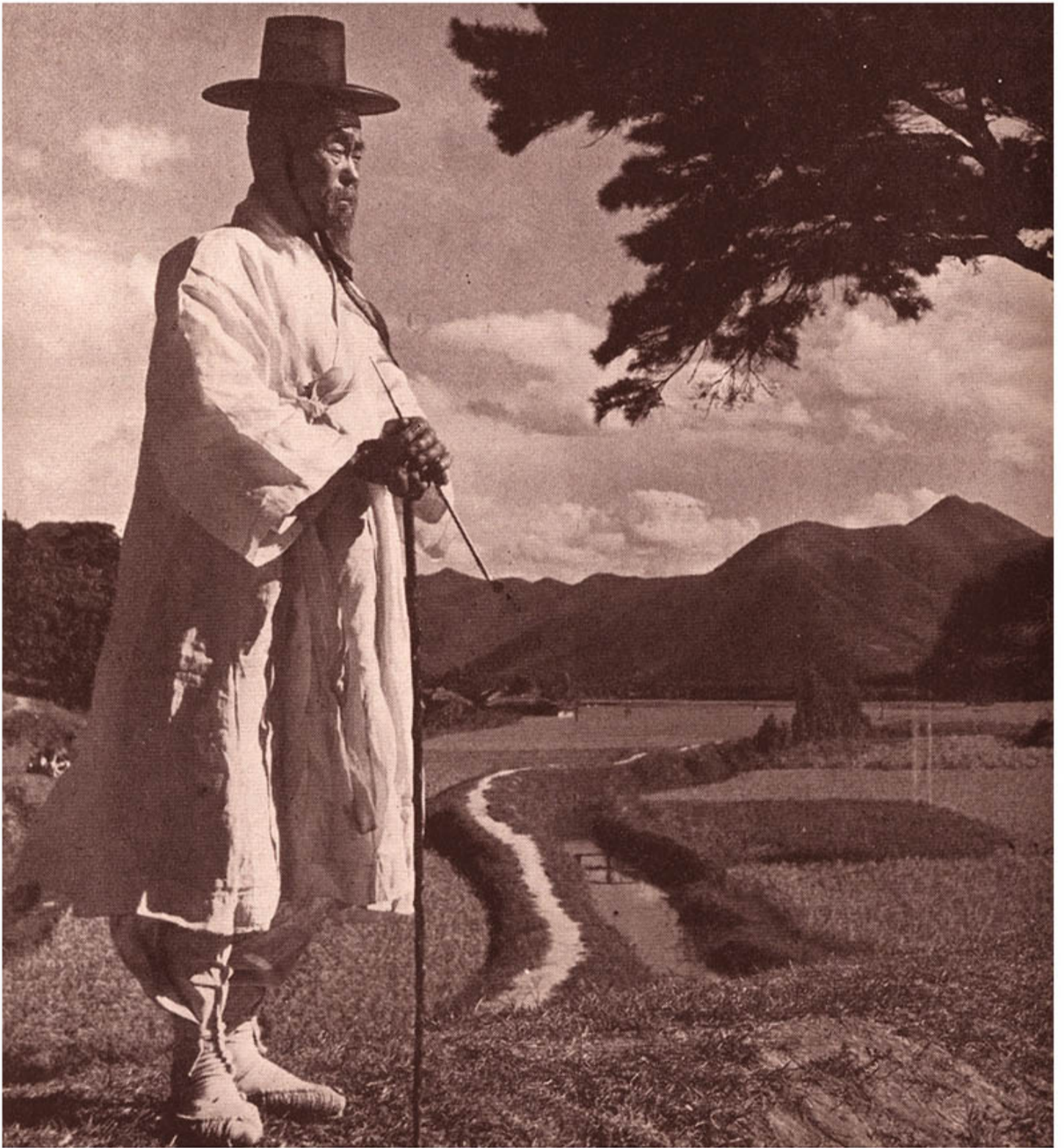


KOREA ■ THE COUNTRY ■ NOBODY KNOWS

The Russians say they don't want it; to us it's a headache
—but both sides are digging in

Text by **ROBERT P. MARTIN**



OldMagazineArticles.com

PHOTO-REPORT**48**

Photographs
by
**HORACE
BRISTOL**

April 15, 1948: p. 42



KOREA is sawed in half along the 38th parallel, and the division unfortunately is not a magician's illusion. Two armies—American and Soviet—liberated this nation of 29,000,000 people, pledged them independence and assistance, and now, two and a half years after Japan's surrender, still remain there as conquerors, as two armies of occupation facing one another across an unnatural dividing line. Not even honest elections under United Nations auspices can correct the wrong that has been done to the citizens of this strategic area.

