HEADQUARTERS
UNITED STATES ARMY MILITARY GOVERNMENT IN KOREA
Foreign Affairs Section
Seoul, Korea

23 February 1948

SUBJECT: CHO MAN SIK in Korean Politics

TO: Lt Col Enders

CHO MAN SIK, age 65, is considered one of the most highly respected political figures in Korea. As a native of HEIJO, he is probably better known in the North. But in SEOUL he has also many supporters, especially among the Christian elements. In contrast to other political leaders, CHO has not been the object of so many smear campaigns. Nor does he have many personal enemies. His burning nationalism and his uncompromising attitude toward either Japanese or Russian overlordship have gained him many fans, but also some strong and determined enemies, the Communists.

CHO's nationalism is almost legendary. There are stories to the effect that CHO as soon as he returned from his studies in Japan and set foot on Korean soil, shed his Western clothes and put on the native apparel which he was never again to relinquish. Equally impressive to the average Korean is the fact that CHO was imprisoned by the Japa for three years because of his participation in the 1919 Independence Movement.

On account of his eloquence which is compared to that of LEE HONG HYUNG, CHO was frequently asked to make pro-Japanese speeches. In order to deny these requests, CHO had to feign illness. It is said that CHO was even unwilling to speak the Japanese language. He declined the offer of a title. It is no wonder therefore that some Koreans refer to CHO as the "Korean Ghandi."

His church and welfare activities endear CHO to almost all Christians of Korea. He used to work for the YMCA. Ever since his youth he has been a devout Presbyterian. He is now one of the Elders in his church.

CHO was brought up to be a scholar. He graduated high school in HEIJO and then attended KEJIT University, studying law and political science. After his graduation, CHO has been active in many fields. He taught college for some time. He was also connected with a SEOUL newspaper. Before and during the war, CHO devoted much time to the encouragement of Korea's industries. He proposed that Koreans only buy Korean goods, wear Korean clothes and live the Korean way of life. CHO's fierce nationalism is unquestioned even by his political enemies.

Right after the Japanese surrender, CHO, because of his great popularity and his other qualifications, was asked by the governor of HEIJO province to form a government. Refusing at first, CHO MAN SIK finally
accepted on 17 August. His acceptance resulted in the establishment of the National Foundation Preparatory Committee, headed by CHO, with Reverend LEE as vice-chairman.

On 24 August the Russians entered HEIJO and after a few days asked CHO to confer with them. They asked CHO to remain as the head of the People's Government, but added another vice-president by the name of LEE CHUNG YU NG, a Communist. CHO was then asked to change the make-up of the government so that there would be an equal number of Communist and Rightists. CHO willy-nilly accepted this proposal.

In September there was an attempt on CHO's life. The assassin's aim proved to be poor and CHO was only slightly wounded. CHO's secretary died from his wounds however.

Until 6 November the Russians allowed no party activities other than those of the Communist Party. On that date, supposedly acting on the advice of KIM IL SANG, a very popular Korean Communist, they allowed CHO to form his own party, the CHOSUN Democratic Party. The new party had to register, but its leaders were told that they could run the party without interference. The party's activities, however, were closely watched. Newly chosen party officials, for instance, were always interrogated right after the election. In spite of this, the party is believed to have about 200,000 members in the North.

CHO's real troubles started after the announcement of the Moscow Declaration. On 31 December General CHRISTIAKOV called CHO and KIM IL SANG to a meeting and asked them to indorse the trusteeship proposal jointly. CHO refused, saying that he wanted to learn more about the nature of such a trusteeship and that he wanted to confer with his colleagues on the matter. He also refused to make a broadcast supporting trusteeship.

At a meeting with General CHRISTIAKOV and General ROMANTSEKO, the Military Governor of HEIJO province, CHO was again asked to come out in favor of trusteeship. General CHRISTIAKOV supposedly said: "If you are not for it, the people won't back it." CHO reportedly answered that he was not sufficiently well informed about trusteeship, but that he had heard that the people of South Korea opposed it; that he did not care to see Korea divided in her opinions, but rather that she should be united politically as well as geographically; that he "worked for Korea and not for Russia." General CHRISTIAKOV remarked that he had done everything possible for CHO MAN DIIK and his party.

On 5 January there was a meeting of the provincial committee of HEIJO. At this meeting 12 Communists and 4 Democrats were present. (From a total of 30: 15 Communists and 15 Democrats.) CHO was again asked to support trusteeship. He offered his resignation which was finally accepted by the Russian Commander.
Soon after the 5 January meeting, the Soviet Provost Marshal ordered CHO's guard disbanded. Instead he posted a Korean Red Guard unit which was to safeguard him; CHO was under protective custody. His Chief Secretary was arrested soon afterwards. Ever since 5 January CHO MAN SIK has been under confinement. He has been allowed to see visitors who have been duly searched before the interview. But he is hardly ever permitted to leave his room.

Now there are indications that the Communists are utilizing CHO's confinement to infiltrate into the CHOSUN Democratic Party. For instance CHOI YONG ON, a Communist, is now listed as the new vice-president of the party. At a council meeting supposedly composed of 9 Communists, 9 Democrats, and 9 non-partisans, more than half were Communists. Lastly, only two Democrats were invited to join the proposed People's Government. (One of them being CHOI YONG ON) Whether these infiltration attempts are meeting with much success is hard to say. But it is doubtful that CHO himself is losing any prestige.

Late in January representatives of the CHOSUN Democratic Party came to SEOUL to establish a Southern branch of the party. They are keeping in touch with CHO MAN SIK by means of runners who cross the 38th frequently. These representatives believe that CHO intends to come to SEOUL as soon as conditions permit.

WALTER TRENDELL
Political Analyst
Foreign Affairs Section

Sources: XXIV Corps
G-2 Reports
Others