

An Australian View of the Pusan Political Crisis in Korea, 1952

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Introduction

Australia was a member of the UNTCOK (United Nations Temporary Commission on Korea) when Korea was divided in 1945, and took part as a member of the UNCURK (United Nations Commission for the Unification and Rehabilitation of Korea) during the Korean War in 1950. When Australia served as a member of the UNTCOK, it opposed the U.S. strategy of establishing a divided government in Korea along with Canada.¹ Nevertheless the role of Australia in Korea at this time has been

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1 Choi Yo-Sup (ChoeYosöp). “1947-1948nyön Yu-en Yimsiwiwöndanü Söngnipkwa Hwaldong (The Establishment and activities United Nations Temporary Commission of Korea (1947~1948)), Master’s thesis, Department of Korean History, Seoul National University (2005) ; Park Tae-Gyun (Pak TaeKyun). “Miunriseakkidül: Yu-en Hankuk Yimsiwiwöndanesö Kaenada Daepyodanü Hwaldong” (The Ugly Duckling: The Activities of the Canadian Delegate in UNTCOK and Koreans’ Evaluation) *Pigyo Hankukhak* (Comparative Korean Studies) 13(2005). For an Australian perspective on the UNTCK see Keretes, J.L. Australia and Korea 1947-1948; “Australia’s Involvement in the U.N.T.C.O.K.” B.A (hons) thesis, Department of Government and History Faculty of Military Studies, University of New South Wales Royal Military Academy. 1976.

overlooked. This is because contemporary Korean history has generally been studied within the framework of relations between Korea and America.

At that time, the Korean Peninsula occupied a strategic location with overlapping international interests reflecting the respective positions of the US and the Soviet Union. Australia also paid sharp attention to the political situation of Korea even to the extent of showing concern over Syngman Rhee's (Yi Sŭngman) medical condition. Of course, it's difficult to regard Australia as of anywhere near equal importance, to Korea, as America. There was no direct support or orders from Canberra, and Canberra put an Australian in Seoul who was capable of making his own judgment (and thus decisions about political events in Korea) in charge of independent judgment and decisions about political events in Korea. So apart from Australia's concern over political events, it didn't play a crucial role in events such as the "Pusan Political Crisis." Nevertheless Australian diplomats like James Plimsoll intended to intervene in the crisis. This article aims to examine the reason that Australians in Korea, as a member of the UNCURK, concerned themselves and intervened in the crisis guided by democratic principles, even though there was no specific directive from their government.²

Earlier studies on this event treat it as a political confrontation, a democratic issue, and as the framework of relations between Korea and America (for example, 'Everready Plan').³ On the other hand this article

2 Garry Woodard. "James Plimsoll in the South Korean constitutional crisis of 1952," *Australian Journal of International Affairs* 56 (2002): 3.

3 Hong Seuk-Ryule (Hong Sökryul). "Hankuk Chŏnjaeng Chŏnhu Mikuküi Yi, Sŭngman Jaekŏ Kaehoek" (The US's Assassination Plan of Syngman Rhee around the time of the Korean War) *Yöksapipyŏng* 26 (1994); Lee Chul-soon (Yi Chŏlsun). "Pusan Chŏngch'ipadong e Daehan Mikuküi Kaeyip: Mikuküi Kuk kayiyik Kyujŏngül Tulŏssan Kungmupuwa Kunpuüi Nonjaengül Jungsimŭlo"(The Controversy between Department of State and the Military over the Definition of U. S. National

shows a new perspective of this event in terms of using Australian archival documents. The members of the National Assembly who opposed Syngman Rhee appealed to the Australians. Australians in Korea⁴ sincerely desired to intervene in this event for its own interests and to ensure democratic principles were upheld.

The National Archives of Australia in Canberra has many documents about the relations between Korea and Australia. This article also aims to expand the current understanding of foreign relations after liberation in Korea as not simply limited to America but also in relation to Australia. This article attempts to highlight that Korea's relations were not unilateral between Korea and the U.S. but more multilateral in nature, and that other countries, in this case Australia, did have an impact and were involved as well.

Political Machinations for Perpetuation

There is no doubting that Syngman Rhee was deeply involved in lobbying for the establishment of the ROK (Republic of Korea) in various forums, particularly in the USA. He was not only involved in the overall push for the creation of the ROK but as would be expected was also deeply involved in the internal struggles and machinations of the various groups involved. The formal establishment of the ROK saw Rhee installed as the first President. If there was a hope that the intra/inter-conflict might recede with the establishment of the republic this was not to be the case.

Although President Rhee may have had some philosophical basis for

Interest: American Intervention in Pusan Political Crisis in Korea) *Hankuk Jōngchi Yōnku* 10 (2001); FUJII, Takeshi (Hujii Takesi). *Pasijūmka Jaesamsaekyejuūi Saiesō*. (Seoul: Yōksapipyōngsa, 2012).

4 Apart from the approximately three on the UNTOCK there were only a few Australian missionaries.

this attempt to modify the Korean constitution to allow for direct presidential elections, in line with US practice, the timing of such action gives credence to support the interpretation that Rhee's real concern was with remaining in power and that he was willing to use whatever means were necessary. Despite the war situation being anything but favorable, political maneuvering followed the October 1951 announcement that by-elections for the National Assembly and local elections were to be held in the New Year. This maneuvering not only escalated the tensions that had been simmering below the surface but took on a more public form.

In line with Rhee's previous tactics his campaign opened in an indirect fashion by having Lee Ki-Boong (Yi Kipung) announce at a press conference that a spy ring had been uncovered and as a result ten prominent Koreans had been arrested.⁵ The list of those arrested showed a clear political bias⁶ and was seen by many as a smokescreen for future actions, a cause celebre behind which Rhee would be able to continue and expand his machinations. From this time onwards, and because of his actions, the belief that all his motives were purely political tended to be more widely accepted by the general society, a situation that further solidified with Rhee's condemnation of the National Assembly Liberals and the Democratic National Party (DNP, Minkuk Tang) on the 13th and 14th of January. Despite Rhee's skillful use of Confucian allegory to castigate his opposition on the grounds of legitimacy, coupled with their futile attempts at amalgamation, Bullock reported to Canberra that the

5 Australian Archives (AA)1838/T184 312/2/9Pt1 Memo24 Smyth to External Affairs(EA) 13 Jan 1952.

6 Those arrested included Lee Yung-Guen (Yi Yŏngkŭn) previously from North Korea and Secretary to Cho Bong-Am (Jo, Pong-am) a Vice-Chairman of the National Assembly; Lee Il-Bum (Yi Yilbŏm) Chief of Educational Services Public Security Bureau; Song Chi-Yung (Song Jiyŏng) editor Tai Yang Sinmun; Kim Yong (Kim Yong) Chief of Information and Research Public Security Bureau; Kim Chong-Won (Kim Jongwŏn) former Chief Converted Communist Association; NamkyungYo-se (Namkung Yose) and Hong Min-Pyo both of Korea Enterprises; AA a1838/T184 312/2/9 Pt1 Memo 24 O N Smyth 13Jan 1952.