A Korean does not need a vigorous imagination to understand the tragedy of his country. The Russians are in the industrial north, the Americans in the agricultural south; Korea is not one, but two countries. In the south, the Korean hears refugees from the north tell weird tales of the Russian occupation; he sees the effects of the American occupation on every hand; and his eye is jaundiced. Formerly he shipped his food to the industrial cities of the north; back came fertilizer, firewood, steel, manufactured

The impassive rice farmer (left) is a symbol of the kind of peaceful life ancient Korea wants; the new native constabulary (above) symbolize the kind of peace it has.

OldMagazineArticles.com



Siberian Maritime Provinces, it is inevitably a priceless pawn in the Russo-American game of power politics. Neither army seems disposed to leave, and neither is a credit to the nation it represents.

Of all the world's countries, Korea is the only one where the U. S. Army still forbids fraternization and makes the ban stick. No

Lieutenant General John R. Hodge, U.S. Commander in the American zone. His job: to rebuild South Korea's farms and dicker with the Russians.

goods; and even though the landlords or the Japanese took most of the profit, he at least got a measure of return from his labors. Now the goods he needs are no longer available. Both Russian and American leaders realize that the division of Korea is an economic monstrosity and a shame. Yet neither permits trade between the two zones, although sporadic smuggling is commonplace.

The Russians profess to want no part of Korea. The Americans understand that their own position on this mountainous peninsula is militarily indefensible. But since Korea is separated from Japan only by the narrow Straits of Tsushima; since it possesses a common boundary with Communist-dominated Manchuria and the

Two GI's guard the U.S. side of the 38th parallel. Just up the road stand their Russian counterparts. Between—a No-Man's-Land that splits Korea.



Korean is permitted to attend American football or baseball games. The GI in Japan can take his Japanese mistress to an Army movie; but if a soldier in Korea contracts VD, he is sent to what he calls the "concentration camp."

The Koreans have retaliated with a defiance mellowed and matured during their forty-one years

Colonel General Shtikov, chief Russian delegate to Korean Joint Commission. His job: to get U.S. agreement on a pro-Soviet government for all Korea.



under absolute Japanese control. One American, hoping to persuade Koreans to stop digging up tree stumps for fuel, visited the farmers and explained why the stumps should remain to bind loose topsoil. The Koreans nodded sagely, thanked the American for sharing his wisdom, and went on digging—amidst growing clouds of dust. Similarly, Koreans built latrines for the Americans, but “forgot” to install the necessary piping. One barracks was built with the chimney ending in the attic.

The typical Korean is ignorant and illiterate. His life is cramped by all the prejudices of semifeudalism. Politically he is inarticulate; the Atlantic Charter freedoms are as remote from his life as ice cream and nylons. But he is also an individualist, and he is extremely volatile.

He can sum up his wrongs with the speed of a lightning calculator.

Last year, for one example, the peasants of Taegku consented to turn in their harvest to the Military Government, after the Americans had painstakingly assured them the rice would not be sent to feed Japan. Weeks later the peasants discovered that the Korean police had sequestered the rice levies for personal use. That touched off a series of bloody riots, unparalleled since the days of conflict between Japanese brutality and the Korean underground. When the terror subsided, scores of peasants and police had been killed and from 7,000 to 10,000 Koreans lay groaning in the overloaded jails.

The 38th parallel, the line of demarcation between the zones of the two trustee powers, has become an armed border. In the north, according to the only available and apparently trustworthy reports, the Russians have de-

Five thousand refugees, like this fatherless family, flee North Korea every week, some in fear of the Soviet-dominated government, others simply to find more food.



