detentions. However, this evaluation is based on discriminatory songbun classification, on biased information and evidence unverified by an independent court, as well as MSS officer’s arbitrary decision to either add to the crimes or to deduct them. Because Party membership is in the first place dependent on the positive family history; the implication of this policy is that only politically privileged class of North Koreans have a better chance to survive after committing a political crime.

There’s a system to everything”: Classification, prosecution and killings

The standard is, what percentage of the person’s relatives within five degrees of kinship are members of the Workers’ Party of Korea. These records already exist. Then you have to add to the list of crimes. So you have to ask people to tell us the bad stories. North Korea punishes according to its own laws too… They don’t kill indiscriminately. They follow the North Korean laws to kill people who need to be killed and save people who need to be saved. You have to gather the information which justifies that policy. There’s a system to everything.

The system of gathering information is based primarily on the network of the MSS officers and leaders of Neighbourhood Watch Units, who are informants of the secret police and are responsible for approximately 40 household units.

MSS (secret police) keeps files on every family, where the life histories of the members and any criminal incidents are recorded⁴. Once the family review is accomplished, MSS Officers gather information to further calculate the ‘pluses and minuses’ as MSS Officers need to justify the decision how the person should be prosecuted. These ‘witnesses’ usually provide information that MSS is looking for. In other words, people reply with what the secret police officer wants to hear:

...because he’s from a hostile class, his acquaintances will say “This man is the lowest of the low,” “this man said this.” If he were from a loyal class people would say “He didn’t used to be like that and I don’t know when he went down the wrong path, but if the Party saw fit to forgive him he would live the right way.” You collect that too and add or subtract crimes. So you try to let loyal class people live... You try to kill off people from a lower class. You need the data analysis to show that it’s very justifiable to kill this person.

At the same time, the MSS needs to prove that their existence is justified, and it is apparent that the above standards applied with additional information gathered needs to be exaggerated to make up the evidence to justify the prosecution. In other words, when someone is supposed to be prosecuted, the evidence needs to be ‘found’.

We [MSS] make up crimes that didn’t happen. We exaggerate as much as possible. They’ve committed a small crime, but we exaggerate. The sentence will change depending on the phrasing of the report.

3. Similar systems of gathering information on private citizens, religious workers, or political opposition existed in other communist countries. For that reason, the Communist secret police in each country under the Soviet political and ideological influence gathered large volumes of data used for analysis of trends in the society, for manipulation and prosecution of individuals. The secret police in those countries would use the network of secret police officers and their informants to provide information that was analyzed. These secret police systems were originally based on the Soviet matrix and North Korea is not an exception. The communist archives in Poland and Germany measure at least 100 km of secret police files that can be accessed by victims, relatives, researchers and journalists. Among them, the North Korean Archives Project published jointly by Citizens’ Alliance for North Korean Human Rights and Institute of National Remembrance – Commission for the Prosecution of Crimes against the Polish Nation revealed files on North Korea gathered by the Polish communist secret police. For more information, see the North Korean Archives Project: https://northkoreanarchives.org/
Inherited slavery and slavery-like conditions in minerals extract industry in North Korea

Mining in North Korea is conducted in the so-called social mines, in political prison camps (kwalliso) and labor-reform prisons (kyohwaso).

The production in detentions is procured by MPS (police) and MSS (secret police) foreign trade agencies for export, or other agencies belonging to Party’s specialized Bureaus, which possess waku, or exclusive rights for trading certain minerals. The type of mining that MSS camps focused on was reported to be coal and gold. The MPS political prison camp produces anthracite, limestone, and magnesite (produced as magnesite clinker).

North Korean MPS also operates kyohwaso (long-term reform through labor prisons), nodong-dallyeondae (labor detention) and jipkyulso (holding centres before trial). Several police kyohwaso have been reported to operate mines with the reported mining of anthracite, lignite, limestone, and magnesite. Some prisons operate male and female wards for lumbering and some have large female wards producing beauty products that are sold to companies in China.

Another area is mining production owned and sold by the KPA (army). Since the North Korean army reportedly operates the fourth largest army in the world, it in fact owns large workforce and was reported to largely
command the soldiers to work in gold mines and in weapons and chemical factories owned by KPA. We also received reports that soldiers were sometimes directed to anthracite mines in political prison camps and ‘rented’ to secret police trading companies to operate cargo transport vehicles to and from the ports.

The People's Army is also known to operate their own detentions for soldiers called kyangsos and their own mines. That even women soldiers are directed to the mine shafts was recently revealed by Kim Yo Jong’s orders, who was allegedly ‘concerned’ to improve ventilation conditions in shafts for women miners due to diseases among women soldiers. The Leader’s sister was unconcerned with the fact that these women are ordered to work in the mine shafts in questionable work and livelihood conditions at all to procure large funds for the Party's military development funds. 4

During the course of the investigation, it became apparent that certain classes of people and their subsequent generations perform work in the extract industry; even in the so-called social mines. This type of work is performed in particular by people and their descendants whose status was classified as disloyal to the regime under the songbun system.

The state-imposed class persecution system is one of the fundamental supports of North Korea’s minerals mining system: miners are either of low socio-political class who are given the job because they are not allowed to take on more responsibility and prominence in society, or they are detainees who have been classed as ‘hostile’ and work without pay and upon threat of starvation at the best of times. Several camps, including No. 18 and No. 15, have been known to impose collective responsibility upon successive generations based on imputed political opinion. If the father in a family is accused of an ideological ‘crime’ the severity of the crime determines the number of generations that will serve their sentences. Even if the family is released, the severity of the original crime will continue to decide the future of subsequent generations:

If I’ve been sentenced to reform from my father’s line, I go in my father’s name. I become the first generation of responsible person. Otherwise if my father is executed when I’m young, for example, and I grew up with my mother, I become the second generation. If you categorise crimes into four categories of A, B, C and D, you won’t be released from a Category A crime just because you’ve served three generations.

In the early stages after the Korean War, North Korea primarily directed to the mining areas all individuals whose political background was deemed suspicious to the regime. The system of political prison camps was expanded in the 1970s and waves of enforced disappearances followed.

Among people sent to social mines, one of the largest groups were thousands of South Korean Prisoners of War who were directed to major coal, magnesite, zinc, lead mines in North Korea after the war, mostly in North and South Hamgyung Provinces. They were never allowed to return to South Korea, although they believed that if they worked hard, they would be sent back.

According to ROK’s Ministry of Defence data, the status of 19,409 ROK soldiers has not been confirmed after the Korean War, but the exact numbers are unknown. The situation is complicated due to the fact that among the 13,000 ROK soldiers that were believed to be killed in action were individuals that escaped in recent years from North Korea to South Korea. By other sources, the estimated number of prisoners of war in North Korea is as high as 50,000–60,000. South Korean prisoners of war who were under the age of 16 when caught by the North Korean side were not even included on the lists of prisoners of war, but recorded separately as ‘minor,’ sent to school to achieve adult age and then directed to the mines.

One South Korean prisoner of war reported that by the Cabinet order 143 in 1956, North Korea released 80,000 troops and sent them to mining industry. With that order, the South Korean POWs in internment camps suddenly received the North Korean residence card:

Even though the hope was dim, our constant wish was that North Korea would send us home. When we were handed the residence card, we knew it was over. We would never go home and would be forced to live in North Korea.

These POW troops were immediately relocated to mining areas. Various witnesses reported that on average between 1000-2000 prisoners of war were working in these mines:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>ROK Prisoners of War</th>
<th>Sent to Mine</th>
<th>Type of Mine</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>POW Corps No. 1701</td>
<td>Aoji Complex, Eundok Mine, Obong Mine, North Hamgyung Province</td>
<td>Lignite coal mines, Aoji is also a chemical weapons, ammunition powder production complex</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>POW Corps No. 1702 &amp; 1703</td>
<td>Hoeryong Hakpo Mine, North Hamgyung Province</td>
<td>Lignite coal mine</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>POW Corps No. 1704 &amp; 1705</td>
<td>Hamyoun Mine, North Hamgyung Province</td>
<td>Lignite coal mine</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>POW Corps No. 1706</td>
<td>Songbong Mine, South Pyongan Province</td>
<td>Lead, zinc mine</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>POW Corps No. 1707 &amp; 1708</td>
<td>Byongpoing Mine, Komdok Mine, South Hamgyung Province</td>
<td>Magnesite mine, Lead, zinc mine</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>POW Corps No. 1709</td>
<td>Koginowan Mine, North Hamgyung Province</td>
<td>Lignite coal mine</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

It is reported that South Korean prisoners of war were sent to 16 other mines. A few additional mines were identified by another prisoner of war who was captured as a minor serving in the South Korean Army; put into school instead of a POW internment camp, and sent to work in Hambung and in Pungin Mine two years later:

In Onsong District there’s Onsong Mine, Jowon Mine, Sanghwa Mine, Pungin Mine. Five mines. All
the people who used to work at Hamyeon Mine were sent over to Sanghwa Mine. We got education
a few times in the past and I was the class president once. While I was class president, I had to write
a list of around 40 people who received the education, and they were all prisoners of war. But a lot of
them didn’t know how to read and write. There were around 2000 prisoners of war who were put into
Hamyeon Mine. Hakpo Mine, Aoji Mine, they’re all prisoners of war.

These prisoners of war are now in their 80s and 90s, and their children and grandchildren continue to be as-
signed to mine labor from the time they graduate high school. Additional labor force required in prisoner of
war mines is filled by civilians of similarly low songbun, or people previously in important government posi-
tions who fell out of favor but had not committed a crime grave enough to justify execution or a political prison
camp. Almost none of these people return to a position in government, let alone their former station in life:

That might happen to one of a hundred people, and the rest have to live there. It’s rare that they leave
alive.

The children of prisoners of war, like children of political prison camp detainees, are assigned jobs in the mine
and are not allowed to work anywhere else. There is a silent understanding about children of prisoners of war
even inside mining areas:

They all know. They don’t say it out loud but they all know that this man is the son of a prisoner of
war, so unless the son has a special skill of his own (to work elsewhere in the mine), he works at the
coal face.

Another prisoner of war said:

High school education is decided by the Ministry for Education. After you finish that education and
graduate from high school, people who can perform military service will go into the army; workers
will work. The army looks at songbun a lot. The child of someone like me can’t go to the army. They
wouldn’t accept him.

[Q: When you have children, do they have to work in the coal mine too?] They have to work in the
coal mine. [Q: Do you have children too?] Yes. [Q: Did they work in the coal mine?] They did. [Q:
Sons or daughters?] Two sons. [Q: What did they do in the coal mine?] The older one was on patrol,
the younger one was an excavator.

Another prisoner of war said that North Korea promised the South Korean prisoners of war that they would
be able to come back to South Korea if they worked hard and so they believed that working in those mines
will bring their subsequent release. He admitted that even decades later he still had dim hope that South
Korean President would ask for their release during the first North-South Korean Summit. When it did not
happen, he decided to escape first and was recently joined by his son, who was working in the same mine and
by his now teenage grandson in South Korea. When saying goodbye to researchers at his home, he proudly
introduced his grandson saying:

He plays in the school orchestra now and participated in music concerts abroad. If he stayed in North
Korea, he would soon be sent to work in the mine as the grandson of the South Korean POW.

During and after the Korean War, North Korea was preparing itself for the large-scale industrialization that
followed in many countries which were implementing the Soviet type of communism and was short of skilled
and unskilled labor.

One of the methods that North Korean authorities used to cope with this shortage of labor was through the
abduction of civilians during the Korean War. About 100,000 people were documented to have been purpose-
fully targeted by the communist secret apparatus at their homes or workplaces. Among them were nurses,
doctors, policemen, or businessmen – individuals who had skills useful to North Korea. They are still unac-
counted for, and this purposeful abduction of civilians committed by North Korean leadership was classified
as a crime against humanity in the report of the UN Commission of Inquiry in 2014.

During the Korean War, beginning in 1951, North Korea also started sending thousands of children and
youth gathered from around the Peninsula to ‘friendly’ communist countries in the Soviet Bloc in Europe.
The North Korean Archives Project revealed individual files of young Koreans registered by the secret police
in Poland which received at least about 1,500 of the youth, some of whom indicated their birthplace in South
Korean towns. At the insistence of DPRK Embassy, the older students reportedly did not have any freedom
to choose their education but had been directed by the North Korean authorities to be trained in metallurgy
and mechanical studies. The subsequent fate of these children and youth is unknown, but the early letter com-
 munications from North Korea to Polish caregivers indicated that some attempted to escape and that some
were sent to the mines. In 1959, all were returned from Poland and other Soviet Bloc countries back to North
Korea and assigned jobs in mines and heavy industry.

This movement coincides with another order from Kim Il-Sung in 1959: the displacement of 93,000 of Zain-
ichi Koreans from Japan to North Korea. It is another large scale operation bringing much needed labor to
North Korea. The vast majority of that population had hometowns in what is now South Korea and were
relocated to Japan as forced labor during Japanese colonization period. This operation was organized by
Chongryon, a pro-North Korean organization in Japan managed by the North Korean United Front Depart-
ment, a special intelligence unit that formed the Internal Intelligence Department of the Korea Worker’s
Party, together with other specialized intelligence units later responsible for abductions of Japanese and South
Korean citizens.

With the exception of individuals who were actively involved in Chongryon, large portions of Koreans from
Japan and their Japanese spouses immediately found less than desirable conditions of life and work in North
Korea, including constant surveillance, due to their origin and independent opinions. When the political prison camp system was expanded beginning in the 1970s, and the increased labor force there was necessary, many from this group also began disappearing to the political prison camps and other mining areas. This included those who knew that the second wife of Kim Jong-il and the mother of the current Leader, Kim Jong Un, was half-Japanese. This fact apparently made it extremely problematic for North Korean anti-colonization and anti-Japanese propaganda that continued to today, and the government tries to keep the fact a secret.²

Political prison camps house hundreds of thousands of people over vast tracts of land. These camps generate their own resources and income, as well as producing enough to trade. Camps, such as No. 18 with its Prisoners Area and Released Prisoners Area, also house children who are born and raised in those areas, used as child labor and grown into future coal miners. Most political prison camps and labor prisons have been reported to have the conditions and resources to grow food to feed the detainees and camp employees; political prison camps also have factories and animal farms. Many detention camps are built on rich coal veins, such as Kwalliso No. 18 in Bukchang, Kwalliso No.18 Released prisoners area in Tukchang, Kwalliso No. 14 in Kaechon, Kyohwaso No. 1 in Kaechon, and Choma Bong Camp in Kaechon. Prison mines are more profitable because detainees are not paid for their work, and food and equipment are not provided at adequate levels.