real crux of the problem was opposition to the government's power.⁷ Always the consummate politician Rhee, while attacking the Liberals and the DNP, began to hint that there may be cabinet changes in the wind. Although he declared he may not have finally decided on any changes, or the hints were “red herrings” to achieve an outcome, it was obvious that he was playing Lee Bum-Suk (Yi, Põm-sõk) off against Shin Ik-hui (Sin Yikhi) and Chang Myon (Jang Myõn) again.⁸ Despite the proposed amendments being introduced to the National Assembly for January 17th for discussion on that day and the next, the president suffered a humiliating defeat of 143 to 19.⁹ This defeat may actually reflect the annoyance of the member's in relation to Rhee's statement regarding the amendments and it was felt that many who might have supported the amendments voted against them.¹⁰ Rhee responded by indicating that he did not consider the matter settled and that he would bring the amendments to the general public to assist in settling the matter in the “correct way.”¹¹ At this early stage some National Assembly members were so concerned with Rhee's potential action that they confided in the US delegation and the Australian delegates on the UNCURK.¹²

The negative view of Rhee was not only increasingly accepted by many sectors of Korean society, who attributed the situation directly to Rhee, but importantly among the few western observers in the country. Although few in number foreigners were soon be in a position to exert some influence on Rhee. In general, it seems, people believed that the US

7 *Tong-A Ilbo* (Tong-a Daily) January 13 and 14. Reported AAA1838/T184 3127/2/3Pt2 Memo 27 Bullock to EA 16 Jan 1952.

8 Reported as part of discussions between Muccio and Bullock, following Muccio's discussions with Rhee AAA 1 838T184 3127/2/3Pt3.

9 The amendments were basically to introduce the direct election of the President and the establishment of a bicameral system.

10 AAA1838/T184 3127/2/3Pt3 Memo 38 Smyth to EA 23 Jan 1952.

11 *Ibid.*

12 AAA1838/T184 3217/2/4Pt1 Memo101 Bullock to EA 22 Feb 1952.

would be able to exert the most pressure just as it was believed that the US was practically the only country to be deeply involved in the foundation of the ROK. In fact, in both instances the input of Australia has been largely overlooked.

Obviously it would be expected that the loudest protestations would come from the parliamentary opposition; but even within Rhee's own party, and society at large, opposition was becoming more vocal. The apparent inability of any Korean group, including factions within Rhee's own party to modify his actions through acceptable channels, meant that perhaps the only recourse was an appeal to the foreigners present in Korea who in turn might be able to restrain Rhee or at least modify his actions. This perceived need to appeal to foreigners not only clearly hurt Korean pride but indicated the degree to which Rhee could stifle the opposition in Korea, and by corollary, the frustration felt by Koreans trying to block him.

In an effort to influence Rhee the US, recognizing the ability of at least one Australian diplomat, increasingly requested the Australian government for the return of James Plimsoll and the dominating influence that he had already illustrated in regards to the UNTCOK in Korea. This was coupled with his personal influence in relation to the President. Not only the Americans had been pushing for the return of Plimsoll but the Koreans had also previously indicated a hope and desire for his return.¹³ Although John Muccio fully appreciated Plimsoll's professionalism and his degree of influence, they did not have a "yes" man as although he was a distinct force there was no way the Americans could take him for granted nor assume that he would always follow the America line. It might even be suggested that Plimsoll helped the US embassy formulate its policy at that level. Unfortunately embassy policy was subservient to the overall parameters in Washington as well as influence by the US military and embassy staff in Tokyo. Much of Plimsoll's actions reflect a

13 AA A1838/1 852/20/4/6Pt2A Letter Y.T. Pyun to Casey 9 Oct 1951.

carryover of the operations of the previous External Affairs Departmental thinking as well as the outlook of the previous government and the international humanist views of many of its leaders, particularly the first President of the UNO (United Nations Organization) Dr. H.V. Evatt and a previous Minister for External Affairs. Another factor was the relative smallness of the Department of External Affairs at that time. Including clerical staff the total number of members in the department was approximately 35 persons at that time. With such limited resources, the External Affairs only became heavily involved in a situation if it was believed that Australia could make a positive input to secure an appropriate outcome.¹⁴ President Rhee has at times been somewhat simplistically portrayed as a megalomaniac and while this may be in part true it should be accepted with an underlying medical condition that might help explain some of his rather bizarre actions at various times. Given the nature of the symptoms and the diagnostic techniques available at that time it was not until his exile to Hawaii that he was diagnosed at a US naval facility as suffering from generalized arteriosclerosis and cerebral arteriosclerosis and hypertension.¹⁵

The Mobilization of Government-Fabricated Public Opinion

The 1952 political crisis was not an isolated event, but something that in a general sense had been building up over time, simmering below the service, and simply needing a trigger to precipitate an actual crisis.

14 Interview with J Burton an ex EA Officer, by the author at his residence Canberra 9 Oct. 1995 insert.

15 Although President Rhee was probably initially treated at the Tripler Army Medical Center, he was bedridden from 29 Mar. 1962 till his death on 19 Jul. 1965 at the Maunalani Hospital. "Korean Consulate General Hawaii to Foreign Affairs Seoul 27 Feb. 1962 rec 6 Mar. 1962" Ministry of Foreign Affairs and Security Archives Seoul.

Whether the actual trigger was the introduction of the proposed amendments, the indication that the President was contemplating extra parliamentary manoeuvres or a combination of both is a moot point. What is really important is that now what had been building up below the surface would manifest itself as a true and profound crisis.

Rhee increased pressure on the National Assembly by organizing the National Association (Kukmin Hoe) to plaster Pusan with posters labelling those who failed to vote for the amendments as traitors. Interestingly the posters made reference to the “will of the people,” a phrase that was used with increasing frequency, and urging them to recall the recalcitrant members. In addition to the National Association, the Taehan Youth Corps (Taehan Chöngnyöndan) was actively engaged in collecting signatures on petitions that demanded the recall of the Assembly members. In addition to collecting signatures the Youth Corps began a series of demonstrations culminating in the largest outside the National Assembly by over 300 members.¹⁶

Within the National Assembly, however, there was still strong opposition to the amendments. On February 16th, members questioned ministers and tried unsuccessfully to get them to admit the unconstitutionality of the amendments. Despite being unable to get the ministers’ concurrence they were successful in arranging for the establishment of a special investigation committee to study the matter. The President counted the next day by issuing a statement declaring the recall legal on the grounds that although the Constitution did not provide for it, it did not specifically prohibit it either.¹⁷ To prove that the Taehan Youth Corps intimidation had not worked the Assembly moved to interpolate the president who in turn, by claiming sickness, failed to make an appearance. Rhee's failure to attend not only fuelled the situation but

16 AA A1838/T184 852/20/4/6Pt2A Cablegram I 2799 Australian Embassy Washington to EA 21 Feb 1952.

17 AA A1838/T184 3127/2/3Pt2 Cablegram I 2606 Bullock to EA 19 Feb 1952 (0540hrs).

the Assembly responded by dropping all business to proceed with the investigation.

The recall tactic by Rhee was clearly unconstitutional as the Constitution made the Assembly the sole judge of a member's qualifications and eligibility. Likewise one can only guess at the cynicism in the request by the Director of Public Information who on the 16th asked the USIS (United States Information Service) for information on how Americans removed elected officials.

While Rhee continued his machinations within the assembly there had been a series of by-elections which allowed him firstly to ensure that those who supported him would be assisted to be elected and secondly to expound his recall policy. The President seemed to believe that if he was able to achieve this, he would be able to ensure the passage of the amendments. Rhee claimed that those who voted against his amendments were either ignorant of, or intentionally running against, the "will of the people."¹⁸ He advised voters to keep a constant watch on their representatives and recall those who are guilty of corruption or illegal deeds. Rhee's constant or reference to recall and corruption, coupled the "will of the people" being synonymous with amendments, ensured solid ground work for his future actions and a warning to those who would oppose him.

