

June 8, 1955

Letter, Chai Yu Choi to General Ferenbaugh

Citation:

"Letter, Chai Yu Choi to General Ferenbaugh", June 8, 1955, Wilson Center Digital Archive, B-013-020, Official Correspondences, President Rhee's Correspondences, Syngman Rhee Institute, Yonsei University.
<https://digitalarchive.umd.edu/document/122663>

Summary:

Chai Yu Choi, Minister of Health and Social Affairs, writes concerning the rate of pay for Korean Service Corps laborers.

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Original Language:

English

Contents:

Original Scan



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MINISTRY OF HEALTH AND SOCIAL AFFAIRS
REPUBLIC OF KOREA
Seoul, Korea

June 8, 1955

Lt. Gen. C.B. Ferenbaugh
Deputy Army Commander
Hqs. Eighth United States Army (Forward)

Dear General Ferenbaugh:

President Rhee has asked me to reply to your letter of May 18 concerning the Korean Service Corps as I am familiar with all the details of past negotiations, conferences and discussions. I know it is unnecessary to review these details as your headquarters naturally has this information at hand also. However, I do wish to assure you that our utmost efforts have been pledged to reach a satisfactory solution to this vital matter. We are fully cognizant of the indispensable nature of the KSC for military operations.

I am sure you agree that there should be a basic principle that is sound and logical whenever it is necessary for a democratic government to limit freedom of individual citizens. Korean soldiers were conscripted, and under the Law of Military Service payment for their services was not specified. However, Korean laborers in the Korean Service Corps are free civilians who were mobilized under the War Time Labor Mobilization Act, which defines the minimum wages they are to be paid, for their own support as well as their support of their dependents.

The distinction between soldiers and KSC laborers is clear.

You will recall that KSC laborers were paid Hw 45 per day when the exchange rate was 60-1, or 75¢ in U.S. currency. Of course the exchange rate was revised to 180-1, and now that 8th Army obtains hwan through the Bank of Korea dollar auctions it is approximately 500-1, which means the KSC laborer is paid an equivalent of only 20¢ per day under the 8th Army budget. Incidentally I might point out the budget was drafted when there were considerable more KSC laborers employed than presently.



For this reason we are unable to understand your reluctance to match the pay of the KSC laborers with that paid by 8th Army to direct-hire free laborers, who receive ₩ 520 per day. Comparisons, if any should be made, should not be between conscripted soldiers and laborers, but between laborers and other laborers doing the same sort of work for the same employer.

The Korean Government's interest in this matter is to avoid suffering by the families of the KSC laborers. The Ministry of Health and Social Affairs is greatly concerned, and we had no alternative but to suspend mobilization of laborers under present conditions. If you authorize equality of payment for similar services you may be assured of our full cooperation in obtaining the necessary workers.

I might point out that the stabilization of the dollar-hwan exchange rate would prevent possible future problems of similar nature, since the KSC problem is related closely to the need for a fixed exchange rate.

If you wish further discussion on this subject, please feel free to advise me as I would be most happy to see you at any time.

May God bless you and the troops under your command.

I am

Sincerely yours,

Chai Yu Choi, M.D.
Minister

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