During this and other parallel investigations we interviewed the daughter of a person abducted from South Korea during the Korean War, who as a second generation worked in the mine with her siblings. We also interviewed several witnesses who reported families of displaced Zainichi Koreans living and working in concentration camps, including in mining areas of Camp 18. We interviewed people who were living in mining concentration camps as children of political prisoners and were sent to work in mine shafts at the age of 16, as well as children of released political prisoners who continued to live in the Released Prisoners Area. We possess testimonies of people who met their neighbours again after being released from the camp, only to find out that the neighbours’ grown children, now worked as miners in the Released Prisoners’ Area. We gathered testimonies of South Korean prisoners of war and their families and people who worked with them. We also interviewed people who testified of the persecution policies based on songbun undertaken by the Ministry of State Security.

This is only the tip of an iceberg illustrating the overwhelming evidence of connection between discriminatory policies of songbun and practices akin to modern forms of slavery in the mining industry in North Korea.

³ New NHDR report describing North Korea’s special operation of displacement from Japan and subsequent disappearance of hundreds of Zainichi Koreans in North Korea will be released in March 2020.
Thousands of South Korean prisoners of war were forced to work in the mines of these Complexes and currently confine their descendants as mining labor. Practices enforced on these miners such as prohibition on changing residence, restriction on movement and confinement to mining villages, without any individual choice and under threat of detention on refusal to work, should be emphasized as practices akin to the modern forms of slavery.

Aoji Complex, or officially June 13 Enterprise, is a Chemical Complex reportedly under the 5th Bureau and the Second Economic Committee used for chemical weapons production. It has several coal mines attached, which status is currently unknown. One of its mines, called Eundok Mine, was reportedly producing lignite of 600,000 tons a year. Aoji Complex is close to the Rajin-Sonbong special economic zone and its ports.

One former Party Member reported that he was directed to the June 13 Coal Mine Enterprise (known as Aoji) with South Korean POWs and their families and that their mine was directly connected to the factory producing weapons.

Q: Which is the Division that manages the Aoji Coal Mine? 13 June Coal Mine is an enterprise. It's an enterprise in itself. It produces the coal and then it hands it over to the 7 July Factory. That's where they make chemical fertilizer. And they make military goods there too. With the coal. They make gunpowder, gunpowder for explosives.

Q: So are 7 July Factory and Aoji Mine connected by train? No, when you dig the coal out of the ground, it takes a conveyor and goes over there. [Q: All the coal mined goes directly there?] 100% of it. It all goes over there. So you can't steal coal from the mine. Everything in North Korea, every chemical weapon produced comes from mines. Under every mountain is a mine. [Q: So who works in the 7 July Factory?] There's a separate 7 July Public Enterprise Manager. There's a Chief Engineer, a Party Secretary, too. High-up people got plate numbers according to Kim Jong-il's birthday. Only people that were assigned by Kim Jong-il got cars.

Q: You said that you worked together with prisoners of war. If they get married do their families get sent along with the prisoner of war? Their families work there too. [Q: Are the POW people under surveillance?] There's no surveillance, but they can't be released. [Q: Can't they escape?] They can't escape.

Another industrial complex is Ryongyang Complex, one of the largest magnesite production sites in the world. North Korea is estimated to have 6 billion tons of magnesite reserves, which can be used for civilian and military purposes. Much of that production is exported to China. Komdok Mine, in the vicinity of Ryongyang, is a part of Komdok Industrial Complex. Together with nine other mines, it is one of the largest zinc and lead production sites in East Asia. The Ryongyang mine complex has been called ‘white gold’ since Kim Il Sung era, as the production has been an important source of export income for the regime for decades.

Again, even though Ryongyang is considered a social mine, it is also the place of banishment for generations of people classified as low songbun, such as South Korean prisoners of war with their second and third generations, or those who committed a political offence whose crimes were not serious enough to merit detention in a political prison camp:

Q: Who gets banished to places like that? Low-songbun people get banished to Ryongyang mine to work in it. You mine ore there. My sister-in-law was so shocked [due to hard labor] she collapsed, hurt her spine and became a hunchback. She had two daughters and two sons and they all worked in the mines. Small children go to school, but the people there didn't live like human beings.

Obviously, it is not enough that these people were already punished by being banished and confined to minerals mining industry for generations. The witness, who was a party member sent to June 13 Mining Enterprise (Aoji Complex) informed us that these large important complexes have their own detentions, separate from district detentions run by MPS (police).

If you're absent from work for only three days they come to get you. There's an enterprise patrol unit. They're the police. If you're not at your home they go looking for you through your family. They arrest you and bring you back. They take you and force you to work. Then you need to work for six months. It's uncompensated labor.

The 13 June Coal Mine has its labor detention, and the 7 July Enterprise labor detention. The District labor detention is the labor detention run by the District for the small enterprises. The large enterprises are the 7 July Enterprise and the 13 June Enterprise with their labor detentions. The small enterprises inside the district, like the essentials factory or the pencil factory, would fall into the District labor detention.

Q: So what kind of crime do you have to commit? I have to be sentenced, so there needs to be trial. So they lock people up [before the trial] in the jipkyulso.

Q: You said that if you're absent without notice for three days at the mine you get sent to jipkyulso. Are there any other crimes? What else would there be. There's nothing to eat. Stealing food.
[Q: Stealing coal too?] Oh, taking coal isn’t stealing. Not that.

[Q: Do they send outsiders into these labor detentions, too?] No. Only people from the enterprise.

The connections between various agencies are also visible in practices of forcible transfer of low songbun people from social mines operated under Ministry of Coal to the mines that were vacated by MSS political prison camps (kwalli). One of the witnesses stated that Onsong District Coal Complex operates six mines including Sanghwa Mine (one of the biggest mines containing South Korean prisoners of war and their families), Pungin Mine, and Tongpo Mine (which was combined with the Complex, but previously was a site of MSS political prison camp). Tongpo was operated by Camp No. 13, but around 1990 the camp’s prisoners were relocated to the nearby MSS Hoeryong Camp No. 22, which in turn was relocated in 2011.

A daughter of a person abducted to North Korea during Korean War, worked with her siblings in the mine in Hoeryong, which has Hakpo Mine (large mine containing prisoners of war) and Guksim Mine. Guksim Mine is located near Chungbong-ri which was a mining village of MSS Political Prison Camp (Hoeryong) No. 22 that was reportedly fully vacated by 2012 and the prisoners relocated. Miners from the nearby social mines, especially Guksim Mine, were forcibly relocated to the vacated MSS Camp housing and worked in the mines there.

In 2011, the 20-something political prison camp was shut down. You can’t imagine how many coal mines there are there. In that district there’s a farm, coal mines. If you go in, first of all, there are no political prisoners left there. It was totally empty. So, every coal mine needs laborers. They don’t choose from just any mine, they’ll choose a particular coal mine. About 400 people from my mine moved there too. They just lumped everyone together. [Q: ‘They told you to move so you moved?’] Yes. We have to carry out orders.

The witness also reported that the housing vacated by the relocated prisoners was assigned to the workers of the social mines and they had much worse conditions of living than when they lived near a social mine. The coal mine management or law enforcement officials received the housing of the former officials of the political prison camp.

I’ve been there, the prisoners from the political prison camp who worked there had four families to one building. The house, there’s a kitchen and a single room. The houses were still there. And the MSS officers housing who were guarding the prisoners, the houses of the officials, too. The houses are huge. Around 180-210 square meters [60-70 Pyeong]. And according to their ranks sometimes there were individual houses and yards. There are a lot of individual houses there, like the head of the MSS and the head of the MPS have been assigned individual houses.

PART III
BLOOD COAL EXPORT FROM NORTH KOREA
Coal as a top export and profit commodity for North Korea

The previous chapters of this investigation have illustrated that North Korea’s mineral extract industry is intertwined with, and dependent on, persecution policies of enslavement. This chapter focuses on the blood coal originating from political prison camps that has sponsored ever-increasing expenditures in military development and the North Korean elites’ luxurious lifestyle since 1970s. However, coal is just one example. Blood coal is no different from the magnesite, limestone and gold produced in various types of detentions where thousands of people and even families perished.

South Korean data show discrepancies in amount of reserves of anthracite coal, estimating them at 1.63 bln tons (Ministry of Unification); 4.5 bln tons (Korea Resources Corporation) and 11.7 bln tons (Korea Energy Economic Institute).

According to materials deriving its data from the North Korean sources, total coal ore reserves in North Korea are estimated at 18.6 billion tons and the reserves were previously valued at 3,480,220 billion USD.\(^6\) It is estimated that North Korea earned 200 million USD in export of coal in 2017 alone, exporting the coal mostly to China, Russia, Myanmar and Syria.\(^7\) There were also reports that some trading companies in China were stockpiling anthracite, expecting lifting of sanctions after the U.S.-North Korea summit. North Korean traders were willing to sell anthracite at $30-$40 per ton, one third of the price of Chinese coal at the time.

As a top export commodity for North Korea and one that is also exploited by the military industry, coal has of course been placed on the UN Security Council Sanctions list. However, these sanctions previously allowed for a certain amount of coal to be traded by North Korea, which gave rise to room for manipulation. As illustrated in our initial chapter on the quota system and export requirements, the pressure to earn foreign currency is enormous. As such, the North Korean trading companies exploit legal and illegal methods to sell the minerals which bring the highest profits to their Ministries and waku fees to the regime. It is no surprise that the North Korean Leader is eager to have the sanctions lifted on mineral trade, particularly on coal.

In recent months, several media articles have attacked the sanctions for their alleged effect on average citizens. However, no one has so far looked into the other side of the story, namely that the free trade of the commodities produced in political prison camps and other detentions has been sustaining the system of persecution, oppression and enslavement in North Korea. While a lot of discussion focusses on the impact of sanctions, there is no similar discussion of the origin of the sanctioned minerals and other products. Nobody so far has raised the question: where has the coal come from, who has been producing it and at what cost?

South Korean statistics continue to claim decreased production (by 20-30%) of coal, and provide estimated numbers of production to be at 21 million tons. At the same time, foreign investigators have been observing that mining areas continued to show stockpiles of coal, or rapidly developing new mining zones with new coal piles, and some research points to new coal terminals in ports that have been built in recent years. There have also been numerous journalist investigations that the North Korean coal offloaded and onloaded in Russian ports may be exported to Western countries, and that ships with North Korean coal also reached the South Korean port of Pohang in breach of Security Council sanctions. However, the final result of this investigation has not been reported to the public.

Both mineralogy reports and witness testimonies indicate that anthracite is mainly produced in the ‘coal basin’ in South Pyongan Province, including areas of Kaechon, Bukchang, Tukchan, and Dokchon. This area has been a major anthracite reserve and production site that has reportedly been exploited since the Japanese colonization period of Korea. The South Pyongan anthracite fields are the largest in North Korea.

This investigation has found continued production in the areas of political prison camps and released prisoners’ areas in South Pyongan Province. The reported yearly target of production at its height was 8 million tons of anthracite in just one camp. In the following chapters, we provide the detail of this production.

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\(^7\) https://www.japantimes.co.jp/news/2018/02/03/asia-pacific/north-korea-earned-200-million-banned-exports-u-n-report-says/#.W4OuKegzY2w

As the [Satellite photo 1] illustrates, the shaft and open pit mines in the mountain valleys of Bukchang and Kaechon are overlapping with the area of major known political prison camps in North Korea. These camps have been in operation there at least since the 1970s when the North Korean system of political prison camps was expanded. While the first camps holding South Korean prisoners of war have been functioning since the Korean War, the system of camps and other detentions as we currently know of has been in operation since the reforms which established Ministry of State Security (MSS – secret police) as a separate agency carved out of what we now know as Ministry of Public Safety (MPS – police). The Ministry of Public Safety had previously functioned as one institution under a different name. As such, most of the political prison camps that are known as Kwalliso (literally “Management Zone”) went under the jurisdictions of MSS (secret police), while reform prisons (Kyohwaso) and short detention centers (Nodong-dallyeondae) remained in operation under the MPS (police). However, until recently, MPS also retained operation over at least one political prison camp, known to the international community as Camp 18 in Bukchang.

Bukchang and Kaechon together is an area of major anthracite extraction, and there are also reports that magnesite clinker and platinum are produced there. Camps that have been known to human rights organizations are Camp 18 in Bukchang, Camp 14 in Kaechon, and Choma Bong Camp (suspected new camp since 2005) attached to the boundaries of Camp 14 in Kaechon. In addition, in a straight line north, the city of Kae-
chon has an MPS labor prison (Kyohwaso) No. 1 with anthracite mines. Further down in Sunchon the reports place gold mining sites, which administratively are said to belong to Kyohwaso No. 1 in Kaechon. Sunchon also reportedly has Kyoyangso (a type of Kyohwaso detention) operated by Ministry of People’s Army with gold and uranium sites.

The Camps’ mining industry sites in Tukchang, Bukchang and Kaechon have become a source of profit and competition between the two law enforcement agencies. The human chattels that live and die there constitute generations of current and former political prisoners and their families who are still owned, transferred and exploited for profit by MSS (secret police) and MPS (police). These two law enforcement Ministries use their own trade companies, or sell coal to trading companies of Bureau 39 (which manages slush funds) and Second Economic Committee (which produces and exports weapons) which also have exclusive rights to export blood products around the world.