Although Roh Jin-Sul (No Jinsöl), Chairman of the Central Election Committee, called on Harold Bullock on February 8th claiming that the election was fair and just, the reality was somewhat different as both Bullock and Muccio had received several submissions and visits from opposition members, indicating a high degree of interference.¹⁹ The police control of the radio network meant a complete control of all communications. While the police controlled the communications, soldiers campaigned for the government by claiming to be representatives

18 AAA1838/T184 3127/2/4Pt1 Memo 87 Smyth to EA 12 Feb 1952.

19 AAA1838/T184 2127/2/4Pt1 Memo 88 Bullock to EA 19 Feb 1952.

of the ROK army. On a more active level, police in mufti campaigned for selected government representatives. Perhaps even more damning was the evidence that the President had sent specific orders to provincial police in eight electorates. Although the Director of National Police tried to maintain a non-political stance, he was forced to send the orders under duress. The need to resort to having to specifically order the Director to send the instructions convinced Rhee that the Director should be removed. Unfortunately for Rhee he was prevented from carrying out his plan as the US presented a medal to the Director in appreciation of his devotion to duty, thus forestalling Rhee's plan.²⁰

As expected press reaction to the by-election was mixed. On February 17, the *Tong A Ilbo* published a summary of a roundtable discussion between the leaders of the various parties, each, not surprisingly, holding to their respective party's position. Positions ranged from elections that had been fair to gross interference. Chong Hon-Chu (Jǒng, Hǒnju) an Assembly Liberal, even going to the extent of claiming that the UNCURK had endorsed the results.²¹ After the summary of the discussions was published the DNP issued its own press statement that the election had been interfered with. This in turn prompted the Kukje Sinmun to editorialise that if this was the case then it was regrettable.

With the situation continuing to deteriorate the Australians and Muccio held discussions to collate the information each had and to forward the reports to the respective governments. If these reports caused disquiet in Canberra, Bullock's dispatches of the twenty-second raised genuine alarm.²² From his meeting with Rhee on the 19th, Muccio believed that the President's periods of "lucidity" were becoming less frequent and he is "becoming difficult to handle." Muccio's belief that it was or had been possible to "handle" Rhee really shows how seriously the US either

20 AA A1838/T184 3127/2/4Pt1 Memo 99 Bullock to EA 19 Feb 1952.

21 UNCURK had deliberately not endorsed the results of the election due to the irregularities involved.

22 AA1838/T184 3127/2/4Pt1 Memo 101 Bullock to EA 22 Feb 1952.

under-estimated the resourcefulness and/or the consummate political skill of Rhee. In addition to Muccio's view, Bullock and Smyth presented a report of the interview with Rhee on the twenty-second. Smyth and Bullock had arranged to visit Rhee independently of UNCURK, as the Australians and Muccio believed that the others on the Commission were not forceful enough and any half-hearted approach would do more damage than help.

From their interview with Rhee both Bullock and Smyth reported that Rhee's answers to questions were very vague, often bordering on the naïve. They believed he had real knowledge of what was happening but he claimed he would stop "them" if that was what was happening, unfortunately neither found him very convincing. Rhee throughout the interview continually referred to the "will of the people." He also informed them that he believe that the people who drew up the Constitution had meant to include, the direct election of the president but forgot. Rhee was even less convincing in stating that "direct election" had even been written on a piece of paper but it must have been lost. Rhee lavished praise on the whole Australian delegation and in particular on Plimsoll, even though at the time he was in Australia. In summary they thought that the interview was "pretty useless" and Bullock in particular thought Rhee's state of mind was a problem, particularly in that he was messianic in his belief that he alone expressed the "will of the people." Interestingly on the basis of these reports the US decided to try to strengthen the UNCURK in an attempt to curb Rhee's excesses while the Australian government decided to permit the return of Plimsoll.²³

23 AA A1838/184 3127/3Pt3 Cablegram O3030 EA to Aust Embassy Washington 29 Feb 1952 (1745hrs) Interestingly ,all HC were notified of the situation and Plimsoll's return- usually only London was informed re happenings in Korea .This report coupled with previous and subsequent assessments by the US Embassy in Korea and Australian diplomats on the UN Commissions, tend to add credence to the diagnosis in Hawaii, possibly indicating the onset of symptoms and a partial explanation for Rhee's seemingly erratic behaviour at times which is consistent

The Proclamation of Martial Law and Arrests of Members of the National Assembly

The merry-go-round of changes that had begun in February, when the President made his initial reshuffle, continued until the end of May. One of the more interesting changes was the appointment of Chang Suk-Yoon (Jang Sökyun) also known as Montana Chang. Muccio's assessment of Chang was quite derogatory, claiming that he was of limited intelligence and was known to have been involved in torture and strong-arm tactics.²⁴ The appointment is more unusual as it was over the objections of the acting Prime Minister.²⁵ Another major change and one that was to have a major impact in the future was the appointment of Shin Tae-Yong (Sin Taeyöng) as Minister for National Defense. Lee Ki-Boong recommended the general as his replacement as it was generally believed that he was honest and not interested in politics. At that time it was generally believed that Lee was dismissed because he had stood up to Rhee on some questions and in particular because he had refused to release to the notorious Kim Jong-Won (Kim Jongwön) from gaol.²⁶

On May 26 Chang Myon had announced his resignation and Chang Taik-Sang (Jang Taek-sang) was confirmed as Prime Minister with a vote of 95 ayes to 81 nays and 1 abstention. With Chang elevated to Prime Minister, Kim Dong-Song (Kim Tongsöng)(Liberal) was elected Vice-chairman, an indication that the majority of the Assembly was still firmly against Rhee.²⁷ The President countered with the appointment of Lee Bum-Suk (Yi Pömsök) as Home Minister replacing Chang Suk-Yoon (Jang, Sökyun) as a means of countering the new Prime Minister. As

with increasing severity of the symptoms and hence the illness.

24 AA A1838/T184 3127/3Pt2 Memo 77 Bullock to EA 6 Feb 1952.

25 Ibid.

26 AA A4321/2 U.N.C.U.R.K. 1952 Ministerial despatch 3/52 Views of the Korean Prime Minister on the Political Situation 9 Mar 1952.

27 AA A1838/T184 3127/2/3Pt2 Memo 187 Plimsoll to EA 30 Apr 1952.

Chang Taik-Sang had been giving orders to the police Rhee was particularly worried that they might come under Chang's control. With Lee Bum-Suk appointed to Home Affairs, Lee Pyung-Ho (Yi Pyŏngho) was replaced by Hong Bom-Hui (Hong Pŏmhi) while Yun U-Gyong (Yun Ukyŏng) became Chief of the National Police. Interestingly Hong had formerly been a leader in Lee's National Youth Corps and had appointed Kim Yong (Kim Yong), who with eight others had been accused, but acquitted of spying for North Korea. Yun U-Gyong (Yun Ukyŏng) was a career policeman and was expected to stay out of politics.

While Rhee was involved in his Cabinet reshuffles, the Assembly began maneuvers of its own. In an attempt to forestall the reintroduction of the amendments and thus give members time to develop a more positive response, it was voted to extend the Parliamentary session. This tactic was used as the constitution prohibited the reintroduction of any amendments into the same Parliamentary session. Assemblymen, in an attempt to give themselves some form of protection passed the Law for the Protection of the National Assembly by a vote of 95 to 30.²⁸ This guaranteed members freedom from arrest except, "*in flagrante delicto*" during times of political vicissitudes. By defining political vicissitudes as including presidential elections, assembly elections, local elections and those periods in which there was the presentation or discussion of constitutional amendments the assemblymen believed that they had protected themselves from Rhee.

