

KOREA: SYNGMAN RHEE FINDS SITUATION NOT "CRITICAL"

Available transmissions from the Seoul radio and from the KOREAN PACIFIC PRESS reveal a reluctance to admit the seriousness of the present military situation. In late November there were references to the presence of Chinese Communist troops but Seoul assured Koreans that this was no cause for concern. On 3 December Seoul broadcast special messages from Syngman Rhee and Defense Minister Shin which declared that "there is nothing to fear or worry about. . . . The President of the United States has once again declared that Korea cannot be abandoned." And on 5 December Seoul reports President Rhee as saying at his 4 December press conference that "the present situation is very serious but not critical after all." However, Seoul fails to report Rhee's 4 December reference to a possible compromise with Peiping and Moscow, and it does not discuss President Truman's reference to the possible use of the atom bomb.

This failure to acknowledge the actual state of affairs suggests a desire to avoid panicking the civilian population. It also suggests Republican confidence that the United Nations will be able to save the day. Rhee frequently reminds Koreans of the assistance they are receiving from the U.S. and on 6 December Seoul reports that "the National Assembly," meeting in an emergency session on 4 December, called on the U.N., President Truman, General MacArthur, Britain, and France to take "stern measures" in connection with the Chinese invasion. Seoul quickly reported President Truman's new request for increased military appropriations, and Rhee's above-mentioned quotation from Truman's 30 November statements also seems intended to bolster confidence in eventual salvation.

On the other hand, however, Seoul reports that Rhee has taken at least one step in the direction of self-help. On 4 December Seoul announces the decision to levy land taxes in kind, contrary to the provisions of the land tax law only recently adopted by the Assembly over Rhee's protests. In the statement explaining the "emergency measures," Rhee declares that the Government had intended to enforce the Assembly measure, "understanding that the National Assembly must have had reasons for this action," but that the sudden change in the military situation necessitates postponement.

In news reports, talks, and articles transmitted prior to 3 December both Seoul and KOREAN PACIFIC PRESS note the Republic's attempts to solve such problems as inflation, care of refugees, guerrillas, competition between ROK and North Korean currencies, and creation of a National Guard. As usual Seoul gives only the briefest indication of the friction between the Assembly and Syngman Rhee. KOREAN PACIFIC PRESS, however, relays newspaper references to conflicting opinions on the juridical system, land tax, and treatment of "pro-Communists" (there is a tendency to avoid the word collaboratorist).

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