Tukchang Labor District adjacent to Bukchang Camp 18 is not a ‘normal’ labor district, but inter-generational mining area which previously constituted Camp 18. Before moving unreleased prisoners to Bongchang-ri, Bukchang County, Camp 18 operated in Tukchang and was similarly divided between Released Prisoners’ Area and unreleased Prisoners’ Area. When prisoners were receiving amnesty, they were forced to remain in the same area as Hejaemin, or released prisoners, while political prisoners that had not yet received amnesty (ijumin) were forcibly transported to a new adjacent area and separated from the zone of released prisoners. When such forced displacement occurred, it usually coincided with the need to excavate new mines and the influx of new political prisoners, often prisoners relocated from other camps that were undergoing re-structures.

However, it does not mean that the area where prisoners were relocating was barren. One witness reported that when unreleased prisoners of Camp 18 in Tukchang were finally displaced to Bongchang-ri in Bukchang, they were assigned barracks and family houses in the village that previously belonged to yet another camp. This witness said that the prisoners must have been hastily transferred before the arrival of prisoners from Camp 18, as they found cooking stoves still warm, leftover food in the kitchen area, as well as unpicked ripe corn in the fields. These signs indicated that the prisoners who left were not even allowed to pack the meager food around them before they left.
We were boarded on cars, and from where I lived before to the region we moved to, it doesn’t take too long by car. I went into the house and found that the kitchen was still hot. The kiln (kama) was still hot. They used wood to build fire, not coal.

Our family was pushed into an old house of a building that was for four families. They didn’t even leave the night before, but just that morning. When we arrived there, they just left all the objects on the floor, and we took them into our houses. We didn’t even have much with us, because we were all people from kwalliso. In the house, there was corn in the rice jar, corn powder, and the kiln was hot as if they just cooked food.

This is how Camp 18 expanded from Tukchang District to Bukchang District over the span of 30 years, leaving the released prisoners in the Tukchang Labor District under the control of Tukchang Mining Kwalliso, which is often referred to as Tukchang Labor District Mining Complex. Tukchang still operates using the labor of released prisoners of Camp 18, and their children. Similarly to people of low songbun in social mines, former prisoners and their children are de facto bonded to mining industry there: they cannot find jobs without government approval, cannot move houses without being assigned housing, and cannot travel without being given a permit. They are not assigned houses in social areas, and it is impossible for these people to leave the area if they do not have relatives or connections. We found that witnesses who moved outside of the Tukchang District upon release from Bukchang Camp 18 used their connections to move. They also reported that the neighbours released earlier were still living in the same area even many years later. In addition, even if they lived elsewhere after the release, they were returned to the camp if found re-offending. Two witnesses reported that they were returned to a political prison camp when they were caught in China and repatriated to North Korea.

Tukchang constitutes much larger territory than the Prisoners’ Area in Bongchang-ri, Bukchang. One witness reported that, at its apex, it comprised about 100,000 people. This witness was assigned some work in the administrative office and learned how many inhabitants there were.

Tukchang has been observed to have increased the housing areas in recent few years, which means that more mining labor is available. This could also mean that there was an influx of released prisoners to the Area.

Similarly to what we have found in the large Mining-Military Complexes in so-called social areas, there is a separate detention managed by Tukchang mining complex for the released prisoners for lateness, or being absent from work and other types of crimes.
Political prison camps are vast. They span the area around a mountain and partway up the mountain, and they have many villages and work areas such as farms, mines, and factories. Each political prison camp is designed to be self-sufficient so they also have canteen, infirmary and school.

The system is so complete that in Camp 18, Bongchang or its released prisoners area people are born and die there. They were established so that the detainees could be geographically contained and self-sufficient, meaning that coal mining and detention are symbiotic. The importance of the mines are such that electricity is generated for 24-hour use in mines but not in homes, neither in detention camps nor in villages that house workers for social mines.

There have been several reports of changes in MSS (secret police) Camp 14 and MPS (police) Camp 18, of possible closing or recent re-opening of Camp 18, as well as of new restricted areas being established in the boundaries of Camp 14. South Korean sources insisted that Camp 18 was severely downsized around 2003, with the remaining prisoners being transferred to Kaechon. One of our witnesses reported that some of the remaining prisoners were relocated to Mujindae in Kaechon district. However, there is no definitive evidence to support these changes and much of the information can be inferred only from satellite imagery.

The reports of closing or downsizing may give the erroneous impression that the area is no longer inhabited by prisoners, or that it has become a civilian town or maybe even an abandoned camp. This is an incorrect assumption. Satellite imagery indicates that the coal mines and coal loading stations of Camp 18 together with portions of settlements, are intact as of 2019.

In addition, since 2016, there have been new ongoing developments in Bukchang which would indicate that it is functioning as a political prison camp. Newly expanded southern perimeters of the camp have been marked by new guard posts, and new buildings beyond the old boundaries of the camp and changes in some of the mine buildings have also been observed. Coal trains near coal loading stations, as well as larger cargo trains on 2019 satellite images can also be easily observed.

It is more likely that the detention camps have only changed names, not structure, and that there is no improvement to the working and living conditions of detainees. One detainee in Camp 18 reported that when she was detained a second time in the area in 2008, her political prison camp had been renamed from ‘South Pyongan Province Bukchang District Bongchang Town No. 18 Kwalliso’ to ‘South Pyongan Province Bukchang District Bongchang Labor District’. However, all of the top positions continued to exist without change. There was no personnel change, the same Commander of the Camp remained in charge of the area, only titles including the type of institution changed from “Kwalliso Administrative Officer” to “Enterprise Administrative Officer”. This indicates that there are attempts to hide the true state of detention camps without improving the real conditions there.
Yet, there were definitely some changes that happened to the area especially after 2015, indicating that active concentration camp operates there. The satellite imagery as of 2019 (Satellite Photo 3) show the southern perimeter of what has been known as Camp 18 expanded further south. There is no reason to secure the area with new guard posts if it is not a functioning concentration camp. The two major entrance guard posts on the right side of the image (eastern boundaries of the Camp 18), which have been dividing Camp 18 Prisoners Area in Bongchang-ri, Bukchang County from Camp 18 Released Prisoners Area in Tukchang Labor District are also there, still dividing the two zones.

The Prisoners Area in Bongchang-ri, Bukchang MPS (police) Camp 18 and the MSS (secret police) Camp 14 in Kaechon face each other and are separated only by the Daedong River, linked by a railway bridge. While the characters of the two camps totally differ, as Camp 14 is de facto a death camp that does not allow for release of reformed prisoners as Camp 18 does, the close connections between the two agencies that operate these camps is visible from the witnesses’ testimonies.

A witness who worked in MSS reported that Camp 18 and Camp 14 were originally one camp in the past and were split between the two agencies. In fact, Bongchang-ri, which constituted the last known Prisoners Area of Camp 18 was administratively marked a part of Kaechon area on older North Korean maps until 1984, after which it was separated and added to Bukchang District. Even though Camp 18 is an MPS (police) camp, the Management Complex reportedly also had an MSS (secret police) Management Building. In addition, even though the Daedong River separates the two Camps, there are areas on the opposite bank of the river and adjacent to Camp 14 that two witnesses identified as belonging to Camp 18 as the management housing settlement. Similarly, a witness reported that the northern perimeter of the Camp 18 in Bukchang has changed and Camp 14 expanded across the river to take the northern hilly area, as platinum was found there and the rights to gold excavation belonged to the MSS (secret police). Many of these statements in fact support some historical evidence, or previous satellite imagery analysis done by experts that the area could have possibly have stronger connection to Camp 14. Whatever changes the area went through and whichever Camp and Ministry now works that land, the fact remains that Bongchang-ri, Bukchang continues to be a controlled area of a political prison camp producing blood coal as it previously did.

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8 A very good additional reference is an analysis of changes in Camp 18 and Camp 14 that has been done by Curtis Melvin on his NK Economy Watch site: Has Camp 18 been reopened or merged with Camp 14? http://www.nkeconwatch.com/2016/09/30/has-camp-18-been-reopened-or-merged-with-camp-14/ Speculation Time: A new kwan-li-so or expansion of Camp 14? http://www.nkeconwatch.com/2013/01/18/speculation-time-a-new-kwan-li-so/
Witnesses who were formerly miners in Bukchang Camp 18 Prisoners’ Area and Camp 18 Released Prisoners Area in Tukchang gave an idea into the number of miners, organization of the mines, and work and life conditions. As explained earlier when Camp 18 was releasing some of its reformed prisoners, these released prisoners would mostly continue to live in the area (which is now Tukchang Labor District) while unreleased prisoners were moved to an adjacent zone in Camp 18.

Various witnesses had reported several such forced relocations until the Prisoners Area finally settled in Bongchang-ri. Thanks to the relocations, the witnesses possess information of several mines and the production in Tukchang area while it was still part of Prisoners Area of Camp 18.

One of the witnesses reported that the Tukchang area has a few larger mines than Bukchang and that the number of released prisoners living there was approximately three times as much as the Prisoners Area of Bongchang-ri in Bukchang, which at the peak of operation as Camp 18 had housed approximately 30,000 prisoners – men, women and children.

While the prisoners did not know the exact metric daily or monthly production, they did report of daily meetings during which they would receive orders of the number of coal carts (tancha) to fulfil. Each coal cart could be filled with two tons of anthracite. It was also reported that the yearly planning order in Bukchang MPS (police) Camp 18 was 8 million tons of anthracite.

One witness reported that on any average day, one team would fill 70 to 100 coal wagons (tancha). On a bad day, it was 50 carts; on the days when a lot of coal was exposed, or the orders were higher, the political prisoners would have to fill up to 180 wagons. Three shifts a day worked 8 hours each, so that the mines would operate 24 hours. In addition, there is only one day of rest a month, mostly for reparations and maintenance of tools and equipment rather than rest. The prisoners aim to fulfil the quota because food rations would otherwise be cut.

As the witness did not know the individual production data, it was necessary to extrapolate the reported data to establish an approximate tonnage of coal produced by one prisoner and to see how much in a year Camp 18 could really produce.

Dividing reported production of 50, 70, 100, and 180 carts per day gives us an approximate average of 100 wagons per day. Knowing the approximate number of prisoners in most of the shaft mines and open pit mines in the area of Bukchang, we established that with an average of 100 carts a day the MPS (police) Camp 18 in Bukchang would produce 7,700,400 million tons of anthracite a year, which is very close to the reported 8 million tons for the yearly planning order of Camp 18.

We have also interviewed two witnesses who lived in the area of Tukchang, both in Released Prisoners Area and in areas that belonged to Camp 18 before it moved to Bongchang-ri in Bukchang. Using the same witness to recall the number of mines and estimate the number of miners, we were able to establish that the Released Prisoners Area in Tukchang is able to produce at least 8,013,600 million tons of anthracite a year. This number does not include three mines with an unknown number of miners, and the possible production could be higher.

As of 2019, all of the reported mines have been in operation both in Bukchang, as well as in Tukchang area. Some living quarters in Bukchang were demolished, which could indicate that the number of detainee-miners may be smaller. On the other hand, the Tukchang area has seen entirely new buildings.

These calculations indicate that at the peak of operations, both Bukchang and Tukchang could possibly produce at least 16 million tons of anthracite. Even if the number of prisoners in Bukchang has reduced its number of detainees and Tukchang operates at a lower level of productivity, together they must still be producing a large amount of coal.

We have not found any similar studies that would estimate the individual mine production. We are of the opinion that the scale of production, especially detainee production in North Korea, has not been fully assessed thus far.
### Yeongdeung Miners

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Unit</th>
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<th>small company 3</th>
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<tr>
<td>Total Reported Miners in Yeongdeung shaft mine</td>
<td>800</td>
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</tbody>
</table>

### Yongdeung Mine Coal Production Calculations

**Yongdeung Mine Coal Production Calculations**

**864,000**

**1 mine cart (tons)**
- Middle company: 8
- Small company: 8

**Average daily coal wagons (units)**
- Middle company: 100
- Small company: 200

**Average monthly production (tons)**
- Middle company: 6,000
- Small company: 72,000

**Average yearly production by one small mining company unit (tons)**
- Middle company: 72,000
- Small company: 216,000

**Average yearly production by four middle company units (tons)**
- Middle company: 864,000

**Shaft mines near Bongchang Coal Number of miners Production volume (tons)**

- Suan Mine: 1, 2,000, 2,160,000
- Bongchang Mine: 1, 800, 864,000
- Sangri Mine: 800, 648,000
- Jingol Mine: 200, 216,000

**Total**: 788,400

**Average Coal Production in MPS Camp 18 Detainees Area Shaft Mines**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Shaft mines near Yeongdeung Coal</th>
<th>Number of miners</th>
<th>Production volume (tons)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Youngdeung Mine</td>
<td>800</td>
<td>864,000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hanjia Mine</td>
<td>600</td>
<td>648,000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hannyeong Mine</td>
<td>500</td>
<td>540,000</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Total</strong></td>
<td><strong>2,052,000</strong></td>
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**Shaft mines near Bongchang Coal**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Shaft mines near Bongchang Coal</th>
<th>Number of miners</th>
<th>Production volume (tons)</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Suan Mine 1</td>
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<td>2,160,000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Suan Mine 2</td>
<td>300</td>
<td>324,000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bongchang Mine 1</td>
<td>800</td>
<td>864,000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bongchang Mine 2</td>
<td>600</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sangri Mine</td>
<td>600</td>
<td>648,000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Jingol Mine</td>
<td>200</td>
<td>216,000</td>
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<td><strong>Total</strong></td>
<td><strong>4,860,000</strong></td>
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</table>

**Yearly Plan of Camp 18 reported: 8,000,000 tons of coal**

**Average Coal Production in MPS Camp 18 Detainees Area Open Pit Mines**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Shaft mines near Youngdeung Coal</th>
<th>Number of miners</th>
<th>Production volume (tons)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Pot Factory open pit</td>
<td>80</td>
<td>86,400</td>
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<tr>
<td>Alcohol Factory open pit</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Total</strong></td>
<td><strong>86,400</strong></td>
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</table>

