

January 19, 1953

Despatch No. 372 from American Embassy Taipei to the Department of State, 'Monthly Political Report for December 1952'

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Summary:

The Monthly Political Report for December 1952 highlights Dr. Hu Shih's visit to Taiwan, during which he advocated for democratic reforms and criticized one-party rule, eliciting mixed reactions within the Kuomintang. The report also discusses legislative challenges, including the delayed passage of the land reform bill, and President Chiang Kai-shek's New Year address emphasizing mobilization for anti-communism and a return to the mainland. Local elections were praised for their improved conduct, while diplomatic representation in Taipei grew with the addition of new missions. This document summary was generated by an artificial intelligence language model and was reviewed by a Wilson Center staff member.

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SUBJECT: Monthly Political Report for December 1952.

Summary

Dr. HU Shih's two-month visit to Formosa continued to attract attention during December. He has indicated to high Kuomintang leaders his disapproval of one-party government and recommended that the various KMT factions within the Legislative Yuan should become separate parties which could thrash out issues on the basis of principle rather than on the basis of personality disputes. His pronouncements on free speech and freedom of the press have engendered a reaction from some elements of KMT leadership, notably from adherents of Lt. Gen. CHIANG Ching-kuo, who insist that individual freedoms must be subordinated to the state during the present time of crisis. Hu has stated publicly that Free China's fate is inextricably bound to that of the Free World, and privately that President CHIANG still holds for the Free World (i.e., the United States) a measure of distrust. Dr. Hu supports the Chinese Government vigorously, despite his "friendly criticism", and holds no brief for the future of the Third Force.

The National Assembly held an informal meeting on Christmas Day. 1,100 members were present, well short of the required quorum of 1,523. The Assemblymen passed a number of resolutions, including a request to the Executive Yuan to convene an extraordinary session of the Assembly in March 1953. It is possible that a quorum might be achieved by asking Assemblymen from Hong Kong and elsewhere abroad to come to Formosa. A quorum would permit the resolution of a number of pressing constitutional problems, such as the expiration of President Chiang's term of office next year, the impeachment of LI Tseng-jen, and the election of a new Vice President.

The Legislative Yuan has continued to maintain its position as the Government's "legal opposition", for which it has been praised by Dr. Hu Shih. In the current session the Yuan has reduced the government-sponsored increase in power rates, subjected the Premier to a crisp interpellation session, and is expected to make substantial revisions of the land-to-the-tiller program.

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In his address to the nation on New Years Day, President Chiang exhorted his countrymen to measure the worth of every activity on the basis of its contribution to military preparations for a return to the mainland. He said that the government had achieved "practical democracy and economic equality" on Formosa but criticized his subordinate officials for too much extravagance and "looseness in organization".

Elections for 11 of 22 hsien and municipal councils on Formosa were conducted December 28 in what appears to have been an atmosphere of fair play, a marked improvement over similar elections held two years ago.

Increased foreign diplomatic representation in Taipei during the past year has raised to 11 the total number of nations maintaining diplomatic missions here.

Dr. HU Shih's Visit to Formosa

The visit of Dr. Hu Shih, eminent philosopher, educator, and former Chinese Ambassador to the United States, has continued to attract attention in the press, with most papers carrying almost daily articles on his movements and his speaking engagements. Embassy officers have found personal association with Dr. Hu at several small gatherings enlightening. During his stay here, which began in mid-November and ended with his departure for the United States via Japan on January 19, he was both publicly and privately critical of the Chinese Government and the Kuomintang, though as a "friendly" critic. Dr. Hu's position vis-a-vis high Kuomintang and Government circles is unique. Despite his tendency to unleash frank criticism of certain aspects of the political "climate" on Formosa, virtually all doors have been open to him at the highest levels. He has held several conversations with President Chiang Kai-shek, the latter has given a dinner in his honor, and it is indicative of the special niche which Dr. Hu occupies that he was seated on the President's right at a luncheon in Hsinchu, on December 22, which included virtually all top-ranking civilian and military officials of the Chinese Government. The deference given Dr. Hu is perhaps not so much due to his international reputation as to the fact that in Free China the ch'un tzu (scholar) is, happily, still close to the top of the social scale and accorded special honors which are his due as a ch'un tzu as well as a former Ambassador. In any case, his viewpoints have been given an ample hearing. What effect they will have on Kuomintang policies or organization is a matter of conjecture.