To maintain pressure on the Assembly there was a constant round of demonstrations outside the building. The week ending twenty-third of May was particularly vehement and was the week in which a new element was added. From this time there was a linking of the Suh Min-Ho (Sŏ Minho) case with the amendments. Posters began appearing advocating the killing of all traitorous members of the Assembly while handbills went further listing some 14 members to be killed. Those to be killed

28 AA1838/T184 3127/2/3Pt2 Memo 214 Smyth to EA 24 May 1952.

included leaders of the DNP, the People's Friend members (Min U-hoe), several independents including Chung Il-Hyung (Jǒng Ilhyǒng) who was the Chairman of the National Assembly Foreign Affairs Committee. As the week progressed the demonstrations became increasingly violent and there was a lessening of attempts to disguise that any of them were staged.²⁹ Perhaps most illuminating, in this regard, is that although Lee Bum-Suk was made at Home Minister on the twenty-fourth, he did little to curb the demonstrations.

As Lee in no way tried to mitigate the violence, he gave Rhee the thin veil he required to carry out the next stage of his plan. From midnight on May 24 the President invoked martial law. State Council Public Notice number 37 signed by the President simply stated "By resolution of the State Council, I hereby proclaim martial law as follows..." to which was affixed a list of those areas in which it would be effective. By excluding those areas already under a UNC (United Nations Command) control there was little of the country not affected. As required by the Constitution the proclamation was signed by Assembly Ministers, in this case 13,³⁰ but in contravention of the provisions of the Constitution³¹ the documentary evidence was not made available until the twenty-ninth. At the same time the State Council vetoed the Law on Political Movements and the Law on a Government Organization. Shin Ik-hui declared his intention to reintroduce them in the "Movements" legislation when there was a quorum that would ensure the two thirds majority to override the President.

29 AAA1838/T184 3127/2/3Pt2 Memo 213 Smyth to EA 23 May 1952.

30 The 13 ministers who signed the proclamation were Chang Taik-Sang; Lee Bum-Suk; Pyun Young-Tae(PyǒnHyǒngtae); Shin Tai-Yong(Sin Tae-yǒng); Suh Sang-Kwon(SōSangkwǒn) Paik Rak-Jun(PaekLak-jun); Ham In-Sup(Ham Yinsǒp); Lee Kyo-Sun(Yi Kyosǒn); Choi Chang-Soon(Choe Chang-sun); Choi Jae-Yu(Choe Jae-yu); Kim Suk-Kwan(Kim Sōkkwan); Cho Ju-Yong(Jo Juyǒng) and Lee Yun-Yong(Yi Yunyǒng).

31 Under the Constitution notice must be given 24 hours in advance.

Once martial law was in effect in Pusan, additional intimidation could be brought to bear on recalcitrant members. During the early hours of May 25, five parliamentary members were arrested on charges of receiving money from the communists, all were opponents of Rhee. The five arrested were all taken into custody by ROK military police who were not acting on the orders of the UNC nor had martial law been requested by the US Army through the UNC. The five arrests clearly signaled a further deterioration in the situation particularly as Muccio was in Washington for consultation.³² With Muccio away, Allan Lightner, the US Charged' affaires, met frequently with Plimsoll, who was in turn trying to overcome the objections of the Pakistan representative. Although Pakistan did not wish to become involved, Plimsoll believed the arrests would continue and that Rhee was carrying out a virtual coup by arresting sufficient political opponents to ensure his re-election. The arrests continued as two more were taken into custody during next week. Importantly, one of the arrests took place in front of Plimsoll, Mathieu, Teodoro and Eastham as well as two American and one British correspondent. The purpose of the exercise was obviously to send a message to the foreigners in Pusan. As Rhee had on several occasions bemoaned the "interference" in Korean affairs such blatant arrests were crudely but clearly meant as a warning to these people.³³

Such pressure was starting to have an effect and Rhee, and/or the inner coterie, was not about to let up. On May 25th, Chung Il-Hyung (JōngYilhyōng) saw Plimsoll and requested sanctuary in his house. Although Plimsoll would have liked to help him, he believed that to acquiesce to the request would compromise his position and thus affect his effectiveness.³⁴ May 27th saw an intensification of pressure on the Assembly when 40 members were refused admittance and held in detention for 26 hours. The pretext for detention was that the authorities

32 Muccio departed for Washington 24 May 1952.

33 AAA816/1 19/323/73 Cablegram I 7701 Plimsoll to EA 30May 1952 (0720hrs).

34 AAA816/1 19/323/73 Cablegram I 7529 Plimsoll to EA 30May 1952 (1606hrs).

were looking for five members who were in hiding. The detention of any member clearly didn't violate the provisions in the Constitution relating to the movement of assemblymen. By May 29th, Vice-president Kim Song-Soo (Kim Sŏngsu) could carry on no longer and announced his resignation which he also used to denounce Rhee claiming that the President planned to arrest another sixty members. Despite these tactics, the National Assembly defied the President on May 30th, by voting 82 to 0 for the release of all detained members. It should be noted, however, that of the whole House only 116 were present and thus Rhee was having an impact.³⁵

June saw not only the maintenance of pressure but also an increase and the addition of a new dimension. On June 1st, all police outside the assembly were changed and the personal police guards assigned to members were removed. Such forms of blatant intimidation, and with it an implied threat of physical violence, were bound to have a profound effect. While this was occurring it was also announced that a plot had been uncovered to overthrow the ROK government. It was alleged that ex-Prime Minister Chang Myon (Jang Myŏn) planned to carry out the plot with money supplied by North Korea. Such measures were clearly meant to destabilize the situation even further.³⁶

Till the first police actions have been largely confined to the members of the Assembly but on the second police action moved to the general public. The houses of prominent members of the DNP were searched in the early hours of the morning but as many were sleeping elsewhere, as a precaution, it is difficult to ascertain how many were found and arrested.³⁷ Throughout this period the newly elected provincial councils, which supported Rhee, called for the dissolution of the National Assembly even though there was no constitutional basis. To achieve this end they sent a

35 AA A816/1 19/323/73 Cablegram I 7701 op cit.

36 AA A1838/T184 3127/2/3Pt3 Cablegram I 7763 Plimsoll to EA 1 June 1952 (0355hrs).

37 AA A816/1 19/323/73 Cablegram I 7781 Plimsoll to EA 2 June 1952 (0135hrs).

flood of petitions all calling for the dissolution of the National Assembly for failing to carry out the “will of the people” i.e. the presidential amendments.³⁸ Concurrently the National Assembly made strong representations to Rhee to a) return to legality b) lift martial law c) release all members currently under arrest. Each of the five main groups in the House planned to send two representatives each to Rhee to press their demands. Surprisingly, or not surprisingly depending on one's interpretation of Rhee's motives, the two representatives of the pro Rhee faction claimed that if the amendments were passed, all could be easily solved. A clear admission that all the charges relating to the plot were groundless.