**Open pit mines near Bongchang Coal**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Shaft mines near Bongchang Coal</th>
<th>Number of miners</th>
<th>Production volume (tons)</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Sangri Open pit</td>
<td>150</td>
<td>162,000</td>
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<tr>
<td>Suan Open pit</td>
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<td>540,000</td>
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<td><strong>Total</strong></td>
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### Possible variations in production in Yeongdeung Mine based on daily number of carts reported

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Mine carts</th>
<th>50</th>
<th>70</th>
<th>100</th>
<th>180</th>
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<tr>
<td>Total Yearly Production in tons</td>
<td>432,000</td>
<td>604,800</td>
<td>864,000</td>
<td>1,955,200</td>
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### Possible variations in yearly and daily production in Yeongdeung Mine per coal picker

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<thead>
<tr>
<th>No. of Coal Pickers only</th>
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<tr>
<td>Mine carts</td>
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<tr>
<td>Yearly (tons)</td>
<td>1,800</td>
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<td>Mine operates 353 days/yr/24h</td>
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<tr>
<td>Daily (tons)</td>
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### Possible variations in yearly and daily production in Yeongdeung Mine per miner

<table>
<thead>
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<th>All Miners</th>
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<td>Mine operates 353 days/yr/24h</td>
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<tr>
<td>Daily (tons)</td>
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</tbody>
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### Average Coal Production in MPS Camp 18 Released Prisoners Area (Shaft Mines and Open Pit Mines)

#### Average Coal Production in MPS Camp 18 Released Prisoners Area Shaft Mines

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Shaft mines in Tukchang</th>
<th>Number of miners</th>
<th>Production volume (tons)</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Myeonghak Mine</td>
<td>Unknown</td>
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<tr>
<td>Shimse Mine</td>
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<tr>
<td>Tukchung Mine</td>
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<td>N/A</td>
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<tr>
<td>Youth Mine 1</td>
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<tr>
<td>Youth Mine 2</td>
<td>2,000</td>
<td>1,512,000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bopi Mine</td>
<td>800</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>Jamsang Mine</td>
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<td>378,000</td>
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<tr>
<td>Ryongsang Mine 1</td>
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<td>756,000</td>
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<tr>
<td>Kalpil Mine</td>
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<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td></td>
<td>7,635,600</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Based on an average of 70 carts daily by 1 full mining unit*

### Average Coal Production in MPS Camp 18 Released Prisoners Area Open Pit Mines

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Name</th>
<th>Number of miners</th>
<th>Production volume (tons)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Jamsang Open pit</td>
<td>200</td>
<td>151,200</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bopi Open pit</td>
<td>300</td>
<td>226,800</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td></td>
<td>378,000</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*All production volume figures extrapolated using average figures.*

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The overall production is divided per total reported number of miners.

The number of miners does not include management, canteen workers, child labour, etc.
Management of Camp 18 Mines

The Camp administration manage all the mines. The Camp administration is comprised of the Commander [Sojang], Chief Engineer [Kisajang], and the Party Committee [Tang-wiwonhoe], but the Chief Engineer reports to the Commander about the operations of the coal mines. These positions are chosen from MPS police officers.

The Chief Engineer of the detention camp acts as the chief executive of the mines, and the other officeholders contribute to calculating the planning orders and other operations of the detention camp:

The kwalliso does it. We’re Kwalliso Number 18. There’s the management office. The management office has the General Manager, the Chief Secretary, managers for everything... the Mine Chiefs. These people, the Chief Engineers, they are people called Kwalliso Chief Engineers. They even have their own homes. Standalone homes, big ones. They make the rounds of the mines and inspect them. Generally this person does all the inspections... Yongdeung Mine Chief, Bongchang Mine Chief... So this person would go to the kwalliso and have their Review Sessions for plans that haven’t been met and plans that have been exceeded. A [detainee] like me has no chance at all of participating in something like that.

Key executives and managers in coal mines were reported to be mostly MPS officers and occasionally soldiers, and they received reports from each Section of the mine about the amount of coal or other minerals produced each day. The MSS is present in all detention camps and throughout all other North Korean institutions.

Career progression between the different branches of the MSS is allowed except for the Re-education Bureau [Kyohwa-guk] which operates the detention camps. Upon entry, employees of the Re-education Bureau are not allowed to take up positions anywhere else:

Why? Because if these people come out the secrets come out too.
P

risoners of Camp 18 in Bukchang were told that they had to meet annual 8 million tons of coal of production for the Bukchang Thermal Power Plant. Bukchang Power Plant lies beyond the Tukchang Labor District, which has only one eastern exit that can send cargo trains to the outside area. From the West, Tukchang is blocked by Camp 18 area in Bongchang-ri.

Camp 18 in Bongchang-ri cannot send its coal trains or cargo trains through Tukchang Labor District, as the area has never been connected by railway with Tukchang District. Neither coal trains, nor full-size cargo trains can go toward Tukchang Released Prisoners Area. No such railway connection between Bongchang and Tukchang exists on satellite photos, official railroad maps and in witnesses’ testimonies.

The ROK’s Ministry of Unification data mention that the coal to Bukchang Power Plant is supplied by the mining towns of Deokcheon area, and not from Bongchang or Tukchang. Moreover, Bukchang Power Plant is reported to consume 5 million tons of anthracite a year, which is much less than was the reported yearly production in Camp 18.

Sophisticated system to transport and export blood coal by various governmental agencies

The Prisoners Area of Camp 18 has two coal loading stations, Bongchang and Yeongdeung. Yeongdeung station [39.551874, 126.057887] was identified as ‘unnamed coal transfer station’ in recent report by 38 North, together with Bongchang Station which was mistakenly described there as ‘nearby Bukchang Concentration Camp’. Our investigation clarifies that both of the stations belong to Bukchang Concentration Camp.9

Witnesses reported that large cargo trains, each consisting of at least 20 wagons able to carry 60 tons of product per wagon, were leaving the area at least two to three times a week. As the witness reported, these special trains were leaving through the bridge connecting Camp 18 with Camp 14 and disappearing on the Kaechon side of the Daedong river. We followed the direction and observed that the railroad passes by Camp 14 on the side of Kaechon, but it turns toward the bridge leading to the main railroad that connects with Nampo and Pyongyang before reaching Mujindae coal loading station.

Connection through Mujindae Valley on the side of Camp 14 is impossible, as it has no further connection by railroad. It is the last coal transfer station, and the valley with its mining areas is blocked by guard posts which separate the area from Choma Bong political prison camp, a suspected new camp. As mentioned earlier, Mujindae is adjacent to Camp 14 and has appeared in the testimonies as an area to which prisoners of Camp 18 were relocated. While more information is necessary, what is observable from the satellite imagery indicates that Mujindae area should not be considered as a ‘social’ settlement.

On a satellite photo in April 2019, we captured an empty cargo train moving in the direction of Bongchang-ri. The only railroad in the area follows the Daedong river bank, and passing by the management buildings of Camp 14, and crosses the bridge across the Daedong river to arrive at Bongchang-ri, Bukchang political prison camp.

There are many connections between the police, secret police agencies, their detention facilities and the military.

9. See Makowsky, Town, Pitz, “A Snapshot of North Korea’s Supply Chain Coal Activity”, 38 North, March 8, 2019, p.4.
Detention camps do not have the right to negotiate the sale of the coal their detainees mine, and government departments and their wholly-owned trading companies work independently to win contracts to sell the coal to earn the foreign currency quota assigned by the top leadership. It appears that the trading companies are the lynchpin between the detention camp and the trains that transport their coal out: the trading company negotiates the sale of coal for a price, applies to the Supply Management Office for a travel permit, sells the coal to domestic or international buyers, submits a share of the profits according to government orders, and distributes the rest of the profits among its staff and to maintain the Ministry that is managing the given detention facility and other employees of the Ministry. As was explained in the beginning, the Ministries have to earn their own operating costs to support salaries and maintain office buildings. So if the police camp produces coal, some of the earnings will be directed to support the police force and offices around the country on the top of providing quotas to the government.

Transport throughout North Korea is controlled by the military through the issuance of travel permits:

[Military personnel] manage the command control. For example, if you want to export 150 tons of goods from Wonsan Port, then you have to arrange for it to be sent to the port. That's managed by military personnel. Civilians can't do customs. In DPRK you have to provide a long-distance permit, a travel permit. It's complicated just to get the papers. Civilians can't do that. The command does it.

One interviewee mentioned also a Military Supply Management Office:

...when there's a war, the Military Supply Management Office directs all the provisions trains. It's an institution that deals with supply management in preparation for war and all the people involved are military personnel.

If you need to use two 60-ton trains, the Supply Management Office gives you the papers you need if you make a request... It's really hard to get assigned a cargo train. Even in the military, you get special privileges if you're the son of someone who fought for national independence.

Train drivers are also said to be military personnel. This interviewee reported that the Supply Management Office arranges for coal to be transported from Bukchang.

The Ministry of State Security (secret police) forms a part of a larger intelligence structure of North Korea. While the MSS mostly deals with domestic surveillance, and persecution of enemies of the state, separate intelligence structures exist that form so-called external intelligence units. While not much is known about exact connections and organization, we know that special Bureaus of the Korea Workers’ Party that form the infamous Third Floor have among them Bureau 35, Bureau 38 and Bureau 39. Bureau 35, which has been known as the External Investigations and Intelligence Unit, has reportedly been joined with Reconnaisance General Bureau, creating Department 5.

It is important to look at various details from a broader perspective. This broader perspective is that MSS and MPS as an internal protection system formed one security organ in the past that have been functioning in a subordinate role to the special structures of Korea Worker’s Party and the leaders of the State, as it was the case in other communist countries. In many communist countries, external intelligence and counter-intelligence were housed under one Security organ, while in North Korea, such units have been detached from the internal secret service organs. However, while many operations are compartmentalized in North Korea, the channels and structures become narrower at the top as they lead to the Leader.

MSS or MPS are not organizations that operate in a vacuum. They play various functions and report to the top...
The MSS also has the function of operating a Customs Office to support the confidential export of specialized Bureaus of the Party of the Third-Floor Secretariat that deal with weapons, narcotics, and trade for slush funds.

Nampo Port has a separate MSS branch stationed within. This MSS branch is separate from the Nampo City MSS because Nampo Port has large operations and traditionally received many foreign ships. The Port Authority and harbor master have more administrative roles that inform other government agencies which ships enter and leave, and when. The customs office and MSS branch both send inspectors to inspect foreign ships when they come into port. They have different areas of responsibility: the MSS officers inspect for prohibited items such as spying equipment. The witness also reported that foreign boats directed for Japan were smuggling ethnic Koreans resettled from Japan trying to escape North Korea, and MSS inspected the ships for such hidden escapes.

Much of the MSS duties in the Port is the protection of the ships that are carrying goods for foreign currency earning:

The MSS raises funds for the Party. The MSS’ foreign currency earning activities are completely separate from the MSS building. They’re usually in the field, on the ground. If it’s gold mining, they’re at the gold mine. It’s just command that’s stationed in the city. You ship it out on boats that manage Party funds. You don’t give [foreign currency trading goods] to a foreign ships. It’s a North Korean ship that goes out.

All goes up to Pyongyang first and then comes back down. So for example, the 5th Department will give you a one-year plan of gold. The MSS foreign currency earning people go onsite to a gold mine. You finish refining it, and it becomes gold. To my knowledge they keep it in a shed within North Korea’s Central Party Bureau 39. Then you take it from there and put it on a North Korean ship. You’d never give it to a foreign boat. You don’t know if they’ll run away with it and rip you off.

The MSS Customs knows the schedule of shipment for the goods for Bureau 39 and Second Economic Committee and informs it to the Port Authorities that the goods have been loaded and the ship can depart.

All the Port Authority does is to guide the ship to the best, safest place [in the dock], and then they go away. We do the rest. And then we’re told to report to the Port when the ship is going to depart, we tell the Harbormaster at the Port Authority. They’ll confirm that.

While the MSS officers do not know exactly who will be coming and what will be loaded, the MSS officers do know what the shipment might contain because of special instructions on the cargo, and because of the rotating people whom they know come either from Bureau 39 or the Second Economic Committee. These officials also use the MSS Customs Office facilities to maintain confidentiality.

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These people follow sailors. When foreign sailors come there’s a separate barracks for them.

Then fleet management, which manages MSS vehicles... they give you petrol. In North Korea they give you petrol for the MSS, if you say you need to go somewhere. Not petrol stations like in South Korea. If you go 10 kilometers they give you 10 kilometers’ worth of petrol, and diesel too. Then clothing, where they tailor and repair your military uniform and clothes like that. Then the restaurant. They manage all of that. All of this is married women. But it’s a relative or wife of an MSS officer. Not a total outsider. We don’t go outside for hairdressing. You have to do it right there, because of security...

Because they’re worried we’ll leak secrets if we go to someone else, MSS employees’ wives will cut our hair, make our food, and look after our children.

Strict confidentiality is maintained by the threat of punishment. Our interviewee reported that even showing interest in the contents of cargo could cause serious consequences. When there is a confidential Cargo on board, the officials from Bureau 39 or Second Economic Committee will appear at the port. Our interviewee reported:

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The Second Economic Committee manages the weapons exports. When they appear you know they’re loading weapons, and when Bureau 39 appear you know it’s foreign currency earning like gold or fox fur. If people like that appear, we know.

The witness also reported that ships can be shared. For example coal or other products can be shared with confidential cargo that is hidden on board from the crew’s sight. However, if the volume is large, such as in many cases weapons that have large volume, the ship will not take other cargo on board.
Second Economic Committee. The Operations Division. So if you get people from here they load weapons, but they don’t even let you watch them load your products first and then leave free space. Then they load their products at the very end. The people who loaded the other things first don’t know what kinds of weapons are loaded. It’s top secret. Everyone has to leave. Not even the Captain knows what’s on board. They tell the Captain just to stay at the helm. They try to have two, three-layer security.

