

May 21, 1958

**Despatch No. 715 from American Embassy Taipei to
the Department of State, 'Suicide of Chia-I Hsien
Council Speaker'**

Citation:

"Despatch No. 715 from American Embassy Taipei to the Department of State, 'Suicide of Chia-I Hsien Council Speaker'", May 21, 1958, Wilson Center Digital Archive, Freedom of Information Act (FOIA) Case Number F-1979-01277, US Department of State Virtual Reading Room. <https://digitalarchive.umd.edu/document/301275>

Summary:

The document discusses the suicide of Wang Kuo-chu, the Speaker of the Chia-i Hsien Council, attributing his death to personal and political pressures. This document summary was generated by an artificial intelligence language model and was reviewed by a Wilson Center staff member.

Credits:

This document was made possible with support from Chun & Jane Chiu Family Foundation

Original Language:

English

Contents:

Original Scan

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PRIORITY

FOREIGN SERVICE DESPATCH

DEPARTMENT OF STATE 793.00/5-2158

FROM : AmEmbassy, Taipei

TO : THE DEPARTMENT OF STATE, WASHINGTON

REF :

CLASSIFIED BY: [Signature] DATE: 1/9/82

EXEMPTIONS: 1, 2, 4, 5, 7, 8, 9, 10, 11, 12

DATE: MAY 21 1958

CLASSIFIED/RELEASABLE/RELEASE DENIED

DEPARTMENT OF STATE

35 For Dept. Use Only	ACTION	DEPT.	EXEMPTIONS		
	FE-4	RMR-2	1	2	4
REC'D	OTHER		5	7	8
5-26	CIA-12 OCB-1 USIA-10		9	10	11
			12		

SUBJECT: Suicide of Chia-i Hsien Council Speaker

Chinese observers commenting to Embassy officers and other American officials on the state of morale in Taiwan frequently mention as a major adverse factor the "oppression" of the Kuomintang. Officers and men in the armed forces are alleged to be unhappy because of the consideration given to political factors--e.g., the Party standing of the individual concerned--in promotions and assignments, and the allegedly disproportionate influence of political officers and Party members in the administration of the service. Local elective officials complain of Party "spying" on their activities. Private persons complain of the requirement of Party membership for certain positions. Certain instructors at Taiwan University express resentment over what they consider the concerted effort by the Ministry of Education and the Kuomintang to remove non-KMT member CH' IEN Ssu-liang as President of the University.

To some extent, such complaints are reflective of the frustrations that are inevitable under the heavy burdens, economic, political, and psychological, imposed by the wartime conditions under which life must be carried on in Taiwan. It is only natural that the Kuomintang, as the dominant political force in Taiwan, should be the target of much of the resentment generated by these circumstances, whether or not the Kuomintang per se is actually responsible for the particular grievance of the complaining individual.

To some extent also, complaints against the KMT are politically motivated. The leadership of the GRC--and many private persons as well--subscribe to the statement reportedly made by President CHIANG at the Memorial Service for Dr. Sun Yat-sen on May 19 at the Yangmingshan Institute for Revolutionary Practice: "The fact that there is a breath of life in China today is thanks to the Kuomintang. The Chinese Government and Party leadership are insistent also that the only hope for the recovery of the mainland lies in preserving the vigor and unity of the Kuomintang. This view has its opponents, who argue that the institution of Western style democracy and the disestablishment of the Kuomintang would be the best way of combatting

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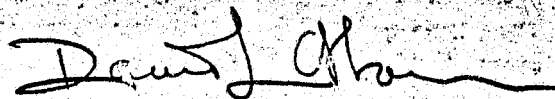
communism, a line of argument that has a wide appeal to persons chafing under the various burdens of life in Taiwan, and who are only too ready to blame their ills on the ruling Party. This situation is the source of some concern to the Government and Party leadership, who feel that one of the things responsible for the loss of the mainland was the undermining of the nation's political unity by mistaken advocates of misconceived democracy and freedom.

Enclosed, as an example of an attempt to exploit resentment of the Kuomintang for political purposes, is a translation of an editorial from the Kung Lun Pao of May 5, relating to the suicide of Mr. WANG Kuo-chu, Speaker of the Chia-i Hsien Council. The implication of the editorial is that Wang's suicide was due at least in part to Kuomintang pressures in connection with internal political matters in the Hsien Council. From an objective standpoint, a finding of guilty against the Kuomintang would hardly appear justified in this case. Wang had for some time past been despondent over his wife's death, had even spent some time in a mental sanitarium, and committed suicide on the anniversary of his wife's death. The political maneuvering described in the enclosed report appears to be the sort of thing that might happen even under a western-style multi-party system. However, many readers of the Kung Lun Pao will undoubtedly accept the editorial and its implications at face value, and the suicide of Wang Kuo-chu will probably be accepted by political malcontents as an instance of "oppression" by the KMT.

The political motivation of Publisher-Editor Li Wan-chu in printing the editorial in question is obvious. He is one of the leading figures in the current endeavor to establish a "genuine" opposition party (See Embassy's Despatch 689 of May 13, 1958, "Views of LI Wan-chu, Taiwanese Publisher, on Political Conditions on Taiwan; Prospects of an Opposition Party.").