Hu Shih is a voluble man, and his comments during the past two months have ranged over a wide variety of important topics. Of most significance to the Embassy have been his remarks on Kuomintang Party organization, on civil liberties, and on Free

China's international position. Dr. Hu has made it clear that he approves neither of one-party government nor of the dual role which President Chiang occupies as both tsung ts'ing (President) and tsung ts'ai (party leader). This arrangement, says Hu, tends to stultify healthy opposition, because strictures on the party may be taken as personal criticism of the President himself. He is pleased with the ability of the Legislative Yuan to function as "legal opposition" to the administration (see below), but feels that the interests of democracy would best be served by forming entirely new parties from the various cliques within the Yuan, such as the C-C Clique and CH'EN Ch'eng's San Min Chu I Youth Corps Clique. In this way differences of opinion could be settled in the open on the basis of principle rather than in sub rosa personality squabbles. Hu's recommendations have not found a receptive ear among KMT party leaders, who for the most part agree that if a new party is to be created it should be formed by dissident KMT members who have been "read out of the Party" altogether, rather than by factional splits.

Dr. Hu has expressed to President Chiang his opinion that Free China's future is inextricably bound to that of the Free World, which is to say that if the Free World succeeds in its struggle against the forces of communism then Free China must surely succeed also. He therefore urges the latter to cooperate faithfully with the Free World (i.e., with the United States). It has been Dr. Hu's observation that President Chiang and other top leaders of the Chinese Government still bear a measure of distrust of the United States and feel that cooperation should be something less than unreserved. The wounds created by what many Chinese here feel was a callous abandonment of Chiang's government during the loss on the mainland in 1949 have not yet healed. Furthermore, Chiang feels that the Free World might "desert" him again, and is apprehensive over possible changes of US policy which might be engendered by peace in Korea or other possible settlements with the regime in Peiping.

Hu Shih's admonishments in the cause of civil liberties have been concerned principally with freedom of the press. As reported in the Embassy's Political Report for November (Embassy Despatch 309, December 18, 1952) his address on freedom of speech before the Taipei Newspaper Editors' Association on December 9 was happily echoed on the editorial pages of the non-KMT-controlled newspapers in Taipei. There have, however, been dissenting voices, principally those of adherents of Lt. Gen. Chiang Ching-kuo, Chief of the General Political Department of the Ministry of National Defense. It is perhaps not unrelated to Hu's visit that the "Year-End Message of the General Political Department", front-paged by the highest KMT newspaper, the Central Daily News, emphasized that individual freedoms must be subordinated to the interests of the state during the current emergency. Hu was also sharply attacked in two quasi-military

journals, one, with a circulation of 100,000, issued free to the armed forces by the Political Department, and the other an organ of the new Youth Corps, of which Chiang Ching-kuo is Chief.

Another aspect of Dr. Hu's visit is his pointed repudiation of the Third Force, with which his name has been at times linked in the past. He has privately stated that he scarcely regards the Third Force as a "force" in any sense of the word. The itinerary of his return to the United States is to include a short visit to Tokyo but not to Hong Kong, where he would logically proceed if he were planning extensive contact with Third Force leadership.

National Assembly

Following a practice established on December 25, 1950, over 1,100 members of the National Assembly gathered in Taipei on Christmas Day for their annual informal meeting. (It was necessarily "informal", since the number assembled, which included almost all of the Assemblymen now on Formosa, fell short of the required quorum of 1,523.) The following resolutions were passed at this meeting: 1) To send a cable to the United States Congress requesting revocation of the Yalta Pact; 2) To request the Executive Yuan to convene an extraordinary session of the National Assembly on March 29, 1953; 3) To appeal to the United Nations or the International Refugee Organization to extend effective relief to Chinese refugees from the mainland now in Hong Kong and elsewhere abroad; 4) to recommend that the Executive Yuan formally announce that upon returning to the mainland the Chinese Government will permit the farmers there to keep the land they now till; 5) To recommend that the Government raise the pay of guerrilla troops to the same level as that of the regular armed forces.

Perhaps the most interesting of these resolutions is the request for the convening of an extraordinary session in March. The Assembly has much pressing business before it, including such questions as the expiration of President Chiang's term of office in 1954, impeachment proceedings against Vice President Li Tsung-jen and an election of a successor, and the extension of the terms of office of members of the Legislative Yuan -- already extended twice, in the spring of 1951 and the spring of 1952, by presidential decree. The problem of raising a quorum is perhaps not insoluble. Of the total number of 3,045 Assemblymen only 1,180 are now on Formosa. However, as Dr. Hu Shih remarked to the reporting officer, there are many in Hong Kong and elsewhere abroad, and the opinion is generally held in the Executive Yuan that a sufficient number could be persuaded to come to Formosa to achieve the required quorum.