If you can’t load everything, it’s possible that only the 2nd Economic Committee goods will be loaded. Because it has a large volume. I know that they’ve usually sent goods to warring countries. Middle Eastern countries at war; they go to Iraq.

Even if the Captain or crew look at or guess the contents of any confidential cargo on board, every ship has an officer who works for the MSS. It is reported that sailors pretend to know nothing so they are not reported, thereby losing the opportunity to work on their next ship.

For example, they tell you that this ship that’s about to depart has to be careful to avoid fire or something else, and we guess based on that. Susceptible to water. Handle with care. Things like that, and they really emphasize those safety conditions. You can use that to guess and if you take a look, they’ll write it.

They package in two or three layers. They put it in a darkroom where it’s the hardest to see on the ship or they hide it away.

The MSS Customs Office is a crucial part of the Kim family’s efforts to maintain secrecy over its most crucial financial operations: the export of weapons and narcotics, and the import of luxury goods enabled by its slush funds. Its existence indicates that the top leadership are invested in maintaining secrecy over the lengths it will go to maintain its lifestyle by trading in sanctioned goods.

The Korea Trade-Investment Promotion Agency (KOTRA) assessed coal as North Korea’s largest export, as recently as 2016, the year the United Nations Security Council passed sanctions on North Korea’s trade in coal and other key products.

Even since sanctions were passed, coal remains one of North Korea’s main exports in breach of existing sanctions that prohibit all supply, sale and transfer of coal. This is enabled by the diversified and highly competitive trading company system, where waku are issued for very small amounts of goods compared to the whole. Intermediaries knowingly or unknowingly assist the transfer of goods and money, including banks and shipping companies outside North Korea, and North Korean ships have developed more and more ways to avoid detection and tracking by international monitors.

The United Nations Security Council has passed multiple resolutions sanctioning North Korea’s international trade, in relation to a range of goods and labor provision. The bulk of the sanctions resolution were passed in 2016. This was also the year of the first sanctions on coal exports, which became progressively more restric-

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Coal remains a large proportion of North Korea’s export income

https://news.kotra.or.kr/user/globalBbs/kotranews/787/globalBbsDataList.do?setIdx=249
- Resolution 2270/2016 prohibited all supply, sale and transfer of coal from North Korean territory, individuals or flagged vessels, excepting any coal transported through the Port of Rajin solely for transfer purposes and when the trading activity is unrelated to generating revenue for North Korea’s nuclear or ballistic missile programmes or any other sanctioned activities, and any coal traded exclusively for livelihood purposes.¹¹

- Resolution 2321/2016 retained the terms of the first sanction and imposed a further annual quota over such procurement. The Resolution also added the condition that no entities or individuals be involved who are associated with North Korea’s nuclear or ballistic missile programmes or any other sanctioned activities.¹²

- Resolution 2371/2017 prohibited all supply, sale and transfer of coal from North Korean territory, individuals or flagged vessels, excepting any coal transported through the Port of Rajin solely for transfer purposes.¹³

Many intermediary companies are involved in arranging the export of coal. This may be because every North Korean trading company is given a small amount to export, and they each form their own business network with foreign companies. They conduct business using foreign banks owned and operated by North Korean individuals and companies, including Chinese banks along the North Korean border.

Foreign ships and companies were found to carry cargo for North Korean trading companies both in and out of the country. It is unclear whether there is a North Korean intermediary agency which arranges all shipping, or whether each trading company makes its own arrangements from a list of approved foreign shipping companies. North Korean trading companies are limited in the types of goods they are allowed to export under the waku system, so it is unlikely that one company would be able to arrange both the export and import leg for one ship. What is clear is that some foreign-owned ships have been detected both importing and exporting goods that are used for the elite class or the Kim family. For example, the DN5505 was the consignee of two Mercedes luxury vehicles that were later photographed in Pyongyang, but it was later seized by the South Korean government for importing North Korean coal into Seoul.¹⁴ This is consistent with the witness report that North Korea’s own ships export goods out and receive consignments of goods to import in. North Korea’s international trade would be extremely difficult, if not outright impossible, without the engagement of foreign companies and banks that enable the transfer of money and goods.

Although the North Korean government has been shipping cargo for decades, the long list of sanctioned goods has required it to adapt to increased surveillance and sanctions enforcement. In the case of coal shipments, trading companies and the vessels they use have developed a variety of techniques to avoid being caught shipping North Korean coal.

Vessels that ship North Korean coal are owned by corporations registered in other countries, usually Asian countries like Hong Kong or China. Vessels are registered under the flags of countries such as Panama, Zanzibar, or Fiji as flags of convenience. All ships must be registered to a state, usually the state of the shipowner, but some vessels sail under flags of convenience registered to a state so that it is subject to the law of that state. This law may have less regulatory oversight and less labor protection. Some companies use smaller ships that do not require registration.

Crews avoid detection by satellite turning off their automatic identification system (“AIS”) so they cannot be tracked, or use the call sign (a vessel’s unique identifier) of a different ship so they are misidentified even if they are tracked. They paint over hulls with false names to avoid photo identification, or install fake cargo hatches as disguises. Some vessels have been found to increase their draft (so that they sit deeper in the water, as if carrying a heavy load) before they arrive in North Korean ports to take on coal.

Documents are forged to claim that the coal onboard is from a neighbouring country, such as China or Russia, and coal may be transferred from vessel to vessel by crane while at sea, to avoid being detected. Sanctions committee reports from 2018 and 2019 indicate that ship-to-ship transfers have become the norm, predominantly in the Gulf of Tonkin that separates Vietnam and China.

¹⁴. https://static1.squarespace.com/static/566e8b48bf1d7324d53195ba95d3107a604b742140018776be1563458128965/uv+-%26+Loaded.pdf\#p42
PART IV

LABOR CONDITIONS AND HUMAN RIGHTS VIOLATIONS IN THE MINING INDUSTRY
The Citizens’ Alliance for North Korean Human Rights has used eyewitness accounts from former prisoners to estimate the rate of coal production by the 6480 detainees at the Camp 18 mining complex in North Korea. The mining complex consists of nine underground mines and three open-pit mines. There is also a Released Prisoners’ Area with an additional seven underground mines and two open-pit mines that are operated by 10,600 released prisoners. All mines are producing anthracite, which is the hardest type of coal with the highest energy content. The mining is almost entirely non-mechanized with neither cutting nor loading by machines.

The estimated coal production rate was based on information regarding Yeongdeung Mine, which is one of the underground mines and is operated by 800 prisoners. The prisoners are divided among six work-category units, which are the Digging Unit, the Preparatory Unit, the Coal Picking Unit, the Carriage Unit, the Machinery Unit, and the Maintenance Unit.

The Digging, Preparatory and Coal Picking Units include 96, 72, and 240 prisoners, respectively, for a total of 408 prisoners. The Digging and Coal Picking Units are each divided into four middle units, while the Preparatory Unit is divided into three middle units. Each middle unit is divided into three small units (corresponding to three shifts per day), so that small units of diggers and preparatory workers include eight prisoners, while small units of coal pickers include 20 prisoners. There is no information as to how the remaining 392 prisoners are divided among the Carriage, Machinery, and Maintenance Units.

The key information for estimating the production rate is that each small unit of coal pickers fills 100 2-metric ton carts per shift. In other words, 12 small units of coal pickers (four middle companies with three shifts per day) are producing 2400 metric tons of coal per day or 864,000 metric tons per year, assuming 360 workdays per year. This production rate is equivalent to productivities of 3 metric tons per worker per day (based on 800 prisoners) or 10 metric tons per coal picker per day (based on 240 coal pickers). The above productivities were then combined with the numbers of prisoners in each of the mines of Camp 18 to yield annual coal production rates of 788,400 metric tons per year for the three open-pit mines and 6,912,000 metric tons per year for the nine underground mines, for a total production rate of 7,700,400 metric tons per year. The above total is very close to other information that the yearly plan for Camp 18 is eight million metric tons. The same productivities yield 378,000 metric tons per year for the two open-pit mines in the Released Prisoners’ Area and 7,635,600 metric tons per year in the seven underground mines, for a combined annual production of 8,013,600 metric tons from the Released Prisoners’ Area.

Based on eyewitness accounts, prisoners from the non-mechanized underground anthracite Yeongdeung Mine, one mine of the Camp 18 mining complex, produce 3 metric tons per worker per day or 10 metric tons per coal picker per day. The calculated productivity derives from 800 coal workers, including 240 coal pickers, filling 400 2-metric ton carts per shift with three shifts per day. By comparison, the productivity of Pennsylvania (US) anthracite mines was 2.52 ± 0.13 and 2.06 ± 0.15 metric tons per worker per day for periods of stable productivity for underground (1915-1935) and total production (1900-1935), respectively. By 1935, 21.2% of Pennsylvanian underground anthracite production was machine-loaded, while 4.2% was machine-cut. The productivity of US bituminous coal mines was 2.33 metric tons per worker per day prior to the invention of coal-cutting machinery in 1892.

The long-term mean annual workdays (206.3 days) for Pennsylvania anthracite and US bituminous coal mines was used to convert annual productivity to daily productivity for historical data from the UK, USSR and Germany. For all UK mines, the productivity was 1.14 ± 0.13 metric tons per worker per day for the period of stable productivity 1873-1960. In the USSR in 1927-28, productivity was 0.69 metric tons per worker per day with 15.7% of production being machine-cut. In Germany productivities were 0.58 and 0.88 metric tons per worker per day in 1850 and 1900, respectively. In Poland productivity was 1.3 metric tons per worker per day in 1949 with 7.2% of production being machine-loaded and a smaller percentage being machine-cut. In the state of Santa Catarina in Brazil, productivity was 0.76 metric tons per worker per day in 1945, with a lack of mechanization. In the USSR in 1935 the norm for a single coal picker was 7.3 metric tons for a six-hour shift, although events that demonstrated exceeding the norm seemed not to take into account how many.
auxiliary workers were assisting the coal picker. Possible interpretations of the discrepancy between the historical data and the much higher productivities deduced from accounts by North Korean prisoners include (1) North Korea has actually achieved an unprecedented productivity in non-mechanized coal mining, (2) former prisoners have exaggerated their production rates, or (3) analysts of the prisoner reports have not taken full account of all of the prisoner and non-prisoner labor involved in the Yeongdeung Mine, especially managerial and support personnel, exploration workers, security guards, and children.

The per worker productivity reported by former North Korean prisoners in non-mechanized anthracite mines (3 metric tons per worker per day) is 19% higher than the highest historical productivity for non-mechanized coal mine production (2.52 metric tons per worker per day for underground Pennsylvania anthracite mines during 1915-1935). Although the discrepancy may not seem large, reported North Korean coal productivity is over three standard deviations greater than for the non-mechanized underground Pennsylvania anthracite mines. Moreover, coal productivity in non-mechanized US mines was far greater than what was typical in other countries, especially the USSR, which had a coal productivity of only 0.69 metric tons per worker per day in 1927-28. In addition, the per coal picker quota reported by former North Korean prisoners in non-mechanized anthracite mines (10 metric tons per worker per day) is 37% higher than the quota for coal pickers in the USSR in 1935 (7.3 metric tons per coal picker per day).

It is difficult to reconcile the production for the per coal picker productivity in the USSR (7.3 metric tons per coal picker) with the actual per worker productivity (0.69 metric tons per worker per day) unless less than 10% of the total coal industry work force was coal pickers. However, it is noteworthy that, if the Soviet quota for a six-hour shift were extrapolated to the eight-hour shift that is worked by North Korean prisoners, the productivity would be 9.7 metric tons per coal picker per day, which is almost exactly equal to what is reported by the prisoners, and which may be the entire explanation for the discrepancy in per coal picker productivity.

The essential part of a correct calculation of per worker productivity is the correct accounting for all employee labor hours. According to Kentucky Energy and Environment Cabinet (2017), for the US, “total labor hours [for the calculation of coal mine productivity] include the combination by mine site of direct miner hours, preparation plant hours, and on-site office employee hours.” In other words, total labor hours do not include the workers involved in the transportation of coal. Even so, there are indications in the witness interviews that the 800 prisoners divided among the Digging Unit, the Preparatory Unit, the Coal Picking Unit, the Carriage Unit, the Machinry Unit, and the Maintenance Unit, do not account for all managerial and support personnel involved in the mining operation, some of which may not be prisoners.

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Allocation, organization of work

Net only does the enemy class of songbun define who will work in the mines, the miners are divided into sub-categories within low songbun class. This determines the type of work that a person and their family will do both in political prison camp mines and in social mines.

Some people identified to be of a higher category within low songbun can be given lighter work or greater responsibility. In detention camp coal mines, detainees could hold positions of responsibility up to mining unit leader. Detainees also reported that Koreans displaced from Japan, called in the camps 'Japo' (Japanese Kyopo, or Zainichi Koreans) and their Japanese spouses had usually worked outside of a shaft, such as at the coal transfer stations or coal railway maintenance.

On the contrary, the harshest type of discrimination seems to be reserved for those whose family originated in South Korea, for example those that belonged to the family of South Korean abductee during Korean War, prisoners of that war, or whose relatives escaped during or after the war to South Korea. These people were given the most dangerous type of work at the coal face in both detention mines and social mines. This condition was only eased if the person that originated from Southern part of Peninsula ‘married up’ to a partner of a higher category of a low songbun. For example, one of our interviewees was a person whose mother worked in the mine, but was of a better songbun than her father who was abducted during the Korean War. As such,
even though she was denied further education or different occupation, she was allowed to work as a clerk in the Management Office of the mine and not as a physical worker in the mine.

Coal mine workers are organised by army language and both social mines and detention mines are very similar in the organization and the language they use for various teams. Small groups form a small company and work one shift of three in a 24-hour day; a group of small companies forms a middle company; and a group of middle company forms a unit. Leaders of these work units were prisoners of better songbun than the others at the lower levels, and Party members at the higher levels. Each work unit receives its daily work order from the Chief Engineer of the mine to produce a certain amount of coal carts per day. Some shifts would become double shifts and miners were forced to work 16 hours a day or more in order to meet the quota.