June 2nd also saw the President's most or audacious step to date. On that afternoon the President presented the National Assembly with an ultimatum. Members were informed that unless they agreed in writing by 10am on June 3rd to pass the presidential amendments that the President would dissolve parliament.³⁹ The ultimatum was completely illegal as there are no provisions in the Constitution for the dissolution of the National Assembly, in fact the parliament was not due to expire until 1954. As the Opposition stood firm, Rhee responded by calling a meeting of the Cabinet for the morning of the June 3rd whereby the Cabinet was to approve an order for dissolution. The Prime Minister informed the US embassy in the afternoon that he had refused to endorse the dissolution had expected to be dismissed, he also expected the support of some of the other ministers who are also expecting to suffer the same fate.⁴⁰

At the meeting next morning Rhee was pushing for the dissolution he desired, but was interrupted by the delivery, by Lightner, of Truman's letter.⁴¹ Rhee neither showed the Cabinet the letter nor advised the

38 Ibid.

39 AAA 816/1 19/323/73 Cablegram I 7820 Plimsoll to EA 3 June 1952 (0859hrs).

40 Ibid.

41 795.00/6-252 President Truman to the President of the Republic of Korea Washington 2 Jun 1952, published Foreign Relations of the United States (F.R.U.S.)

members of its contents or source.⁴² The letter did have an effect on Rhee as he agreed not to dissolve the National Assembly immediately but rather to form a committee to investigate possible solutions. Although the immediate crisis had been averted the problems still remained.

Throughout this period, UNCURK; representatives of most legations and the UNC were in constant contact with Rhee, either through personal visits or when delivering notes from home governments and organizations. In general the notes supported ones previously delivered and to which Rhee took little if any notice, being content to reiterate his previous stand that there was a communist conspiracy and that he was only carrying out the “will of the people”. The constant visits did result in the editor of the *Tong A Ilbo*, Koh Chai-Wook (Ko Jaek) and the DNP spokesman Lee Sang-Don (Yi Sangton) being released on presidential order. The President also declared that he had decided to withhold the issuance of the dissolution order in the hope that the members would carry out the “will of the people”. Rhee also relented, to some extent, on the demonstration tactic by requesting that people desist from sending delegates to Pusan for mass demonstrations. In fact, Rhee was aware that the 8th Army had already decided to ban his proposed rally of 50,000 representatives from the provinces and he knew that he could not afford to antagonize Gen Clark with whom he had only recently had another meeting.⁴³ Additionally Muccio was due back in Pusan on June 6 and it was not known if he was bringing a letter from Truman.

In addition to the various activities the Parliamentary executive had been able to wage a very effective propaganda campaign. Although there had been numerous press releases, their frequency and intensity increased

vol. XV Korea Part One ed. J.P. Glenson US Government Printing Office Washington 1984 . 25.

42 F.R.U.S. Ibid. 795.00/6-352 Telegram Lightner to State; Pusan 3 Jun 1952. (1900hrs): 290-293.

43 Clark had met Rhee 2/6/52.F.R.U.S.ibid 7959 B006/6-252 Telegram Lightner to State 1243 3 Jun 1952 (0100hr): 287-290.

dramatically on the twenty-seventh with the announcement of a communist plot. The OPI (Office of Public Information) release was very skillful as the “plot” was linked to the “will of the people” citing an unusual interpretation of chapter 1 article 2 of the Constitution. On the 29th, Rhee denounced as fictitious stories that the UN and the US would issue statements criticizing him, both of which were later to prove true. Similarly on June 2nd he attacked as malicious rumors relating to the withdrawal of US aid but added that foreigners were interfering in Korean affairs. This attack on foreigners was the start of a series of articles attacking UNCURK. On the same day Dr. Clarence Ryee was forced to deny a story broadcast over Radio Tokyo which claimed he had suggested that UNCURK would be expelled if it interfered in Korean affairs. Not only was there propaganda from OPI but an American Paul Douglas, attacked the UN through the Korea Times on 4th June. So vitriolic was the attack that Kim Hwallan, the editor, refused to print it until she revised the article so that there was a misunderstanding on the part of the commission.⁴⁴ Rhee also covered the arrests of Lee and Koh as “non-arrests” claiming they were merely detained for questioning, while the ban on those coming into Pusan on was simply to prevent impure elements taking advantage of the situation to engage in violence.⁴⁵ Despite the constant harassment, the National Assembly met again on 5th June passing a resolution requesting the 52 boycotting members to return. The parliament was in dire straits as it tried to maintain a quorum. In fact there were two forces working against the maintenance of a quorum a) Rhee supporters were boycotting to ensure no quorum would exist to allow the normal working of the national assembly and b) members who were deliberately absenting themselves for fear of arrest. This fear of arrest was very real, as it was believed that Rhee was planning more arrests to prevent any quorum that would allow the legislature to complete

44 A.A. A1838/T184 3127/2/3Pt3 Memo 231 Smyth to EA 6 June 1952.

45 Ibid.

its work and go into recess. With a recess Rhee's plans would have to be shelved.⁴⁶

Concurrent with direct pressure on the National Assembly there had been involving an additional form of pressure which indirectly challenged it and obliquely the members. The trial of Suh Min-Ho had by June moved through various legal stages but then took on the format of a court martial which was widely believed to be a show trial, aimed at reminding recalcitrant members of the National Assembly what might happen to them. The trial revolved around the shooting of an ROK Army captain by Suh who at the time was a member of the assembly. The day after the shooting Suh gave himself up to the police and was questioned. After being questioned Suh was taken to Pusan to stand trial. On May 19th, Suh was released by a vote in the National Assembly, under article 49 of the constitution and thus took his seat.

This article 49 was of paramount importance to the assembly members as a guarantee of their freedom from arrest, ensuring that they could take their seat in the Parliament. This provision was clearly meant to protect members from intimidation through threat of legal action and the May 19th vote was a reaffirmation of the principle. Rhee's actions, through the martial law commander, on the other hand illustrated that he had no intention of allowing any constitutional niceties to stand in his way. Even though Rhee had promised a public trial – he was now able to take advantage of the imposition of martial law. With trials now being held under martial law a more sinister aspect had been introduced.

Suh returned to the court on 21st which sat for only one day before recessing for the weekend. During this recess, the imposition of martial law meant an immediate suspension of the trial so it could be transferred to the jurisdiction of the military command. The headquarters of the Martial Law Commander, Won Yong-Duk (Wŏn Yŏngtŏk), issued an

46 Under the constitution, defeated amendments could not be reintroduced into the same parliamentary session.

updated statement setting forth the reasons for the need to transfer the case to his jurisdiction. The public notice, apart from listing the rather spurious reasons for the transfer, referred to Suh as a “murderer” and stated that the court martial was necessary as the whole nation has been absorbed in such extreme criticism of the government and National Assembly that acts hindering public peace had been committed.⁴⁷

The new trial began in June with a smattering of foreign observers. Despite a visit to the Suwon alleged crime scene (PyongHwa Restaurant) most of the foreign observers believed the court lacked creditability. O.N. Smyth who had been observing the trial for the first and second week was told by the opposition that the chief witness for the prosecution, a part-time cook Choi Chung-Yong (Choe Jǒng-yong) was not even present at the restaurant on the evening and concerned. In fact in court other witnesses could not confirm seeing him on the night in question. In general most witnesses contradicted their testimony given at the Suwon police station or Prosecutor’s office. They suggested, hinted at or claimed intimidation, the threat of violence or even going so far as claiming torture Han Sang-Hyu (Han Sanghyu), Chief of the Suwon Post Office). Basically the trial was, or seemed to be based on the testimony of a false witness drilled on the orders of Han Kyung-Rok (Han Jyǒnglok)(Chief of South Cholla Province Police) and defense witnesses who had been threatened. Although brigadier General Choi Kyung-Rok (Choe Kǒnglok) was believed to be honest, a fact recognized in court by Suh, the brigadier confided in Smyth and Petree (US embassy) that there was great pressure from above to secure a conviction and that the interference was particularly irksome.