1. - For more complete coverage of Hu Shih's visit, see Embassy Despatch 313, December 22, 1952, and Embassy Despatch 326, January 5, 1953.

COMMENT: That a properly functioning National Assembly is not beyond the realms of possibility at this time is an encouraging prospect. There are a number of functions of government which according to the Chinese Constitution can only be performed by the National Assembly. The Constitution might be subject to severe strains, for example, if President Chiang were to die in office. According to law, if there is no Vice President (which is to all intents and purposes the condition that holds today) the Premier is empowered to exercise the functions of the presidency, but must convene an extraordinary session of the National Assembly within three months after the President's death to elect a new President and Vice President. In the event of President Chiang's death a National Assembly empowered to carry out its functions could have a stabilizing influence on the inevitable jockeying for personal power that would follow. It has been the observation of Embassy officers that the Chinese Constitution is generally treated with respect, and that government officials in general take pains to perform their functions in a manner which at least appears constitutional, insofar as the present emergency situation will allow. END COMMENT.

Addressing the Assemblymen on this occasion President Chiang expressed confidence over the prospect of an early return to the mainland and stated his view, which is one that has been heard with increasing frequency on Formosa during the past year, that the struggle against communism is not a question of the problems of one nation or one people that can be isolated by area. Rather, it is a global struggle. He also took this opportunity to complain of the Free World's failure to give aid to the Chinese Government when communism was over-running the mainland. On the contrary, said Chiang, they "kicked us while we were down, encouraged the enemy to knock us out, and rejoiced at our defeat".

Legislative Yuan Activities

After spirited debate the bill granting the Taiwan Power Company authority to raise electric power rates was passed on January 5, but limited the increase to 32.2%, effective January 1, instead of the 54% increase, effective November 1, which had been approved by the Executive Yuan. It was the Legislative Yuan's action in blocking this large increase (Embassy Despatch 309, December 18, 1952, "Monthly Political Report for November") which inspired President Chiang to give a tea for the legislators in the latter part of November at which he admonished them on the importance of cooperation among the five Yuans. However, the Legislative Yuan continued to maintain its active position as the government's "legal opposition". Premier Ch'ien Ch'eng's "State of the Nation" report was followed by a pointed interpellation session in which the legislators sharply criticized the government for waste and inefficiency in government-run enterprises, for failure to improve conditions in the civil service, and for

corruption in the judiciary. COMMENT: It is reported that the Premier, though making a show of appreciating "constructive criticism", was in fact resentful of these strictures which he felt was a personal, impolite, and most un-Chinese sort of attack. The interpellation may well have placed additional strains on relations between the executive and legislative branches. END COMMENT.

The land-to-the-tiller program, which was to have gone into effect on January 1, has still not been passed by the Legislature², which was forced to go into an extended session in order to continue debate on the bill. Revisions in behalf of the landlord class are anticipated. COMMENT: That the legislators should attempt to revise the limited-holdings provisions of the land reform program in behalf of Formosan landowners is not easy to explain. The land reform, though it was given lip service by the Kuomintang from the 1920's on, never achieved substantial gains during the time that the National Government controlled the mainland because of strong resistance on the part of the high proportion of large land-holders in the government. On Formosa, however, the situation is quite different. Opposition has been heated (though ineffectual) in the Provincial Assembly, composed to a large extent of native, land-owning Formosans, but negligible in the Central Government, which is made up almost entirely of refugees from the mainland who do not own farm land on Formosa. If one is to assume that legislators are understandably guided by self-interest, then it is difficult to understand the position they have taken in behalf of the Formosan landlord -- unless it is with an eye towards mitigating the Government's stringent land policy after returning to the mainland. It should be noted, however, that the objections previously raised to the bill in the Executive Yuan were directed against the perhaps unduly hard treatment in prospect for the landlords rather than against the principle of "land to the tiller". END COMMENT.