There are also different jobs associated with coal mining, including miners, tunnellers, and repairers. Other occupations include surveyors, engineers, and coal loaders. These jobs are assigned by government, and some require better songbun and political favour. Coal loaders tend to be older people or pregnant women because they would be able to rest between receiving coal cars from the mines. Pregnant women in detention camps must continue to work until they are close to giving birth, and those who are very ill because of their pregnancy are assigned to the night shift so they can attend hospital appointments. Jobs that require better songbun include the surveyors in the surveying section, who calculate how much mineral can be extracted from a tract of land. The surveyors send in the excavators to create the mines according to which mineral will be extracted.

The work in the mines, especially in the detention mines, is highly non-mechanized labor. In social mines, especially those connected to military factories, a conveyor would be laid to carry coal, which is not necessarily the case in the detention mines.

Tunnellers dig out a mine shaft. Mine ceilings are reinforced with wooden support posts which are raised by miners as they dig out the shaft. The workers also lay a path for a mining car be pulled up and down the shaft diagonally by a wire using an elevator.

Each shaft leads to a blind end where miners would explode the coal face. The interviewee reported using an electrical drill to drill a hole in the coal face approximately 1.2m deep. A miner inserts a stick of dynamite and explodes it with a button with an electrical charge.

In shafts that have a conveyor belt, coal is loaded for transport out from the face. Coal would be transported out in carts and marked with the squadron number by the number of wooden planks stuck into the cart.

The wooden support posts rot over time, and a group of workers called repairers remove the old post and insert a new one. One interviewee who worked as a miner in a platoon which included repairers, reported that repairers were South Korean prisoners of war who were older than the rest of the platoon. Once the coal supply had been exhausted at the end of the shaft, these repairers had the dangerous job of pulling out the support posts so that the shaft would collapse. A wire is tied around the support post in order of depth into the shaft, and pulled from closer to the entrance so that it collapses together with the ceiling. The repairers closest to the support post are at risk of being hit by the post, which weighs approximately 70 kilos, or debris.

Roles differ depending on gender, age and class. Men go deep into the mine shaft and explode dynamite at the face to produce coal. Women load the exported coal onto conveyor belts or into two-ton coal trucks to transport it out of the shaft. Children in Camp 18 and Released Prisoners area in Tukchang would attend school until the end of Grade 4 (16 years old) after which they were assigned jobs depending on their parents' crimes. Most are assigned to coal mines, as they continuously need new generations of labour.

The detention mines have management command and the Commandant of the Camp, as well as Security Commandant who manages all of the workers.
Political criminals are detained in camps for the purpose of providing free labor to produce goods and resources. An interviewee explained that detention camps try to keep detainees alive so they can work for the government agency that operates the camp. This explanation would corroborate the economic system described earlier in our report that every agency must submit goods, submit foreign currency, and pay for its own operating costs. Detainee labor would lower operating costs significantly. To sustain the free labor, camp administration do not arbitrarily or unnecessarily kill detainees, and consistently imprison people for so-called political crimes:

In the prison camps they don't kill you indiscriminately. They see you as labor power. Labor that you don't need to pay for. Docile labor. If you keep killing them you can't produce coal. And you can't bring them in from just anywhere. They make political criminals little by little.

Each detention camp has its own mechanisms of terror. For detention camps, this means being put to intense labor without the use of modern machinery. Detainees are not remunerated and they usually do not enjoy the results of their labor. Detainees’ labor produces revenue for the government at a low operating cost:

Ordinary citizens can mine the coal, but the political prison camp kwalliso itself brings a big profit to the MPS and the MSS, because they profit from not having to pay salaries and provide back-office services.

As well as the food ration that an individual and his family receives, the miners in political prison camps are also entitled to one meal after finishing their shift, but only if they have fulfilled the daily mining quota. Because the work is harsh and the miners feel lack of nutrition especially that the protein is scarce, a meal ticket means a lot to prisoners. The prisoners tend to bring some of the food from mining canteen to their families to add to the overall food rations they have for a day:

If we come out of the mine, we are given a nutrition meal ticket. We have attendance cards. We submit our cards and get them stamped to prove that we came to work today. It's a card for 30 days. With the attendance card, we are given the meal ticket. But if we could not complete our given quota, we cannot receive the meal ticket. If we did finish the task, we are given the meal ticket.

If you don't have a meal ticket, there's no need to go to the canteen. Those who have meal tickets enter the canteen, eat the dried radish greens soup, and take home the other food to give them to their family members.

The quotas are high; our calculations estimated that the prisoners would mine 3 tons of anthracite per day, while the productivity for only coal pickers would amount to about 10 tons. The calculations are an estimate as the precise numbers are not known and have not included child labour and other personnel of the mine. However, the high productivity seems to be maintained in particular by controlling food. All former prisoners and released prisoners claimed that there was never a satisfactory amount of food, so the sheer promise of receiving an additional meal a day upon fulfilling the quotas was a driving force for many of the prisoners.

One interviewee recounted her thoughts when she would walk to work in the morning:

If I get a lot of work done today I can get food with vitamin supplements. Because it’s so hard to eat.

The sheer volume of coal required to be mined without modern machinery means that by the time the detainee's shift ends, they reported that they “hurt like they’ve been beaten all over”.

The forced labor in detention is supposed to be a punishment; the labour in the political prison camp mine does not include rest except for one day a month that was devoted to the cleaning machines and tools and maintenance work.

Miners do not have the freedom to decide when they will rest. Miners in society mines, such as prisoners of war and their descendants, are allowed a few weeks of leave where they can request to go in a particular week. However, they need to obtain permission if they want to leave the mining area during their free times. Detainees in political prison camp mines do not have holidays.
The forced labor conditions in social mines and mining-military complexes for the South Korean prisoners of war and their families have been enforced through threats of detention for an unexcused absence:

If you don’t work for just three days they come to get you. For being absent without leave. There’s an enterprise patrol unit. They’re the police. If you’re not at your home they go looking for you through your family. They arrest you and bring you back. They take you and force you to work. Then you need to work for six months [in prison]. It’s uncompensated labor.

Although the work is dangerous, miners are not allowed to resign or request a transfer in these military mining complexes:

You can’t say you don’t want to do it... You just work until you die. Once you get assigned, until you die. Say I’m too tired and don’t want to work. The only way I can rest is if I get into an accident and go to the hospital and get a diagnosis.

One interviewee described how he tried to kill himself because of the conditions in the mines:

I tried to die so I came to Line 5 and after the explosion I passed out. When I came to, the inside path and the wall of the mine - there’s a little stream - I’d fallen into the stream and was covered in blood. People helped me into the elevator mining car and that’s how I came up. You don’t die just because you decide to die. You never die just because you want to.

In political prison camp in Bukchang and in mining area for released prisoners in Tukchang, students had classes during half of the day and spent the other half of the day picking up coal fallen along the railway while being transported from the mine to the train station. One interviewee reported that each person in the class had to collect five buckets of coal, which would amount to about 20-25 kg of daily coal quota per child.

I was required to build the school myself there [in Tukchang] with other children. When the noon passed, we had to bring a bucket and go out. Do you remember the railroad for mine wagons I showed you earlier? The mine wagons would drop coal behind as it drives forward. When we are announced to bring ‘gathered coal,’ we go outside with buckets. They require us to bring back four to five buckets each.

The collected coal would be counted and the amount of coal we contributed to the production of the Tukchang Coal Mine was announced.

[Q Then how many kilograms did you collect each time?]

I’m pretty sure it was about 5kg. I was quite young at the time, so it was very heavy to me. I went there with several other students, but all of us had to complete [the task] individually. With one hoe and one stick.

Child labour and pregnant women
[Q: How many times did you go there?]

5 times. It was quite far away. So, we worked in teams, with three to four students each. Those who
gather the coal would continue with that, and those who transport them would continue with that.
Then we took turns.

Younger children in Camp 18 in Bukchang were also reported to collect mud after their morning class and
hand it in to the mines, where miners would use it to stabilise the explosives at the coal face. Older children
were required to cut down trees before their classes in the afternoon to use in the mines as support posts.
Schoolchildren would be given other tasks according to what work was needed in the mines. They would fill
in potholes in the roads or water farmland in drought.

We cut the woods, bring them to the mine, and it is used for supporting post. In order to blow up
the mud, the miners have to put gunpowder into the borings. Mud is always needed in the mine. The
students are in charge of these kinds of work in No. 18.

When the students graduate at the age of 16 years old, they are sent to the mines as miners. Out of few hun-
dred children, some are selected to attend the mine school at night at the concentration camp:

Among the 600 students, 5 were selected. I worked very well, and I was one of those 5 students. I was
the only female, while the other 4 were all male. So, we attended the Night Coal Youth School for 4
years. When we graduated from it, we were all given licenses. Because I had a license, I had less phys-
ically burdened work.

Women are encouraged to give birth to children because mines need workers. Women work in the mines
usually until they are married. After a woman receives a certificate from the infirmary that she is pregnant,
she is transferred to work in coal loading section.

When you have two more months left until delivery, you are provided with a before-childbirth medi-
cal certificate. Then you can stay at home with that.

I took care of the work out of the mine, where the coal comes out. They coordinate the work for us be-
cause we're women. If you feel ill during your pregnancy, you can attend the hospital, but that doesn't
mean that you don't have to work. You'll have to work during the night shift and sleep less.

O ur interviewees commonly reported serious injuries from mining accidents. One interviewee who
worked in a coal mine reported starting with a Platoon of 23 people, and gradually losing 10 people
to mining accidents. Another remembered that approximately 30 people died a year. An interviewee remem-
bered seeing dismembered bodies after explosions and having nightmares about body parts.

Men were particularly likely to die from gas explosions or ceiling collapse and flooding. Some mines were
said to flood instantly, especially those which are deeper underground. The explosion at the coal face could
cause any pooled water to explode with it, killing miners who are caught in it. If an explosion happened un-
derground, it was unlikely that any recovered bodies would be recognisable. It would be rare that an entire
Platoon would die from a mining accident, but "there's no month when there are no accidents".

In some cases, the rescue team would not dig up those that were buried when shaft collapsed. It was reported
that they had no equipment to dig up 600 meters underground, so they would just leave the area as unusable
without attempting rescue operations.

The miners would report that the safety conditions were so poor that they had a common saying in the Camp:
“we're living on the bottom lining board of our coffins, because we never knew when the mine would col-
The work accidents also often resulted when the supervisors insisted to continue work even if some dynamite did not explode. The miners reported that there was a rule to wait 30 minutes for the dynamite to explode, but this was not always observed.

Despite the conditions, miners even in social mines are unable to protest. They do not even ask for the minimum equipment, so that they can perform their day-to-day labor.

[Q: What about masks or safety helmets?] They provide us helmets that were made by those who do the light labor in the camp. But they give us one annually. And the helmets have cracks. [Q: You’ll have to use broken helmets?] Yes. How can we have masks, while there’s not enough cloth in the camp. We just rip a part from our clothes. We don’t get separate masks. Do you know how disgusting the smell of gunpowder is?

[Q: Do you get to wash your face after your work is done?] We have to wash our faces because our faces are all black… There are dressing rooms and bathhouses there. There’s always a shortage of soap. So we create soaps with lye. We wash our faces and find our attendance cards. If we’ve done quota as we were told to, they provide us with meal tickets.

[Q: Then the women take showers together?] No, it’s not a shower. We use wooden bowls to pour water on ourselves. There’s no shower. [Q: Is the water warm enough?] Yes, it is. We’re at a coal mine, so they have boilers to heat the water.

One Party Member who worked in a mine reported that South Korean prisoners of war and their families in military complexes were entitled to new shoes and uniforms every six months because coal mining is so physically demanding that clothes wear out very quickly. He reported that his colleagues would not even ask for their minimum entitlements and would not follow orders to improve the work conditions at the blind end, even when it was obviously dangerous, unless it was allowed by the management of the mines.

They’re so scared they won’t say anything. Even if it’s the fair thing to do. These people can’t speak up, and they take whatever they receive and keep whatever they have, their work clothes too. If you’re a coal miner, you’re meant to receive new shoes and things every six months. Those people don’t receive anything like that. They’re lucky if they get a set once a year. You sweat so much when you go inside that you can’t even wear your work clothes.

Depending on the seriousness of the accident, a miner may be assigned to lighter labor upon recovery. Other miners may develop cardiopulmonary illnesses, nephritis and other chronic illnesses. Access to medical assistance was much better in the mining-military complexes than in the mining areas of prisoners and released prisoners.

One of the released prisoners reported of Tukchang:
There were reported special regulations in all sorts of detention mining areas and in the social mines, as to how much a person was supposed to receive. The political prisoners are assigned meal rations according to the type of their employment in the political prison camp, with the miners theoretically receiving the most at 900 grams. However, each individual ration was cut by 20% "taxation" for the Military, meaning that political prisoners – whether they are miners, farmers, factory workers or students – have to feed the soldiers out of their meagre rations. The only exception was when a woman-detainee gave birth to a child, she was given 700 grams rations without the 20% cut.

I worked in the mine, so I earned 900 grams a day. My younger brother also received 900 grams a day. Students can receive only 400. So we take our ration ticket, and they calculate the whole amount. From that overall amount, they take away 20% as rice for the Military. The rest are given as ration.

The total amount of food we could earn monthly was about 8 kg of wet corn. Then we dry them on a net, grind them on a millstone and distribute them in numerous bags. The size of one package was similar to the size of the paper water cup we use here [in water dispensers in South Korea].

The food was never enough. My grandmother allowed all the members to have that one package together only on the days the householder went to work. Sometimes, we brought meal with vitamins [from mine canteen], poured water into it and made it into thin gruel.

There’s no such thing as receiving more rations, even if your food is insufficient. You have to solve the problem yourself.