While in Suwon Smyth was advised by various opposition members that they fully expected Rhee to dissolve Parliament soon and arrest all opposition members. Yu Hong (People’s Friend Group), Kim Jung-Ki (Kim Jǒng-ki) (Independent) and Cho Soon (Jo Sun) (DNP) even

47 A.A. A1838/T184 3127/2/3Pt3 Memo 23 Smyth to EA 6 Jun 1952.

indicating that “members were only relying on the UNCURK” and that they had been unable to talk to the Commission previously as they would have been arrested by the police. Yu also claimed that the government was letting communist guerrillas enter Pusan while at the same time threatening the lives of parliamentarians. All seemed fairly convinced that they were fighting for democracy while at the same time upholding the principles of the UN. This belief in the ideals of the UN prompted them to believe that there would be further action by the UNCURK, and they were awaiting such a lead. How much of this was idealism and how much was political opportunism is difficult to ascertain.⁴⁸

Syngman Rhee’s Political Success and the Retreat of Democracy

While the trial was underway, and clearly serving its purpose of educating, the President’s Liberals were busy on the propaganda front. The extra National Assembly Liberals issued a statement on June 2nd, carried by both the *Yŏnhap Sinmun* and *Kukje Sinpo*, which declared that “the President should save that the situation in accordance with the will of the people”. Both went further by declaring that there should be no foreign interference either by one or several foreign countries. Additionally the UN was specifically warned against any interference which would be resolutely resisted. UNCURK was further admonished that “it should recognize the righteously and fully expressed will of the members of the local councils and the majority of the people, and should cooperate with Korea in her genuinely democratic development.”

The “righteously and fully expressed will” was in most cases the carefully orchestrated demonstrations held throughout the country and the mass of petitions thus resulting. The semi-monthly reports of

48 A.A. A1838/T184 3127/2/3Pt3 Memo 266 Smyth to EA 22 Jun 1956.

UNCURK/US military field teams confirm the organized nature of the demonstrations. Where overt pressure was needed it was applied e.g. Taejon. Surprisingly the June 7th Pusan rally actually took on an anti-government flavor with anti-Rhee leaflets being distributed.

Ahn Ho-Sang (An Hosang) (Head of the Youth Corps) continued his anti-foreign propaganda concentrating on disturbing relations between the UN and ROK forces. That Rhee knew of such inflammatory speeches is doubtful for during his meeting with Muccio on the 18th Rhee appeared very embarrassed by the revelation going so far as stating “that Ahn and Lee Bum-Suk had become problems to me.”⁴⁹ The resistance to Rhee also increased with more demonstrations in Pusan, resulting in more arrests. At one demonstration one professor and 20 students were arrested in relation to the opening of the trial against seven assembly members and seven citizens allegedly involved in communist plot.⁵⁰ Contrary to assurances, given by Rhee, the trials were not to be held in public but, as a concession, the UNCURK and representatives of the British, French and US legations were allowed to observe. The closed trials were also in violation of the National Assembly resolution of June 19th whereby a vote of 84 to 0 the House voted that the trials were to be held in public.

The opening of the conspiracy trials was not a new chapter in Rhee’s machinations but was supposed to provide evidence which would justify Rhee’s actions to date. The trial was thus a linchpin to the whole reasoning behind the extra-ordinary measures taken to date. Consequently

49 A.A. A1838/T184 3127/2/3Pt3 Cablegram I8680 Plimsoll to EA 19 Jun 1952 (no time indicated).

50 Those arrested included National Assembly members Kwak Sang-Hoon (Kwak Sanghun); Suh Bum-Suk (Sō Pōmsōk); Kwon Joong-Don (Kwōn Jungton); Kim Ei-Joon (Kim Ũi-jun); Lim Hung-Soon (Yim Hūngsun); Chung Hun-Joo (Jōng Hōnju) and Lee Young-Sul (Yi Yongsōl). The citizens included Han Ung-Gil; Min Young-Soo (Min Yōng-su); Hong Won-Il (Hong Wōnyil); Lee Gak-Nai (Yi Kaklae), Hong Sang-Hui (Hong Samhi) and Chung Ei-Chul (JōngŨichōl). A.A.A 1838/T184 3127/2/3Pt3 M3mo 263 Plimsoll to EA 20 Jun 1952.

Major General Won Yong-Duk (the Military Law Commander) set the tone for the trial with his opening remarks wherein he stressed the seriousness of the crimes, particularly as it was war-time and explaining the need for absolute security regarding the proceedings. General Won also lectured all observers that their attendance was a privilege not a right. The charges as read by the prosecutor covered 28 pages and basically included various breaches of the Security Act, an act so broad that it could be interpreted to include any disagreement with the government. In addition to the Security Act violations the defendants were charged with bribery in relation to attempts to have Chang Myon elected president at the forthcoming elections. The prosecution further alleged that the funds were supplied by the North Koreans. Although most of the western observers gave little credence to the charges they did accept the fact that some of the accused may have accepted funds from Japanese sources which in turn might have links with North Korea.⁵¹

If the use of the courts was a form of subtle intimidation, then the use of force had none of these niceties. On June 20th, a meeting was held in Pusan by eighty respected members of Korean society. The gathering included such note worthies as Lee Shi-Young (Yi Siyǒng), Kim Song-Soo, Chang Myon and Cho Pyung-Ok (Jo Pyǒngok). Considering the existing atmosphere meeting in an unguarded room might have seemed foolish but the presence of foreign observers was thought would give adequate protection. Within 10 minutes of the start of the meeting, the room was invaded by members of the Youth Corps who immediately started beating several of the elderly participants. Troops, under a Lieutenant Colonel eventually restored order but no arrests were made. The fact that the attacks occurred in the presence of the foreign press, the First Secretary of the UK legation and the Public information Officers of both of the US embassy and the UNCURK was obviously intended to convey a message to the foreigners in Korea.⁵²

51 Ibid.

All this pressure might have been expected to completely cower the Assembly but they again showed courage on June 11th by calling on the President and the government to protect the Constitution (81:0 with 97 members present) in the House and on the following day by requesting the President to appear before the House (68 to 0 with 92 present). Rhee immediately counted by firstly refusing to attend and issuing a virtual ultimatum that was read to the House on the fourteenth. The letter demanded that the Parliament “pass forth with and without any reservations the Constitutional Amendment Bills providing for a direct presidential election and for a bicameral legislature” on pain of being dissolved.⁵³

Importantly the question of when the President’s term expired was debated on the twelfth and thirteenth, however, before any vote could be taken three members of the Shilla faction (such as pro Chang Taek-Sang) left the chamber on the afternoon of the 13th thus depriving the House of a quorum. The same tactic was repeated the next day which stopped the assembly issuing any public statement regarding its position. Ahn Sang-Han (An Sanghan) who had proposed the motion was subsequently detained by the police for two days while he was interrogated. By the 18th the Samujang faction (in other words ‘pro Rhee’) returned to the Assembly after having boycotting it for the past sixteen days. In order to continue Its’ business the parliament decided to elect temporary officers, as it was believed that with thirty members missing it would be inappropriate to elect permanent ones. Shinik-hui was re-elected Chairman,(149:12) with Cho Bong-Am (Jo Pongam) (138 votes) and Kim Dong-Sung (Kim Tongsöng) (131 votes) being elected Vice-chairmen. In such an intimidating atmosphere it is surprising that Yun Chi-Yong (Yun Chiyöng), the pro Rhee candidate could only manage to obtain eight votes.

