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June 20, 1955

Record of Conversation with Deputy DPRK Minister of Culture and Propaganda Jeong Ryul

Citation:

"Record of Conversation with Deputy DPRK Minister of Culture and Propaganda Jeong Ryul", June 20, 1955, Wilson Center Digital Archive, RGANI fond 5, opis 28, delo 314.Translated for NKIDP by Gary Goldberg.
https://digitalarchive.wilsoncenter.org/document/116323

Summary:

Jeong Ryul expresses his concern regarding the challenges of the Korean artists and culture teams stemming from the food shortages in the DPRK.

Credits:

This document was made possible with support from ROK Ministry of Unification

Original Language:

Russian

Contents:

Translation - English

FROM THE JOURNAL OF□□□[stamp of □□□ SECRET
Embassy First Secretary□□□[USSR MFA□□ □ Copy № 2
I. S. Byakov □□□□□Far East □□□ ref 139
□□□□□□Department
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Record of conversation
with Deputy DPRK Minister of Culture and Propaganda
Jeong Ryul

20 June 1955

Jeong Ryul visited me today at his own initiative.

Jeong Ryul said that today he had familiarized himself with field reports from provincial organizations of his ministry about the mood of the population in connection with the difficult food situation in the country and therefore he had come to me to share his impressions about this issue. In Jeong Ryul's words, a large number of the peasant population is hungry and expressing their discontent about this. The peasants are discontent that all the grain was taken from them and they are given only 200 grams a day as a loan; that these loans have to be returned from the new harvest and therefore the peasants fear that next year they might be left without grain. Jeong Ryul said, culture teams sent by the Ministry of Culture and Propaganda to rural locations in connection with the spring planting campaign also are reporting about the peasants' discontent. The Ministry has sent a total of 130 such teams. Reports are coming in from the leaders of the culture teams that hungry peasants are not going to concerts and sometimes do not go to work. Therefore Jeong Ryul gave an order for the artists [artisty] to work along with the peasants and to give concerts only in those cases when the peasants ask about them themselves.

[Handwritten at the bottom of the first page: "to Cde. V. I. Petrukhov"]

I asked Jeong Ryul what the material conditions of the Korean artists are.

Jeong Ryul said that the artists are in very difficult conditions. Many have tuberculosis and other serious diseases; nevertheless, they have to do much work. Jeong Ryul said that, in order to maintain the artists' health their housing conditions and food have to be greatly improved. He suggested to the government that it build a residential building for the artists instead of the planned construction of a theater of opera and ballet but this was rejected.

In reply to my question of how people in Pyongyang assess Moscow's recommendations and advice, Jeong Ryul replied that all the senior Korean comrades received them quite positively and expect that the KWP CC and government will adopt certain decisions directed at improving the material conditions of the population, which is very much necessary. Jeong Ryul said that he, as a deputy minister, gets 10,000 won a month, and lives worse than the average worker in Moscow; that he is personally convinced of this having been in Moscow this spring. But a Korean worker who gets 800-900 won a month has a minimum cost of living one-tenth to one-twelfth of the minimum cost of living of the average Soviet worker. Jeong Ryul said that to eat until full and to dress even in just cheap but clean and warm clothing is the highest dream of not only the majority of workers and peasants but also a considerable number of senior DPRK officials.

I thanked Jeong Ryul for the information.

The conversation lasted 40 minutes.

First Secretary of the Embassy [signature]□□(I. Byakov)

Four copies printed
1 - to Cde. Fedorenko
2 - to the DVO
3 - to Cde. Tugarinov
4 - to file
Drafted by Byakov
Typed by Verina
№ 440
23 June 1955