One of the interviewees was a Party official sent to the military mining complex with South Korean prisoners of war to report to the Central Party of the conditions in the complex. He reported that the rations provided would usually be of poor quality:

The soup is salt soup but they call it nylon soup. In North Korean slang, you say about nylon soup that the pork in it put on rain boots and sloshed away. There’s nothing in the broth, and the meat the officials eat. You see that it’s just plain broth and you say that the pork put on rain boots and walked off.

The detention camps used food to control its workers. Each platoon working its shift would be ordered to mine enough coal to fill a certain number of carts. If they failed to fill the order, they would not receive meal vouchers after their shift. They would be harshly criticised at the daily Schedule Life Review Session. Platoons were not allowed to combine their outputs so that platoons that produced more than their order could fill the order of another. Detainees were also denied meals if they were late.

So for example, the work is done. Then you report to the Command Center that “Coal Mining Squadron 4 has finished our shift”. On the phone. Then the platoon leaders come out and line up in the Command Center. The Command Center officer looks at the squadron members. He has a look, and he calls up the Center that handles the sign-ins at the beginning of each shift and says, "Coal Mining Squadron 4 has finished their shift. This many people attended. This many people receive meal tickets. Those who do not receive meal tickets are these people." He does that. Then you go to the bathhouse and change your clothes and wash up, and then you come out. They’ll give you a card when you come out, and inside is the meal ticket.

Political prison camps are designed to be self-sufficient and, under ideal conditions, political prisoners would be relatively well nourished because the camps produce their own food, but that is often not the case, as the rations are reduced. One interviewee who worked in a corn field would steal some of the corn to eat. Interviewee reported that when he worked on a farm inside a detention camp, he was able to steal ears of corn or rice while he was working and eat it to supplement his meagre rations:

In autumn your body gets a little healthier because you can steal a little corn to eat. You can steal some ears of rice and disintegrate the husks quietly with your hands and then blow the husk off. Then the top layer will come off and the inner layer will stay intact. So you just take off the top layer and you eat it, and it tastes really good.
According to a statistician who worked in the detention camp, the regulations he referred to allowed rations of “bean paste, soy sauce, salt, oil, fish, pollack. It’s all in the regulations.” But these rations usually were not provided as in the regulations:

They give you corn for rice. There are rocks the size of beans in it. You’d chew on a rock and break your teeth. They give you meat on festival days... You get two kilos of meat for about 400 people... The bosses, you know. They’ll take the meat and eat it between themselves. Normal prisoners can’t even get anything in their mouths to get some fat in them. You keep chewing it. You chew it and it becomes water in your mouth. But you can’t swallow it because it’s so precious.

The wards that produce agricultural products in the political prison camps seem to do a bit better, as they have access to such products and can secretly steal. In Camp 18, miners who tried to steal the corn were reported to have been executed. There was also a heavy punishment for trading in food with other inmates if caught. In good years, there was also access to the fertilizers from South Korea, which would improve output in the fields of political prison camps.

Q: So if you have a lot of land, so you’d have a lot of corn or other crops. Do you eat it all inside the prison camp? There’s a lot left. If you ate it all you’d die from overfeeding. Q: Do you know where the rest goes? I don’t know where it goes, but it goes somewhere else.

Q: What do you put on it? Animal waste or fertilizer? It’s fertilizer for farming. We used South Korean fertilizer time to time. Q: How did you know it was South Korean fertilizer? South Korean fertilizer has the text on it. It’s written “Republic of Korea”. During farming season, during fertilizing season, there’s a lot of fertilizer. Because you have to farm for produce so you have to give fertilizer.

Prisoners do not have a choice over the food they receive as rations for cooking. The most common disease was reported to be pellagra. Pellagra can be most common disease in communities that obtain their food energy mostly from corn. This is why receiving the additional vitamin enhanced meal in the canteen is important addition for miners and prisoners who try to meet their daily quota to receive it. A person who lived in the Released Prisoners Area with parents in Tukchang reported that those who had permission would be able to go to social areas to bring some additional food. However, even though his mother would sometimes bring food from the social areas, the basic food was similar every day.

Q: What was normally in the lunch box?
From home, [my father] would take some corn rice and a spoon of soybean paste in a flat aluminum tin. It was the same when I went to school. That’s how normally we packed food. If one or two pieces of garlic were added, that lunch would be a decent one.

People in the camps forage in the mountains during some of the seasons and bring herbs, or mushrooms to supplement the food they eat every day. People were reported to get sick as a result of eating poisonous food.

People start eating this grass called ‘pig’s grass’ because they can’t find any other edible grass anymore. They pick this grass, add corn powder, and cook them into soup. We call it ‘grass porridge’. If you wash the sparkling powder that’s attached on the back of the grass off and boil it, then you’ll be fine. The sparkling powder has poison in it. The person will swell up, as if somebody poured water into him or her, to the extent that nobody will be able to notice who he or she is.
Detainees did not have the freedom to move houses as they wanted. With their families, they were assigned accommodation in a village within the Camp. Interviewee estimated that around 30,000 people lived in Prisoners Area of Camp 18 at its apex, including approximately 3000 personnel of guards and camp management with their family members. 27,000 people would be prisoners, many with their families. Much bigger area was reported to be the side for released prisoners in Tukchang Labor District. Residents lived with their families in one-storey blocks of houses, four of which would be stuck together like a harmonica. They were very small, and up to three generations of the same family could cohabitate. Some of our interviewees reported living in army-style barracks. Some barracks had beds on either side and a corridor in the middle, but some detainees slept on concrete floors of up to 45 people in one building. These forms of accommodation are a stark contrast from Party members who are given larger free-standing houses in the political prison camps as well as high-end apartments in mining-military complexes housing the South Korean prisoners of war and their families. The Party official reported that South Korean POW families would not be able to be released from their mining complex, nor that they could escape, although the level of surveillance was naturally much harsher in the camps.

How many households live in one of these houses? 4 households. 1 building, 4 families. A one-story building. [Q. If someone doesn’t have a family, for instance, would there be a place where men live together?] A dormitory. [Q. Is it the long one?] Yes, the long one is the dormitory for laborers.

[Q. Did you have electricity all day?] No, we didn’t, although we were at a coal mine. We had electricity for a certain amount of time at night and in the morning so that we can cook ourselves food. We would try to find brighter areas, or use oil lamps. [Q. Then how does the coal mine operate when there isn’t electricity?] The coal mine always has enough electricity. They may not provide electricity to the residential area, but they would always make sure there’s electricity in the mine. If there wasn’t enough electricity in the mine, nobody could work.

Some detainees made attempts to escape, most commonly by being hidden in the coal train. One interviewee reported that the border guards would stop the leaving cargo trains and climb on top of the coal being transported out via train and stab the mounds with the knives on their bayonet guns for up to four hours to catch any stowaways.

Some people were reported to suddenly disappear from the Camp to work on what was reported were military projects:

In No. 18 there were cases where men got dragged off without anyone knowing. They themselves didn’t know where they ended up and they would tell you they spent 12 years digging tunnels. They didn’t even know which region.

The released prisoners in Tukchang Labor District would often continue to live in the mining area because they were not assigned housing elsewhere and could not return to their original area of residence. They had to have relatives, or use connections to move out to the social areas. Also, some released prisoners reported that they were ‘bartered’ to residential areas controlled by law enforcement agencies under the disguise that they were being ‘released to the society.’

We lived there [Tukchang District] for about 10 years, and later, few people, among the released prisoners, who could leave were sent out. We took all our things, although thinking now, we did not need any of them, and were sent to Deokseong-gun Sangdo-ri, South Hamgyung Province. After we arrived, we realized that we were sent to what used to be political prison camp No.17. [They] relocated all the prisoners somewhere else, installed a guard post, and sent us released prisoners into that area, telling us that [they] will release us to the society. Dukseong-gun Sangdo-ri is a magnetite mine. It’s controlled under the MPS police.
Punishment for crime

The threat of punishment is attached to the people of low songbun and as an extension to those working in the mining industry. Detainees who have been released from Camp 18 received national identification cards, which meant that they could be tried. A similar system exists in social mines of military mining complexes, where a person will be put into holding center and later tried and sentenced to reform prison or short-term detention.

The threat of disappearance always exists, however, as people do not qualify for a better songbun even when released. As such, they might be a potential target of increased scrutiny by MSS officers.

A person who lived in the released prisoners area of Tukchang Labor District reported that when only lunchbox comes back, it is a message that a person was arrested, and it might be dead, it might be transported elsewhere or it might await trial. The family will never know for sure unless there is a trial involved.

There are many cases where a person may go to work with his or her lunch box, and at night, only the lunch box returns. While the family wails and cries, a black car comes in. The person is put into Bongchang area and sent to the secret police detention. You can’t receive any news from there, whether someone is dead or not. It’s a place where you may live but live as if you are dead.

He also reported that his own father disappeared one day when they lived in Released Prisoners area in Tukchang and the family did not know what had happened, including the nature of the charges, until the trial. Even though the reform prison was nearby, the family was denied visitation rights for the whole year the father was in detention. The witness reported that he would sometimes see his father on the backyard of the detention on the way to school.

Only his lunchbox came back. The accident occurred at night, and his lunchbox came home the next morning. [Q2. Is that what they told you?] They didn’t even inform us. My mother had to run here and there to find where he’s gone… We do have our civil rights here [in Tukchang Released Prisoners Area] so he was given a verdict that he would have to stay in reform prison for a year. He was released exactly a year later.

My father was forced to stay there for a year, because of an explosion accident. He used gunpowder, but it didn’t go off. An unfortunate person accidentally chopped at the lighted but unexploded fuse with a pickax and died. My father had to go to the detention because he was accused of killing that person.

We weren’t allowed to visit him for the whole year.

There was secret police officer (bowiwon) who my father used to call ‘white head’. He wanted to seize my father bad… he wanted to accuse my father of whatever crime, and my father tried not to get caught. That’s when the explosion happened.

[Upon release] his health was severely damaged and he couldn’t work for another year. He felt he would die if he had to go back into the mine.

Detention camps had many crimes that were punished using anything from verbal abuse and a beating to execution.

The Neighborhood Watch Unit, the workplace, the MSS responsible officer and the MPS responsible officer, they’re all around. You have to write out every bad thing other people do and hand it in to them once a month. They read the reports and address them. There are lectures too… they also come to your house during the night to do accommodation reviews so they can check whether more people are staying at your place than approved.

Many small and large crimes lead to beatings and other punishment. These were said to include theft, political language, sleeping over or allowing someone to sleep over at another house, exchange of goods or food, or loitering around a guard’s house. Absence from work attracts a stay in a forced labor facility within the detention camp. Crimes attracting execution include crossing the Daedong River to steal corn from the corn field for food, or being accused of believing in superstitions:

I’ve seen many public executions. Countless public executions… they read out the crimes. They sit
everyone down. There might be three executions a month, and none the next month. An average of once a month.

One interviewee was constantly told by her grandmother: "Pretend you didn’t see anything even if you saw it; pretend you don’t know even if you do". She avoided both reporting others and being reported herself, and managed to be promoted to a higher position within the detention camp.

There were reports that detainees were denied basic human dignity and agency. The most difficult for prisoners and released prisoners was threat of punishment, harsh discrimination and lack of food, which caused many prisoners to refer to this population as not looking or behaving like human beings. Even released political prisoners and their families are treated differently because even if the family served their sentence and behave well, the family always stay within the enemy class of the songbun. One interviewee who lived in the released area in Tukchang reported:

[Q: What was the biggest difficulty?] Hunger and discrimination. Even when I attended the released prisoners area school, the children of MSS, MPS officers and Party officials didn’t treat us as if we were human. I’m not sure whether they were taught to behave like that, but that’s how it was. [Q: How did you deal with it?] You just have to take it in. I’ve seen kids fighting back. They were later beaten up even by the principal. There’s no justice there. It’s just about survival: not being beaten up and not being taken away.

Another recounted her own experience as a detainee:

I started to shake horribly if I even saw an MSS or MPS guard. I ran into one when I was a child, just...
after I graduated school, and he told me to come over to him. It was an MPS guard. He told me to sit and so you have to kneel with your hands behind your back, your head down. They make you take a position where you can’t attack them. And then the guard spat into my mouth. Just once. You have to physically swallow it, and it hadn’t landed directly in my mouth, so I had to sweep it into my mouth with my hand and swallow. I couldn’t even tell anyone when I went home because I was the oldest child and there were only my younger siblings and grandmother at home.

The former prisoners and their children reported that it is engrained in them to show subservient behaviors. One interviewee from another political prison camp described that in remote areas of the mountain while foraging for food at times of hunger, prisoners of the revolutionary zone would on rare occasions encounter people from what they suspected was the total control zone prisoners. They had learned behaviors like kneeling and bowing their heads for any stranger, because it was a rule to do so in their camp, so they would do so in front of them, not knowing that they are bowing to another prisoners.

The person who lived in released prisoners’ area in Tukchang also said that children had a rule of bowing:

We were supposed to bow at the black sedan cars. To think of it now, we were all crazy. We all had to bow on the street. We were young, so we did all of what we were told to do. That’s how they made us all idiots.

The lack of dignity in the camps applies also to dead people. They do not have separate marked graves, usually the bodies are burned, or buried together:

When you go into this mountain valley, there’s a little house for dead people. They get piled up there. If someone dies, you put their body on a cart. Cows don’t pull it, people pull it. People till the fields there too. They don’t even have cows or machines. Humans do every part of it. With manpower. It’s the same techniques used by farmers in the olden days.

As a result of being exposed to mining from a young age or for a long time, the prisoners that we interviewed suffered from lung diseases that were medically treated only after their arrival in South Korea. They also reported of being reminded of various traumatic experiences of their time in political prison camp while they sleep:

I have a lot of nightmares about being in an accident. Even these days, I wake from dreams in which I am still living in political prison camp. It feels weird. I feel uneasy. I dream of talking with people in No.18. The house I used to live at in No.18. When the kids were very young. I meet the children and they call ‘Mom!’ and that’s when I wake up. It’s been 10 years since I came to South Korea, and I never had a dream about South Korea. Isn’t it strange?
According to eyewitness accounts analyzed by the Citizens’ Alliance for North Korean Human Rights, the construction of terraces on waste mounds, the deposition of additional lobes on existing surface footprints of waste mounds, and the displacement of waste mounds and construction of mining infrastructure in the vacated space.