On Monday June 23rd in a quorum was again present with the return of

52 A.A. A 816/1 19/323/73 Cablegram I 8794 Plimsoll to EA 20 Jun 1952 (2000hrs).

53 A.A. A1838/T184 3127/2/3Pt3 Memo 267 Smyth to EA 22 Jun 1952.

the boycotting DNP members. The session from the outset started to show that Rhee's supporters had out-maneuvered the opposition. Firstly, the assembly agreed to extend the presidential term until August 15th by a vote of 83 ayes and secondly, that if his election could not take place the President would continue in office until an election, either direct or indirect, decided the position (only 61 affirmative votes). This decision was justified by a rather "unusual" interpretation of Article 56 of the Constitution but with these two victories it was becoming apparent that the Rhee forces were getting the upper hand.⁵⁴

With apparent successes in the House, the pro Rhee faction members began a second round of debates on the amendments on the 28th. When it came time to adjourn it was proposed by one member that the house should dissolve itself but Kim Dong-Sung in the chair ruled the motion out of order and adjourned the meeting. As members attempted to leave the chamber the exits were blocked by local council representatives who not only stopped anyone trying to leave but set about beating those who attempted to do so. Outside "guards" recruited from among the Youth Corps encircled the building to reinforce their demands while condemning the actions of those inside. Both groups demanded that members sign their resignation before they would be allowed to pass. Apart from preventing members leaving the mob prevented medical attention being given to those that had been beaten. Repeated requests for a police protection, to allow members to return home or for medical aid were met with the reply that the Home Minister was not in his office.⁵⁵

Lee Bum-Suk finally arrived at the National Assembly building at 6:00pm accompanied by a squad of senior police officers where he addressed the crowd asking that they withdrawal as he did not wish to use force against them. Lee stressed the point by emphasizing that it would give foreigners, the UNCURK, US embassy representatives as well as the

54 Ibid.

55 A.A. A816/1 19/323/73 Cablegram I 9168 Plimsoll to EA 28 Jun 1952 (2202hrs).

foreign press a bad impression. Lee's speech was countered by one of the leaders of the Youth Corps who called the members "murderers," citing Suh as a parliamentarian who had murdered an army captain and hinting that others were involved in the attempt on Rhee's life. This particular leader continued his impassioned call by claiming that he was willing to die and been buried on the spot rather than let any of the members pass. This theatrical outburst allowed Lee to further castigate the Assembly by claiming that force would be needed to disperse the mob. He claimed that the Assembly was totally wrong and had made a great mistake, and it was this that caused such indignation in the population. After this harangue Lee escorted the members through a side door, advising them to return on Monday and exhorting them to encourage those who were in hiding to return as well. Throughout the five hour ordeal there was no sign of the Martial Law Commander nor the ROK Military Police, who theoretically, were responsible for maintaining law and order at that time. From reports of the demonstration, it would appear that the only people actually participating were the guards while the crowd and onlookers remained apathetic.⁵⁶ Rhee reiterated Lee's message by having the Prime Minister read a message scolding the National Assembly for not having passed the amendments. Lee had stressed that the antagonism created between the government and people was supposedly caused by the opposition and ending with the threat that dissolution was imminent.

Apart from being active in the Assembly, the President was also interfering in the trial of Suh. On June 28th, the prosecution demanded the death penalty. With the Chief judge Choi Kyung-Rok, however, still will deliberately absenting himself it was impossible to reach a verdict and as a result the court adjourned till 1st July. Over the weekend recess Defense Council called on Smyth and informed him that the court was apparently deadlocked with four voting death and four voting for acquittal. Alarming they told them that they believed that the President would

56 Ibid.

order the court to return a guilty verdict. Defense Counsel and Suh's secretary asked the commission to help prevent the judicial murder of one of Rhee's opponents.⁵⁷ Van Ittersum⁵⁸ saw Rhee on the 30th and expressed the concern of the Commission. At the meeting Rhee informed Van Ittersum that Suh would have to be condemned to death although this was not to be carried out immediately and the court would be asked to reconsider the case in order to allow Suh to prove that he shot in self-defense. Although the court reconvened on the 1st it was not until the second that the death penalty was imposed. As expected both Suh and his council immediately indicated their intention to appeal to both the Martial Law and the President under article 19 of the Martial Law Ordinance. After the sentence was announced Smyth talked to Louise Kim (pro Rhee member of the Assembly) and Cho Chu-Yung (Jo Juyǒng) (Minister of Communications and himself a solicitor) both of whom indicated that they did not believe that Rhee would carry out the sentence. UNCURK members, however, had a different view and decided to take whatever measures could bring pressure on the government.

Obviously the whole crisis was coming to a head, even the in the extended presidential term had nearly expired, the National Assembly members had seen interference in the courts, orchestrated demonstrations were occurring on a wide scale, the foreign community and in particular the UNCURK were interfering on a more regular basis and serious doubts had been expressed concerning the President's health. The combination of all these factors might be thought to result in some huge and/or violent upheaval (clearly something that would delight the north) but in fact the end of the crisis was more like a whimper than a bang. The resolution of the problem, however, demonstrated just how much control the government forces could muster.

57 A.A. A813 3127/2/3Pt3 Cablegram I 9277 Plimsoll to EA 1 Jul 1952 (0230hrs).

58 Van Ittersum was the Dutch representative on the UNCURK. Generally he stayed in Tokyo, only coming to Pusan for specific meetings or during those periods when he was chairman.

By July 2nd, there was still no quorum present in the Assembly as opposition members deliberately absented themselves from the chamber as means of ensuring that the amendments could not be passed. This tactic was overcome, with relative ease, by the combined actions of Lee Bum-Suk and Chang Taek-Sang. In usual fashion the police were ordered to round up the recalcitrant members. During the night of the second and morning of the third the National Police scoured Pusan and then as far away as Seoul to “guide” the wayward members back to the chamber. In addition to those rounded up by the police 14 members who are being absenting themselves returned just after midnight on the second.⁵⁹

Surprisingly on the morning of 3rd, ten of the National Assembly Members who had been arrested in relation to the conspiracy charges were escorted to the National Assembly while their trials were adjourned. This was the first time these members had been hour out of detention since their arrest. Of the ten, seven were kept under close guard while the remaining three given considerable latitude. The distinction between these two groups was in itself an object lesson to members. The arrival of these members seemed to ease the tension and the greater freedom of the three seem to offer hope for the remaining seven as well as hint that the trials might be adjourned. Apart from the uniqueness of their attendance, what was more incredulous was the announcement by the Prosecutor that as all have volunteered to attend and hence they would be countered towards the quorum.⁶⁰ By noon there were 119 in the House to hear Chang Taek-Sang announce to the parliament “you will be kept in the hall until we have discussed the issues in crisis and have acted like a Parliament and made a decision.” To reinforce his statement the building was cordoned off by a double row of police who refused any member permission to leave, while the public gallery was filled with what was believed to be members of the Youth Corps in mufti.