OldMagazineArticles.com

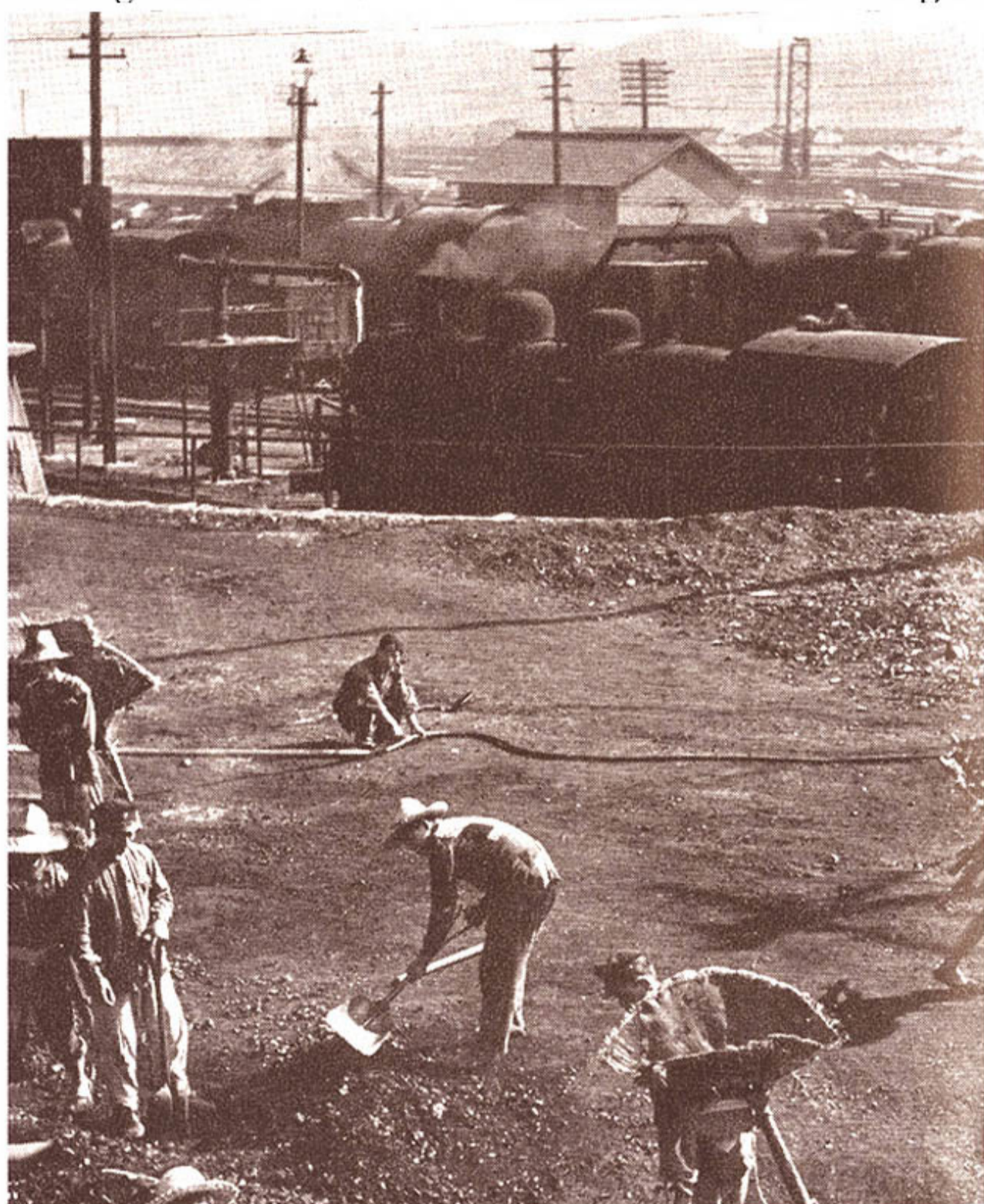


Rightist Youth leaders, admirers of the Hitler Jugend, indoctrinate their underlings. In the American zone such groups flourish but leftists are suppressed.

OldMagazineArticles.com

signed their economic, social, and political program to establish a north Korean government that is Communist-controlled and friendly to the U.S.S.R. In the south, the American policy, beyond controlling disease, preventing starvation, and reopening communications, has been a continual expression of anti-Communism and anti-Sovietism. Both powers have failed in their assigned task of freeing and democratizing Korea.

The Communists in the north divided the land among the peasants, temporarily satisfying the historic craving of all Asiatics. Then they virtually nullified the decree, except for propaganda purposes, by imposing a tax and compulsory contribution, even in the poorest areas, equivalent to 50 per cent of the farmers' yield. The Americans, on the other hand, refused to insist on redistribution of Japanese-owned land or of the large estates.



Loading coal at Pusan terminal is anese used troke down; it will remain idle unless the Americans repair it.

OldMagazineArticles

The feudal-minded landlords were permitted to retain their holdings—despite a public opinion poll showing that the Korean peasants were willing to pay for any land they acquired. The landlords actually were given even more political power than they had under the Japanese.

In the police state established by the Communists in North Korea, only pro-Communists could be elected to any public office. Dissidents were either imprisoned or forced to flee south into the American zone. But more than 1,000,000

Koreans who fled south found that the Americans were supporting a Japanese-trained police force which specialized in torture and extortion, and had not even introduced those two mainstays of freedom—bail law and the right of habeas corpus.