ABSTRACT

The time series of satellite images from April 14, 2015, through April 3, 2019, was used to show that the nine underground anthracite mines of the Camp 18 prisoner mining complex in North Korea were all in active production as of the most recent image (April 3, 2019). The evidence for active production includes expansion of the surface footprints of coal waste mounds, the construction of terraces on waste mounds, the deposition of additional lobes on existing surface footprints of waste mounds, and the displacement of waste mounds and construction of mining infrastructure in the vacated space.

INTRODUCTION

According to eyewitness accounts analyzed by the Citizens’ Alliance for North Korean Human Rights, the mining of coal waste mounds in the Camp 18 complex in North Korea is ongoing, with the estimated rate of 7,700,400 metric tons for the entire Camp 18 mining complex, which is very close to other information that the yearly plan for Camp 18 is eight million metric tons.

This is the second in a series of reports that are intended to assess the validity of the eyewitness accounts. The objective of the first report was to compare the reported productivities with historical data on productivity of non-mechanized coal mining and on quotas for non-mechanized coal mining. The reported non-mechanized coal mining productivity of North Korean prisoners is, in fact, historically unprecedented. The maximum historical non-mechanized productivity was 2.52 ± 0.13 metric tons per worker per day for Pennsylvania (US) anthracite mines in the period 1915-1935. Many historical non-mechanized productivities were considerably lower, such as 1.14 ± 0.13 metric tons per worker per day for the USSR in 1935 and 0.69 metric tons per worker per day in the USSR in 1927-28. In the US in 1935 the quota for a single coal picker was 7.3 metric tons for a six-hour shift. If this per coal picker productivity were extrapolated to the eight-hour shift of North Korean prisoners, it would be nearly equal (9.7 metric tons per coal picker per day) to their reported productivity. The discrepancy between the per worker productivity reported by North Korean prisoners and historical non-mechanized productivities could result from not including all relevant workers in the calculation of per worker productivity. These relevant workers could include managerial personnel, support personnel (such as food preparation workers), coal exploration workers, security guards, and children, all of whom were mentioned in various eyewitness accounts, although apparently not included in the calculation of per worker productivity. On the above basis, it was recommended that coal mining productivities reported by North Korean prisoners should not be dismissed as exaggerations. It was further recommended that the Citizens’ Alliance for North Korean Human Rights seek to gain a better understanding of the total number of prisoner and non-prisoner workers involved in coal production in North Korean prisoner mines.

The objective of this second report is to answer the following question: Can publicly-available satellite imagery be used to determine whether all of the underground mines of the Camp 18 complex are currently in active production? The analysis of satellite imagery focused on changes to coal waste mounds, which are the most visible surface feature of underground mining operations. Coal waste mounds typically include the overburden rock that must be removed to arrive at the coal seams, in addition to non-coal layers that are interbedded with the coal. Since all of the mined coal is anthracite (a metamorphic rock), the overburden and interbedded non-coal layers probably include metamorphic forms of shale, such as slate and phyllite, as well as possibly metamorphosed sandstone (quartzite) and metamorphosed limestone (marble) (Zhai et al., 2019). Coal waste mounds typically also include the products of post-mining coal processing, such as the fine coal and other rock particles that would produce excessive ash during combustion, and pyrites for reducing the sulfur content of the coal. The analysis of the change in the spatial extent of the coal waste mounds in the Camp 18 complex in North Korea was carried out using a time series of satellite images from April 14, 2015, through April 3, 2019.
the sulfur content of the coal (Vick, 1990). The products of post-mining coal processing can be removed using gravity separation, so that they would be relatively dry and behave like a moist soil (Darling, 2011), or by wet cleaning and froth flotation, so that would behave more like a slurry (Backer et al., 1977).

Table 1. Underground mines in Camp 18 mining complex

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Name</th>
<th>Latitude &quot;N&quot;</th>
<th>Longitude &quot;E&quot;</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Bongchang 1</td>
<td>39.554115</td>
<td>126.077930</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bongchang 2</td>
<td>39.555839</td>
<td>126.081777</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hanjae</td>
<td>39.558052</td>
<td>126.043266</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hanryeong</td>
<td>39.545503</td>
<td>126.050956</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Jingol</td>
<td>39.549912</td>
<td>126.074013</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Suan 1 (Suan 2 not included)</td>
<td>39.560125</td>
<td>126.100128</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Youngdeung</td>
<td>39.551020</td>
<td>126.057577</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

1. Data from Citizens’ Alliance for North Korean Human Rights
2. WGS 84 coordinate system

The primary visible change in a coal waste mound is the surface footprint of the mound. Caution must be exercised in interpreting an increase in the surface footprint as an indication of active production (and the lack of an increase in the surface footprint as an indication of the absence of active production) for the following reasons:

1. Some or all of the coal waste could be placed back into the underground mine, for example, to help maintain the structural integrity of the mine.
2. The surface footprint could increase by slumping or flow failure of the existing coal waste without the addition of any new coal waste. In the same way, the surface footprint could decrease as slumps are restored to the mound without any change in the volume of coal waste.
3. Coal waste mounds could be constructed higher without any increase in the surface footprint.
4. The addition of new overburden could be highly episodic as new coal seams are exposed, even while actual coal production is roughly constant.

Based on the above list, false negatives are possible, that is, active coal production could continue without apparent increases in the surface footprint. However, false positives, increases in the surface footprint that do not correspond to continued production of coal waste, are much less likely. Additional changes to coal waste mounds, besides the size of the surface footprint, will be discussed in the Results section.

METHODOLOGY

All satellite images were downloaded from the Google Earth Pro platform and all images processing was carried out using ESRI ArcMap 10.7.1. Google Earth images become available on an irregular basis, largely dependent upon the occurrence of days without cloud cover. The dates of available images for the nine un-
The surface footprints of coal waste mounds showed expansions for six of the nine underground mines. For the Jingol and Sangri mines, there were expansions of the surface footprints of the coal waste mounds between August 31, 2017, and April 3, 2019, with no other apparent changes to the mounds (see Figs. 3a–b). The coal waste mound at the Suan mine also showed some expansion to the northeast, east, and southeast between August 31, 2017, and April 3, 2019 (see Fig. 3c). The surface footprint of the common coal waste mound for the adjacent Yeongdeung and Yeongdeung mines also expanded between August 31, 2017, and August 31, 2018, and then further between August 31, 2018, and April 3, 2019 (see Fig. 3d). This common coal waste mound for the two mines did not even exist as of September 28, 2016 (see Fig. 3d). The coal waste mound for the Bongchang 2 mine expanded between September 28, 2016, and August 31, 2017, and then further between August 31, 2017, and April 3, 2019 (see right-hand side of Fig. 3e). Similar to the Yeongdeung and Yeongdeung mines, this coal waste mound did not even exist on March 30, 2016 (see Fig. 3e).

Another visible change to some coal waste mounds, besides the expansion of surface footprints, was the construction of terraces. These terraces would have made it possible to build the coal waste mound higher without expanding its surface footprint. Note, in addition, the expansion of the surface footprint to the northeast, east, and southeast between August 31, 2017, and April 3, 2019. The above observations indicate that the Suan mine was in active production as of April 3, 2019. See map location in Fig. 2. Background is Google Earth image from April 3, 2019.

Therefore, the assumption that increases to coal waste mounds between April 3, 2019, and the date of the next most recent image indicate active production as of April 3, 2019, is probably not far from the truth.
was evident on April 3, 2019, which did not exist on the eastern portion of the mound on September 28, 2016, and not on the northwestern portion of the mound on August 31, 2017 (see left-hand side of Fig. 3e). Terraces also appeared on the northern to northeastern portion of the coal waste mound at the Suan mine after August 2017 (see Fig. 3c). In the case of the Suan mine, these terraces define a much more distinctive "mound-like" feature than in the rest of the coal waste deposit (see Fig. 3c). In summary, somewhat minor increases in the surface footprint of the coal waste mound at the Suan mine after August 31, 2017, and the lack of any change in the surface footprint of the coal waste mound at the Bongchang 1 mine since September 28, 2016, do not reflect the actual volumes of new coal waste added after August 31, 2017, and September 28, 2016, respectively.

The coal waste mounds at two of the mines show fresh waste deposits on top of previously-existing surface footprints that could best be described as "lobes." At the coal waste mound for the Hanryeong mine, a succession of five overlapping lobes was constructed between March 30, 2016, and April 3, 2019 (see Fig. 3f). At the coal waste mound for the Bongchang 1 mine, a prominent lobe appeared after March 30, 2016, with another appearing after August 31, 2017 (see left-hand side of Fig. 3e). These lobes of freshly-deposited coal waste are distinguished by the lack of trees, especially in comparison with the older deposits (right-hand side of image). The above observations indicate that the Yeongdeung and Youngdeung mines were in active production as of April 3, 2019. See map location in Fig. 2. Background is Google Earth image from April 3, 2019.

Although tree species are difficult to identify from satellite images, the trees on the older coal waste deposits are probably Pinus densiflora, for which the common names are Korean red pine or Japanese red pine or Japanese pine. Korean red pine dominates the coniferous forests of North Korea and is also the tree species that tends to appear after the deforestation of other species (Kolbek et al., 2003). Korean red pine can grow on coal waste and, in Korea, is often the tree species that contributes to the natural restoration of landscapes affected by coal waste (Lee et al., 2017). In fact, Korean red pine was imported into Pennsylvania (US) in the 1920s for the restoration of landscapes impacted by the waste from anthracite mining (Anonymous, 1923).

Although the coal waste mound at the Hanjae mine shows no increase in surface footprint, no terraces, and no lobes of recent coal waste deposits, the entire mound has been displaced about 50 meters to the northwest in a series of stages between April 14, 2015, and April 3, 2019 (see Fig. 3g). This displacement was most likely accomplished by removing coal waste from the southeastern edge of the mound and placing it on the northwestern edge. It can be seen to the south and southeast of the mound that mining infrastructure is now present where coal waste deposits used to be (see Fig. 3g). The construction of this new infrastructure was also carried out in a series of stages between April 14, 2015, and August 31, 2018. The construction of new mining infrastructure could be regarded as another indication that a mine is currently in active production.
DISCUSSION

The previous section showed evidence that all underground mines in the Camp 18 prisoner mining complex were in active production as of the date of the recent Google Earth satellite image. This result is consistent with reports by Makowsky et al. (2019a-b) that used satellite imagery from DigitalGlobe (with the most recent image being from February 24, 2019) to argue that North Korea was actively engaged in coal export. Those reports focused on the growth of coal stockpiles at coal ports. Makowsky et al. (2019a) also mentioned that, “The South Pyongan coal fields are estimated to hold deposits of approximately 1.23 billion tons of anthracite coal...Based on the imagery available, there has been notable growth of spoil piles [waste mounds] around these mines, indicating active mining processes.” However, Makowsky et al. (2019a-b) provided no details or images of coal waste mounds and did not specifically address mines operated by prisoners.

A surprising observation from the satellite images was that, at the Camp 18 mines, the coal waste is simply stacked in mounds and not confined by a dam. Coal waste is highly susceptible to flow failure, especially when it becomes saturated with water, as must be common in the climate of North Korea. For this reason, coal waste dams are standard in most of the world. Some very tragic disasters have occurred as a result of the lack of proper confinement of coal waste. On October 21, 1966, the flow failure of a coal waste mound in Aberfan, Wales, buried a school, killing 116 children and 28 adults (Owen, 2005). Even when coal wastes are confined by a dam, the dam must still be designed, constructed and maintained properly. On February 26, 1972, the failure of a coal waste impoundment dam in Buffalo Creek, West Virginia (US), caused the deaths of 125 people (Governor’s Ad Hoc Commission of Inquiry, 1973). The lack of any apparent dams to confine the coal waste at any of the mines and the location of mining infrastructure immediately next to coal waste mounds at all mines (see Figs. 3a-g) seems to show considerable disregard for human life and the environment.

It is now appropriate to return to the question of the veracity of the coal mining productivity that was developed through interviews with former North Korean prisoners. It has been mentioned that the estimate of 3 metric tons per worker per day by the Citizen’s Alliance for North Korean Human Rights might not be accurate because it might not include the full complement of prisoner and non-prisoner workers involved in coal production. The eyewitnesses explicitly mentioned prisoners whose job it is to remove the overburden rock. For example, according to Witness #8, “Tunnelers expand the mine shaft. The tunnelers go in first and expand the mine shaft, and they’ll say start mining from here. Then the miners will go in. The miners will go...
in and mine for coal.” Presumably, these “tunnelers” are the same as the 96 prisoners in the Digging Unit of Yeongdeung mine, out of a total of 800 prisoners at the mine (Emerman, 2019).

However, in addition to the managerial personnel, support personnel (such as food preparation workers), coal exploration workers, security guards, and children, who were mentioned by eyewitnesses, but not counted in the calculation of productivity per worker, there must also be a considerable number of workers, either prisoners or non-prisoners, involved in the management of coal waste. None of the satellite images show evidence of a conveyor system (for dry coal waste) or a pipeline system (for coal waste in the form of a slurry) for moving coal waste from the mine or processing facility to the waste mound. In fact, the lack of mechanized means of transporting coal waste could account for the emplacement of mining infrastructure so close to the coal waste mounds. Due to the general non-mechanized nature of coal mining at Camp 18, the coal waste at the Hanjae mine (see Fig. 3g) was probably displaced by shovels and trucks. There is no way to know whether the terraces on the coal waste mounds were constructed with picks and shovels, but, if so, the operation would have used a considerable number of workers. In summary, the possibly considerable number of prisoners or non-prisoners involved in the transport and management of coal waste should be considered and included in the calculation of per worker productivity.