In connection with the Publications Law Revisions Bill, now under consideration in the Legislative Yuan, it may be of interest that Editor Li told the reporting officer recently that the enclosed editorial is an example of the kind of thing he would not "dare" print, if the Revisions Bill were enacted.

For the Ambassador:

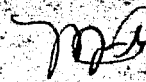


David L. Osborn
Counselor of Embassy for
Political Affairs.

Enclosure: 

Kung Lun Pao Editorial, May 5, 1958.

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From Taipei

Editorial

May 5, 1958

Kung Lun Pao

DEPLORING THE DEATH OF SPEAKER
WANG KUO-CHU OF CHIAYI HSIEN

It is said that Mr. Wang Kuo-chu, Speaker of the Chiayi Hsien Council, was a fine man, yet the fine man committed suicide by hanging himself in the early morning of April 26, 1958. He was then only 54.

The Chiayi political stage has always been a trouble spot. Since the implementation of local self-government, its second magistrate Li Mou-sung was first suspended of duties and later convicted because of his involvement in a case. This newspaper made a comprehensive report on the inside story of the case and the public also knows it very well. Speaker Wang Kuo-chu killed himself in the Council's hostel and the event became a deplorable affair, news of which shocked the whole province. Up to date, there have been numerous murmurings and speculations, but the Government organizations, though they set up a funeral committee for the deceased, have so far failed to release the report on the investigations into the true cause of his suicide.

Isn't this odd?

According to reports by our correspondent in Chiayi, Wang, because of complicated local environment and the recent death of his wife, had no intention to seek the speakership for another term, nor was he prepared to run for re-election after the third Hsien Council ended. But the "organization" could not find another man to replace him. Thus, it rejected Wang's request for retirement and voluntarily made arrangements for his nomination and campaign. He requested later to nominate his good friend Huan Lao-ta as candidate for Vice-Speaker, as a condition for his agreement to run for speakership for another term. The "organization" rejected his request and nominated Huang Ching-kiang instead. This was the first point that made him unhappy.

When the 4th Council convened on March 3 to elect a Speaker and a Vice Speaker, Wang Kuo-chu was elected the Speaker but some "comrades" who supported him failed to vote according to their "instructions" and Huang almost lost the vice speakership. The "organization" considered that Wang had deliberately resisted its instructions and there were suggestions that he

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be punished. This was the second point which made him unhappy. Because of these stimulations, Wang fell sick on the following day. Although Wang was an honest and friendly scholar-type man, he was nervous and irresolute in handling matters. At that time, his kin folk and friends were already worried that he might commit suicide, and were watching him all the time. After a certain period of convalescence, he regained his health and moved from his friend's mental sanitarium back to the Council hostel. By then, the problem of selecting a chief secretary for the Council was being disputed. His former Chief Secretary of the third Council Kuo Chao-tung had been transferred to the post of general service officer of the Hsien government. The "organization" recommended Chen Cheng-wang, who was formerly confidential secretary to Wang's political foe Li Mou-sung, to take that post. The Speaker found it difficult to either accept or reject. This was the third point which made him unhappy. Beside these, there were many official and private matters undesirable and disagreeable to him. Finally, his nerves collapsed and he found life completely uninteresting and decided to commit suicide on the day his wife died a year ago. The proverb says: "Although I did not kill Po-jen, Po-jen died because of me." Because of the slogan of "complete obedience to the organization," there are continuous troubles on the local political stage. Should the Party authorities make a substantial review now?

The results of election of speakers and vice speakers of hsien and city councils this spring were not as ideal as the ruling Party had expected. There were many odd dramas. The Tao Yuan Hsien Council was the most outstanding one. At first, the elected speaker was forced to resign. Later, as the original nominee could not be sure of his election because he was unable to force his comrades in the Council to support him despite his great effort, the man who had resigned was ordered to stay on. Yet the Party still punished him for violating party discipline. The Speaker and the Vice Speaker of the Chiayi Hsien Council were elected as the Party had planned, but the result was the suicide of the Speaker. For this reason, there is a need for an overall review of the unpleasant relations between Party members and Party committees, Party members and non-Party members, citizens and Party committees in other hsiens and cities arising from the unreasonable ways of nominating and campaigning.

Party members are also human beings. They are not machines or tools. Since the people in the ruling party are opposed to the Communist materialism, they should more or less respect the free will and independent character of its members. It may demand its members to follow its platform and policies. But how can the unity of the Party be consolidated if its members

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are left no alternative than to accept orders in the field of casting votes and hiring an employee? People's allegiance is the first factor in the counterattack and national recovery. In Free China, the people do not differ from the Government in regard to fundamental policy, but they cannot go along with the bureaucratic practice and high-handed tactics of the low-level cadres of the Party and the administration. Indirectly, they have invited people's complaints against the government. The proverb says: "If drops of water are not stopped, they will form a river." These things simply cannot be overlooked.

Mr. Wang Kuo-chu was a fine man. If his death could awaken the ruling Party and the Government, then he would not have died in vain.

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