The Americans had, in fact, destroyed the “People’s Republic” which for several days before our landing had governed South Korea, while the Japanese were still there. Although this “government” unquestionably was Communist-dominated, it was sup-

Korean farmers thresh rice by hand, haul it to market (often black) by oxcart. A modernized Korea could feed itself, export 250,000 tons of rice annually.



OldMagazineArticles



Korea's largest—and the Southern zone's only—cotton mill. Capacity: 500 sets of underwear per day. Since the 38th parallel is an effective barrier to inter-zonal trade, most South Koreans must wait for imported underwear—or do without.

ported by a majority of the people and represented every shade of political opinion. Inept American political advisers (one of them, a Navy officer, once referred to President Truman as a Communist) and our military hierarchy agreed that any political organization even slightly tainted by leftism threatened “peace and order.”

Having disbanded the “People’s Republic” (by force in many areas), our Army has backed such extreme rightists as Dr. Syngman Rhee, a power-hungry former exile. A good many of Rhee’s adherents were Koreans who had supported Japan’s war against the Allies and had made fortunes by so doing. These well educated, English-speaking aristocrats were horrified by what they called the

“rabble,” who were guilty of expecting the Americans immediately to establish political freedom and initiate democracy.

Today the average Korean, despite his show of bravado and his studied noncompliance, is in a perpetual state of fear. First of all, he fears the corrupt and brutal police. Under the control or influence of rightist politicians, a handful of excessively rich ex-colaborators with the Japanese, and the powerful landlords, the police have not only driven the left underground, but also those who incline toward moderation. Labor unions and peasant organizations have been smashed and replaced by rightist groups.

On occasion, the Americans have intervened to prevent intolerable

excesses, and in some areas the police, under American tutelage, have begun to understand that "law and order" should be construed as protection for all good citizens of whatever class. In general, however, the American command has considered the police a Korean problem, one that can be solved only by the Korean government, whenever such a government may be set up.

It is in the street brawls, the reign of political brutality, and the spectacle of greedy men struggling for power that one sees clearly the cancer which is undermining

Korean life. The rightists, principally the youth movements, and the leftists, operating more or less underground, are equally guilty. Extremism has begot extremism.

The rightist youth movements, with a membership totaling perhaps 150,000, are recruited mostly from malcontents who find terrorism profitable. They are financed by merchants, businessmen, and rich farmers, who give "voluntary contributions" to avoid having their property destroyed or themselves beaten. In some areas these movements are even more powerful than the police and have super-



A young peddler weighs out the monthly allotment of one of Korea's scarcest commodities—salt. Most goods are rationed, but \$400,000 in American aid plus home production enabled South Koreans to eat better than most other Orientals last year.

PATRIARCH: *This serene old gentleman is one of the few wealthy Koreans who is not also an inbred aristocrat. The fact that he can afford to live alone in his own small house makes him, in middleclassless Korea, a man of means.*



SMALL BUSINESSMAN: *This hardware merchant can't import North Korean wares, would be glad to buy Japanese or American goods. "But how to pay for them? Perhaps we have something the Americans could use. . ."*



HOUSEWIFE: *Mrs. Kim Suk-hi, a widow, supports women's rights but accepts the superiority of men. How has she fared under the rule of Americans? "What costs us 1,000 yen today would have cost one yen three years ago."*



POLICEWOMAN: *Kim Duckhei, a refugee camp guard, joined the National Police, she says, parrot-like, "to help national reconstruction." Koreans have always disliked policemen, don't know what to make of a policewoman.*

seded local officials in control.