59 A.A. A816/1 19/323/73 Cablegram I Plimsoll to E.A. 3/7/1952 (0800hrs).

60 A.A. A1838/T184 3127/2/3Pt3 Cablegram I 9396 Plimsoll to E.A. 3/7/1952 (1330hrs).

The ultimate pressure however came from the President himself who informed the House that if they failed to pass his desired amendments he would have no recourse but to dissolve the parliament. This action was to be taken no later than 12 noon on Saturday, July 5th. Although Rhee had no constitutional power to dissolve the parliament, (only the Assembly itself had such power), it was widely believed that Rhee would carry out his threat.

With a quorum now present, the Assembly set about the task of electing a chairman. General Chi Chung-Chun (Ji Chŏngchŏn), who until the previous week had been a member of the DNP but had defected to the pro-Rhee faction was elected chairman and the Parliament went into closed session. The arrival of more members during the afternoon and evening brought the number of members to 147 but still no decision had been reached. Although the DNP held out the longest eventually even they succumbed to the combined pressure of the pro-administration group led by Samujang and a compromise proposed by the Shillahoe group headed by Chang Taek-Sang. One factor which was of crucial importance in the opposition formally agreeing to accept the “compromise” was that it was made clear to them by Muccio and to a lesser extent the Commission, that they could not expect any U.N. Intervention if Rhee carried out his threat to dissolve the Parliament on Saturday.⁶¹ Due to constitutional requirements the amendments were treated as articles picked out of other bills. This technical device was necessary as Article 98 of the Constitution required that any amendment must be announced 30 days prior to its introduction, thus allowing time for public debate. By picking the articles out of two existing bills it was possible to by-pass the amendments technical requirements and thus sidestep Article 98.

There is no doubt that the passage of the amendments was a victory for Rhee and the methods he employed, or were employed on his behalf. The fact that he had to accept a compromise doesn't really detract from his

61 A.A. A8161 19/323/73 Cablegram I Plimsoll to E.A. 5/7/1952 (nil hrs recorded).

victory as the supposed increased control by the parliament over the Cabinet was not as powerful as it appeared. The real effect of the crisis was perhaps best summed up by Dr. Kim Hwallan, a one-time supporter of Rhee, in the Korea Times of July 8th. Dr. Kim remarked correctly that the crisis had been brewing for a long time, before the war and was concerned with basically opposing views of the type of parliament that was suitable for Korea and the degree of power to be enjoined by the President. Dr. Kim also astutely noted that the only people who were shocked by Rhee's actions and the lengths to which he would go to achieve his aims were the foreigners and a handful of Koreans. Just, as importantly, she also stressed that "constitutional crisis" in reality meant nothing to the rank and file Korean who was submissive and basically concerned with eking out an existence. There can be no doubt that the crisis transformed the indifference of westerners to Korean politics, seemingly overnight, into an awareness of and in a few cases reinforced or sparked an interest in what was happening in Korea and a questioning of the democratic nature of the government. Maybe there was interest as there was a perceived responsibility in relation to the creation of the Korean state, so serious was the turn of events, seen by the representatives of certain western powers, that however fleetingly, they considered the removal of the head of state and his inner coterie.

Conclusion

The archival documents have helped to provide a possible basis to understand the foundation upon which Australian decisions in relation to the Korean political crisis were made. Although they might explain the Australian role in the crisis by giving a foundation upon which decisions may have been formulated, it nevertheless does not explain why Australia played a more dominant role on the UN commissions than other members. It also indicates that Australia seemingly played a role that has often been overlooked due to the perceived size and importance of US involvement.

At the same time it also shows the degree of latitude the Australians were permitted by their home governments whereby they could act first and later obtain government support for such action. Thus clearly the personalities, views and beliefs of the Australians on the constituted Commissions of the UN, in and on Korea, must be considered as a significant input. The records also provide a description of Australian concerns regarding the health of the President. By linking such concerns to the later diagnosis it may be possible to understand perhaps more clearly some of President Rhee's behavior throughout various periods of his presidency. The formal diagnosis of the president's illness was to occur when he went into exile in Hawaii. The Australian archives provide a relatively untapped resource that has largely been overlooked as has Australia's contributions, for a variety of reasons been not only overshadowed but often simply dismissed.

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<Abstract>

An Australian View of the Pusan Political Crisis in Korea, 1952

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This paper examines the ‘Pusan Political Crisis’ through Australian archival documents. Though Australia was a member of the UNTCOK (United Nations Temporary Commission on Korea), it opposed the strategy of the US to establish a divided government in Korea. Thus, Australia paid sharp attention to the political situation in Korea as it took part in the UNCURK (United Nations Commission for the Unification and Rehabilitation of Korea). The scramble for power broke out in Pusan, which was the ROK’s interim wartime capital. The president was to be elected by the National Assembly according to the Constitution, but the majority of National Assembly members didn’t support Syngman Rhee. Thus, he intended to change over to a direct presidential election system to win re-election. The members of the National Assembly opposed to Syngman Rhee appealed to the Australian diplomat to assist in preventing Rhee formally becoming a dictator. Although the Australian diplomat sincerely desired to intervene in this event due to his belief in and desire for adherence to democratic principles he was to some extent reluctant to do so as he did not have specific orders and to interfere in the domestic affairs of a sovereign was not a step to be taken lightly. Plimsoll was also fully aware of the propaganda victory it would give the Soviet Union-the UNO removing the head of state of a country it had brought into being. Eventually Rhee concluded this crisis by proclaiming martial law and

arresting his opponents in the National Assembly.

Keywords: James Plimsoll, Korea-Australia Relations, Pusan Political Crisis, Syngman Rhee, UNCURK

〈국문초록〉

호주 시각에서 본 1952년 부산정치파동

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이 논문은 호주자료를 바탕으로 부산정치파동의 전개과정을 재구성하고 있다. 호주는 유엔한국임시위원단 (UNCTOK) 시절 미국의 한반도 분단정부수립 정책에 대해 반대한 바 있었다. 호주는 한국전쟁 당시에도 유엔한국통일부흥위원회의 (UNCURK)의 일원으로 참여하면서 한국의 정치 상황을 예의주시하고 있었다. 1952년 당시 한국의 임시수도 부산에서는 이승만과 그에 대항하는 국회 간의 권력투쟁이 벌어지고 있었다. 대통령은 제헌헌법에 따라 국회에서 선출되어야 했지만, 당시 대다수 국회의원들은 이승만을 지지하지 않고 있었다. 이에 이승만은 재선을 위해 관제민의를 동원해 선거제도를 직선제로 바꾸고자 했다. 이승만에 반대했던 국회의원들은 이 상황을 막고자 호주를 비롯한 외국인사들과 접촉했다. 호주 외교관 또한 민주주의 원칙에 대한 믿음에 따라 이 문제에 개입하고자 했다. 하지만 한국에 있던 호주인들은 본국으로부터 구체적인 지시가 없었던 데가다 독립국가의 내정에 개입할 수 없다는 입장에 따라 적극적인 개입을 주저했다. 당시 호주 외교관이었던 플림졸은 유엔기구가 한 나라의 대통령을 물러나게 하는 것이 소련에게 프로파간다적 승리를 가져다 줄 것이라는 점을 알고 있었다. 결국 이 사건은 이승만이 계엄령을 선포하고 자신에게 반대했던 국회의원을 체포하는 것으로 결론지어졌다.

키워드: 제임스 플림졸, 한국-호주관계, 부산정치파동, 이승만, 유엔한국통일부흥위원회