

May 10, 1955

**Report, Embassy of Hungary in North Korea to the
Hungarian Foreign Ministry**

Citation:

"Report, Embassy of Hungary in North Korea to the Hungarian Foreign Ministry", May 10, 1955, Wilson Center Digital Archive, MOL, XIX-J-1-j Korea, 5. doboz, 5/c, 006048/ 1955.
Translated by Balazs Szalontai.
<https://wilson-center.drivingcreative.com/document/113396>

Summary:

Report from Dr. László Keresztes, Chargé d'Affaires ad interim at the Hungarian embassy in the DPRK, which describes the food shortage in the DPRK and the ineffective actions of the Northern government to alleviate the situation.

Original Language:

Hungarian

Contents:

Translation - English

The food-supply situation got worse in April. Though [...] the government has taken certain measures, [...] it could not fundamentally change the situation.

Due to the excessive forced deliveries, stocks of provisions were rapidly running out in the villages. At the same time, rice has completely disappeared from the free market. It is only the employees of the state sector and state offices, and the members of their families, who are given rice. It is impossible to get rice in the villages. In the north-eastern province [North Hamgyeong], where the situation is the gravest, the government has distributed some 100 thousand tons of rice, but this is not enough. A lot of people go to the towns to work, but many of the aged and the women head for the south where the situation is somewhat better. In the course of wandering, several of the latter become weakened to such an extent that they literally starve to death. For instance, some 20 dying or dead individuals of this kind have been taken to the Hungarian hospital in Sariwon since early April, of whom the autopsy diagnosed death from starvation as the cause of death. Most of these were such wanderers, but 1 or 2 Sariwon residents were also to be found among them, mainly among the dependents and the aged.

While the urban working population receives the minimal ration, those working in the non-state sector (e.g. street vendors) and large families (the rice rations of the relatives barely meet their daily needs) are also in a difficult situation. As a consequence, the number of beggars, particularly of children, has increased rapidly. [...] At the same time, the number of robberies and criminal acts also increased substantially, and public security got worse.

[...] the rural population tries to supplement its food by gathering various kinds of grass, onions and wild plants. The situation of the rural population is particularly grave in the north-eastern provinces. In addition to the rice shortage, an increasing shortage of other foodstuffs is observable. Due to difficulties in foddering, the arrival of meat in the cities is decreasing more and more. [...] Of the smaller restaurants, many have closed down, because they could not supply their customers with food. Vodka has disappeared from the shops almost completely.

The authorities do not reveal the situation, and this spoils the atmosphere even further, serving as a basis for exaggerated rumors which can be heard. The 26th April copy of Nodong [Sinmun], which had written about the difficulties, was withdrawn.

At present, in early May, a certain improvement is to be expected. The Soviet Union and China are increasing their grain shipments, and by the middle of May, they had transported some 60,000 tons of grain. This enables the government to ensure that the urban population gets the basic food supply. At the same time, the ripening of various vegetables and onions alleviates the situation in the villages. In the middle of June, barley and certain cereal crops are harvested here too, which will also alleviate the situation. However, a fundamental change in the situation can be made only after the October rice harvest.

[...]

Dr. László Keresztes
Chargé d'Affaires ad interim