President Chiang Kai-shek's New Year Message

In his address to the nation on New Year's Day, which may be regarded as designed to "set the pace" for 1953, President Chiang

2 - It was finally passed on January 20, 1953. The principal revisions made by the Yuan were in the nature of the payments to be made to the landlord, i.e., a high percentage (70%) in land bonds, and a lower percentage (30%) in shares of government enterprises. The Formosan landowners place little confidence in the shares, to which they prefer the land bonds, redeemable in rice or currency over a ten-year period.

made it clear that he expected first priority to be given to preparations for the return to the mainland.

"We must continue to carry out with the utmost effort a general mobilization against Communism and to complete all preparations for the counterattack against the Mainland. And every effort must be measured by its contribution to our military preparations ... we must give first priority to military matters and the counterattack, which shall be our watchwords this year in our effort to fight against Russian Imperialism. Our armed forces must be amply supplied with both manpower and materials so that they may be able to counterattack at any time and any place against the Mainland."³

He expressed satisfaction with the government's success during the past year in the carrying out of a "mobilization program against Communism and Russian Imperialism for the purpose of building up Taiwan as a model of political administration in accordance with the San Min Chu I and as a bastion for the vindication of our honor and recovery of the Mainland", but tempered his praise with this admonishment:

"We may say that in Taiwan we have succeeded in putting into practice political democracy and economic equality. However, no marked improvement has been made in the field of social and cultural reforms. The habit of extravagance and lavishness is still prevalent. Looseness in organization and moral turpitude have not been corrected ... In short, if we do not think and act in line with our general objective of anti-Communism and national rejuvenation, we shall lose completely the meaning of life and ruin the self-confidence of our race. Under this circumstance, even though we may be able to launch a counterattack against the mainland, and even though it may end in victory, what we experienced after the last war would be repeated. In other words, even if the democracies should emerge victorious, the same tragedy that befell us once would befall us again."

COMMENT: Exhortatory pronouncements on the general subject of a return to the mainland are an accepted part of speeches by public officials on Formosa, and usually increase in frequency as the New Year begins. They are considered important to the morale of an exiled population. In context the President's New Year's Day address for 1953 is much the same as his address of a year ago. However, there are indications that his words ring with

3 - Translation by the Office of the Government Spokesman. For a complete text of this speech, see Embassy Despatch 330, January 5, 1953.

more conviction in the ears of the people in 1953. Recent events, primarily international, have tended to strengthen the belief on the part of the Chinese on Formosa that a "return" is not mere wishful thinking. MDAP material arrivals from the United States have increased sharply during the past few months. The election of EISENHOWER to the presidency was regarded by many as a vindication of Free China's cause. His visit to Korea was made to appear doubly significant by the fact that he was joined there by General CHASE, Chief of MAAG, Formosa. END COMMENT.

Local Elections

Elections of councilors in 11 of the 22 hsien (districts) and municipalities were held on December 28. Despite bad weather over most of the island on election day, 80% of the eligible electorate turned out to vote. The conduct of the elections, under the supervision of YANG Chao-chia, Provincial Commissioner of Civil Affairs, showed a marked improvement over that of similar elections held two years ago, when there were various instances of intimidation and other political chicanery at the polls. Only minor irregularities have come to light this time, and several public figures, including Dr. Hu Shih and Governor K. C. WU, have expressed satisfaction with the manner in which the elections were held. In Taipei Municipality a contested election is being fought in the courts and receives press coverage almost daily. The plaintiffs' evidence is the discovery of a "leaked" ballot on the street a day before the election. The new hsien and city councils will be formally inaugurated on January 16. Elections for the remaining 10 hsien councils will be held on February 8.

Diplomatic Representation in Taipei

With the position of Free China in the family of nations showing marked improvement during the past year, the number of non-American diplomatic representatives in Taipei has been increasing steadily. Four missions have been either established or reestablished since the signing of the Sino-Japanese Peace Treaty in April 1952. Gastao de RIO BRANCO, Brazilian Ambassador, arrived on December 18 to resume his position as Dean of the Diplomatic Corps. On December 23 Julio de LARRACOECHEA, the new Spanish Charge d'Affaires, arrived from Tokyo to open an embassy. (Ambassador GULLON is concurrently Ambassador to the Philippines and resides in Manila.) Including the recently re-established Papal Internunciature and the Japanese Embassy, which now, with 11 officers, ranks second to the American in size of staff, 11 nations now maintain diplomatic missions in Taipei. Joseph SIGURET, French Charge d'Affaires, holding the rank of Counselor, is to be replaced in February by CATTAND, until now director of the Asia Department of the French Foreign Office. Monsieur Cattand will hold the rank of Minister.

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