

April 22, 1954

Letter, Syngman Rhee to James H. R. Cromwell

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Summary:

Syngman Rhee explains why he cannot not support Cromwell's private enterprise plan proposal as it currently stands.

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April 22, 1954

Dear Mr. Cromwell:

I want to tell you frankly, in a most friendly spirit, that your last letter was a mistake. It was a mistake because you do not understand your old friend, who tries to help you in everything you try to do, and because you do not know the situation with regard to the disposition of aid funds. Let me explain.

You seemed to be offended when I said, in my last letter, that a business undertaking such as you suggested was contrary to my principle. But as you know, my life has been guided by what I call "my principle," and I must remain faithful to it. However, that does not mean I shall not try to help my friends.

Do you know how much trouble I was caused by John W. Stagers' plan for commercial enterprises to be opened in Korea when I first returned in 1945? I really do not know whether he said anything about it or not, but a United States news dispatch appearing in all the local papers reported that a group assisted by Dr. Rhee was to come to Korea to monopolize commercial privileges. I had a terrible time getting the matter straightened out. If I had been connected with the plan, and if I had not had my principle to guide me, I would never have been able to clear myself.

After such an experience, I could not think of having my name connected with any such program. Had I believed I could help you by allowing my name to be used in your "Rhee Plan," it might have made me hesitate. But I knew that this was not the case. The inside story is that I have had nothing to do with the disposition of United States aid funds since the money first began to come to Korea. In fact I have not even known what United States officials were doing with dollars earmarked for the reconstruction and rehabilitation of the Korean economy.

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All this was fought out over a long period of time, and it is only recently that we have had something to do with purchases made from the aid funds. The Combined Economic Board, headed by Mr. Wood and Premier Paik, have to decide on expenditures. Without Board agreement, not a dollar can be used. Even after the Board approves, Mr. Stassen must pass on the decision in Washington.

The only way I can be of help to you is by advising my representative on the Board, and that is what I wanted to do for you. I cannot tell my Premier to help you if I am connected with your plan, and that is why I told you to leave my name out of it.

There is another reason that you must know. You seem to think that all the opponents you and I have been fighting so long have suddenly become our friends and that everyone would be in favor of anything with which my name is connected. I wish that were so, but it unfortunately is not. No matter how sound your plan, the connection of my name to it will result in strong opposition from all those who are against me. Among these opponents are those who want to help build up the Japanese economy with funds appropriated to aid Korea. They are in control of the aid funds. It is obvious, therefore, that if you want to get anywhere, you should keep the plan as far from me as you possibly can.

Without knowing all these facts, you were unduly offended. I can see that, of course, but I do not want you to spoil the friendship that we have built up during these past years. As time passes, I shall always remember that you and your wonderful mother have been interested in our cause.

Everyone knows the groundlessness of the charge that this Government is turning toward a socialistic and monopolistic economy. We are fighting all such tendencies strongly, to the limit of our ability. Even the press did not take up the charge, and create headlines from it, because they know it is completely untrue. I really would like to know who created such a fantastically foolish story.



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Let me suggest again that you make the plan as much like a regular business proposition as you can, and submit it through regular channels. I shall do anything I can to help you. I have previously refrained from telling you that I would assist you, because I was afraid that you would announce it and thereby hurt your plan far more than you would help it.

I wish you and I were together to talk things over face to face. At any rate, I hope you now understand me and the situation better than before.

Cordially yours,

Honorable J. H. R. Cromwell
2100 Massachusetts Avenue, N. W.
Washington 8, D. C.