

September 14, 1959

Food Situation in Pyongyang

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Summary:

The GDR Embassy to the DPRK reports on the bad food situation in the DPRK based on conversations with Czechoslovak, Polish, Hungarian and Soviet diplomats.

Credits:

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GDR Embassy to the DPRK
M 97/08/01
Pyongyang, 14 September 1959

To:
Country Division Korea
[GDR Foreign Ministry]
Berlin

RE: Food Situation in Pyongyang

We take liberty to provide you with a summary of talks we had recently within the diplomatic corps here, as far as employees of our embassy were involved through talks at receptions and events with Czechoslovak, Polish, Hungarian and Soviet diplomats.

All those diplomats mentioned, more or less complained about the currently very deficient procurement for diplomatic representations with food, and the resulting very complicated situation to supply the embassies. We have to confirm these complaints as mostly correct. Goods that were not difficult at all to obtain last year, such as quality fruit (apples, peaches, plums), have become a problem this year. Only temporarily there are apples of low quality available, peaches and plums are unavailable altogether. For many days you could not get one potato in all of Pyongyang. The butcher at the Intourist has basically no meat any more. The Czech comrades reported that there were days with altogether just 3 kilograms of meat for all the embassies and foreigners. (We were not aware of that so much, as we pick up our meat right at the slaughterhouse.) Canned goods and pasta are basically no longer available. The same must be said about essential vegetables like cucumber or tomato where deliveries have become almost completely random.

We are not fully certain about the causes behind this situation. We believe the management of Intourist has a major responsibility, as it cares only insufficiently about providing the goods to foreigners.

We are reporting all this since ever more embassies are pressuring us, in our capacity as the doyen embassy, to take official steps against this bad food situation. After discussions among the heads of our embassy, we decided to do the following: It is not warranted to use this situation to launch an official protest with the Korean Foreign Ministry on behalf of the diplomatic corps. Based on previous experiences and the positions of our Korean friends on such issues, there will be a hundred-percent certainty of relations becoming sour. Therefore each embassy will outline for itself, and on lower levels, the food problems in the embassies, in particular with regard to the children, and ask the Koreans to consider the situation. At this point at least, we do not think more should be done.

P.P. (signed) Gräbner