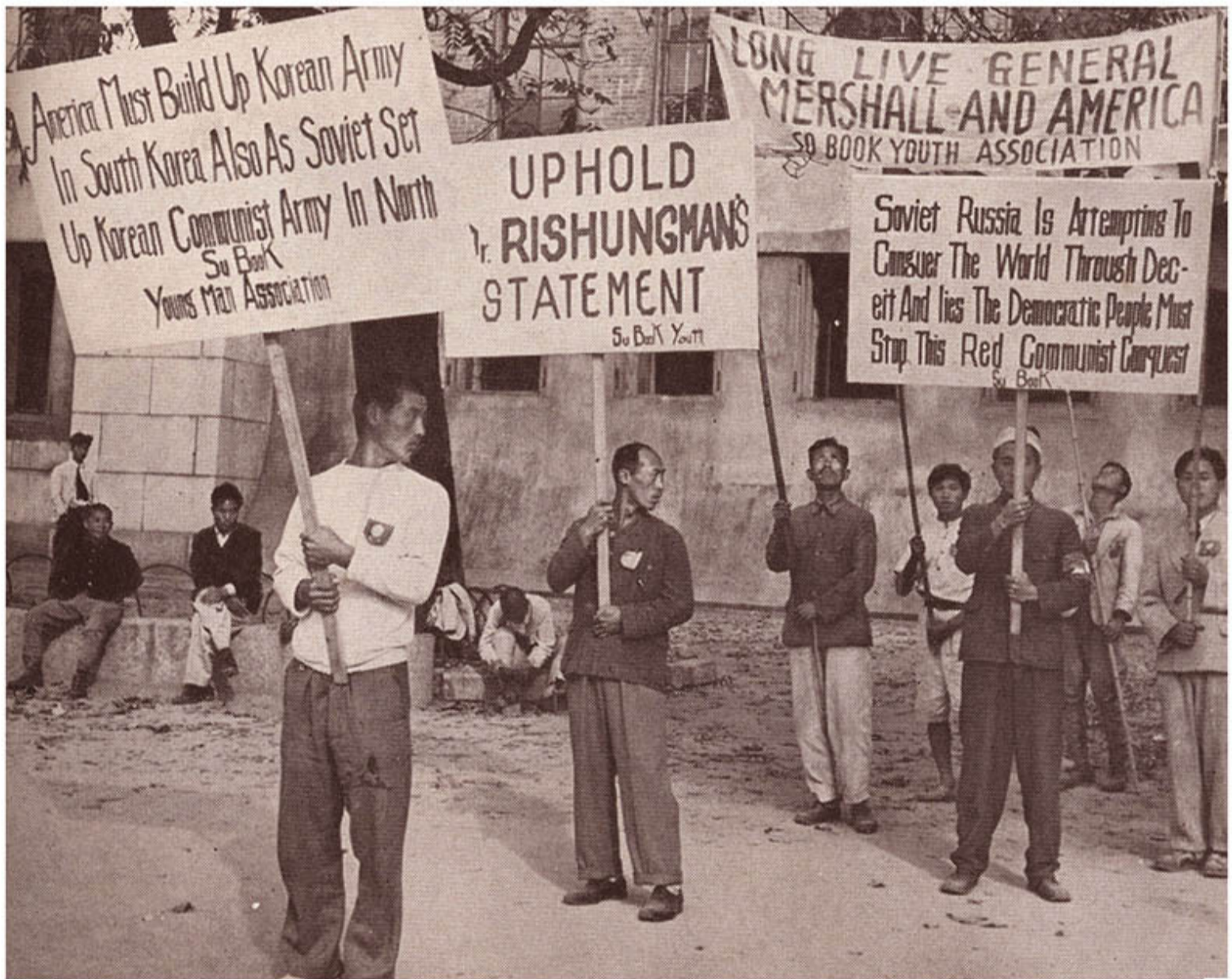
One controversial group is the Korean National Youth, originally planned by the Military Government as an advanced type of Boy Scout organization. Boys and girls alike are trained and then sent back to the provinces to organize other youths. The leader of this group is General Lee Bum Suk, a fervent admirer of the Hitler Jugend.

Members of the organization parade with their shovels; theoretically every member must have a

job, a requirement designed to make the customary types of extortion unnecessary. But Korean moderates believe that General Lee—some Americans call him “Fuehrer Lee”—intends to use the National Youth as his springboard in a future bid for power.

A conclusive commentary on the joint Soviet-American occupation was provided recently by two Americans who have traveled extensively in the two zones and are well acquainted with Koreans of all classes and political groups.

The Su Book Youth Association, a leading Right Wing movement, parades more to impress Americans than its own people, most of whom cannot read English.



OldMagazineArticles.com

These Americans believe that if an election, completely free of every form of rightist pressure and police control, were held in South Korea today, the leftists would win more than 50 per cent of the votes. A controlled election might give the rightists from 80 to 90 per cent of the votes. On the other hand, these Americans say, if an open election were held in the Rus-

sian zone, the Communists would be defeated by a two- or three-to-one majority.

The issue in Korea is not Communism vs. Americanism, but occupation-trusteeship vs. freedom. On that issue, both Russia and the United States would lose after a free vote of the people, because the two powers have, each in its own way, failed Korea. —48—

Older-generation Koreans have revived their traditional Saturday archery practice—a custom forbidden by the Japanese.



OldMagazineArticles.com