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Reprinted from the "North-China Daily News," May 17-18, 1927.

THE CHINA PROBLEM AND ITS SOLUTION

A Review of China's Domestic Turmoil and the Bearing of Local Chaos Upon World Peace

By Arthur de C. Sowerby

The author of the following article, Mr. Arthur de C. Sowerby, was born in China where he has spent the greater part of his life. He is well known as an explorer, having travelled all over the country as well as neighbouring Mongolia and Manchuria. He speaks the language, is a keen student of modern Chinese history, and a competent observer of men and affairs. Few foreigners possess so intimate a knowledge of the country and its people as he, while his many experiences during the past twenty years render him competent to speak with authority.

Silas Strawn in one of his public utterances after having investigated the conditions in China on behalf of the United States Government said "He who could prescribe a panacea for all the ills from which China now suffers would be the greatest pathologist the world has ever seen." The fact that it is a difficult task does not mean that it should not be attempted. Indeed, as the same authority also said, "One of the big world problems to-day is what can be done to help rescue the Chinese people from the enslavement of the warlords and to bring order out of the existing chaos."

World's Peace at Stake

It is absolutely essential to the world's peace and progress that something be done, and that right quickly, to set China's house in order, for she is becoming more and more a menace to present day civilization. The eruptions and turmoil within are having their effect without, and there is an increasing danger of other nations being drawn into conflict one with another over China. Not only so, but this chaos in China is upsetting the world's commercial balance. Four hundred millions of the world's population, and vast stretches of territory such as lie within the borders of China and her dependencies cannot be withdrawn from the world's markets and commercial activities without disturbing their equilibrium and causing very considerable financial losses to other large sections of the human family. The Russian Soviet acting in China was quick to recognize this as shown by one of the documents seized by the Peking Government in the Soviet Embassy, which points out that the Chinese revolution is one of the most important and most powerful factors in disturbing the stabilization of capitalism.

Though foreign residents in China, not excluding the members of the diplomatic and consular services, are fully alive to these dangers and thoroughly understand the whole situation in China to-day, it is extremely difficult first to make the Home Governments understand it and then to get them to adopt the only possible means to meet it adequately and effectively. Naturally, the governments of such countries as Great Britain and America reflect the mental state of their people, and if the people of these countries are ignorant of the true state of

affairs and fail to grasp the necessity of the drastic action that alone can put things right, a similar attitude may be expected from the governments.

Ignorance of European and American Public

The main factor contributing to the present unsatisfactory state of foreign governments *vis-à-vis* China is the ignorance on the part of the general public in Great Britain, Europe and America of the true state of affairs prevailing in this country. For many years now, and greatly intensified since the May 30 incident in Shanghai in 1925, the Chinese both in China and abroad, egged on, aided, and to a very considerable extent financed by the Soviets, have been pouring propaganda into America, Great Britain and other European countries placing China in the light of an awakening country, honestly seeking the light, reaching out to freedom and equality in the world with other nations, and only kept from attaining her just aspirations by the imperialistic oppression of foreign nations, especially Great Britain, against whom the chief venom of the Soviets has been directed with a view to isolating her and bringing her to her knees first, since she is considered the chief bulwark against Bolshevism. The true facts of the case, China's utter inability to maintain order within her borders, to run her public services such as the postal, customs and railway services, and the collection of the salt taxes, without foreign aid, to prevent the misappropriation of public funds and the imposition of illegal taxation, to check the continual recrudescence of the horrors of civil war as the various warlords fight each other and ravage the country through which they pass, to eliminate the ever increasing robber bands that harry the towns, cities and villages, looting, burning, murdering and carrying away for ransom the helpless citizens and farmers—all these facts have either been carefully suppressed, or, if mentioned, have been belittled and characterized as necessary and inevitable evils that must occur during the transition period from the old monarchical *regime* to the new republican system. The facts that this has been going on now for 15 years and that things have been going from bad to worse, year by year, are carefully kept in the background. "Let China work out her own salvation," has been the burden of the propagandists' slogan in foreign countries, "give China the chance to attain to her just nationalistic aspirations." "Hands off China" has been the echoing cry from the communistic sympathizers in foreign lands. Almost nothing has been done to counteract all this, and steadily a public feeling in sympathy with China and believing in her capacity to straighten out her own affairs has been created; so that now, when the internal eruptions of China in chaos are making themselves felt outside, now that foreigners have been engulfed in the turmoil, some being murdered, others losing all their property and the whole foreign population being threatened with financial ruin and the loss of their entire interests, it is extremely difficult to make the people at home appreciate the true significance of it all and give their support to their own governments in taking such action as is necessary. Though Great Britain has had her pro-China propagandists and fanatical missionaries who have shamelessly misrepresented the state of affairs, she has on the whole been better informed than America, which doubtless accounts for the fact that the British Government foresaw what might happen to Shanghai and was able to send out a sufficiently strong military force in time to save that city from a catastrophe similar to that which overtook Nanking. But in America the deliberate misleading of the public has been nothing short of iniquitous. Not only have the people been deliberately misinformed by certain newspaper correspondents stationed in Shanghai and Peking, but efforts that have been

made by reputable bodies of Americans in China to get the truth over to the people of America have been suppressed. Though the American people may be ignorant the American Government is not; but the regrettable part of it is that it appears to be acting more upon the ignorance of the public than upon knowledge of the actual facts in its possession. Since the Nanking outrages there is not an American of any standing in China who does not deplore the present action, or rather lack of action, on the part of the American Government and its general attitude toward China. Some few newspaper men, who are willing to betray their fellow nationals for their own gain, and a few fanatical missionaries are doing all in their power to prevent the American Government's taking any definite action in China, and unfortunately they have succeeded in securing a certain very definite following in America. But the majority of Americans who know China, not excluding the greater part of the missionary body, and practically all other foreigners resident in China, are now unanimous in the opinion that nothing short of drastic action will clear up the situation in this country to-day. They also know that the existence of foreign treaties, treaty ports under foreign control, and extraterritorial rights have had nothing whatever to do with the present state of chaos in China, and that their abolition would only make confusion worse confounded and withdraw from China the last semblance of law and order. To quote Silas Strawn once more, who, by the way, appears to have been repudiated by the American Government for broadcasting the inconvenient truth; "Anyone who has investigated conditions in China to-day must conclude that extraterritoriality, unequal treaties, imperialism and other slogans to which I have referred have nothing to do with China's troubles. These catchwords are being overworked by the agitators, many of whom are bolshevists, the politicians and the militarists to conceal from the long-suffering, patient and industrious people of China the pathetic fact that they are being impoverished and enslaved to the ambition of the warlords for greed and aggrandizement."

Fantastic Situation

The chief difficulty in bringing the people of Great Britain, America and Europe to a true understanding of the conditions prevailing in China is that these are so fantastic, so unbelievable, so altogether beyond reason, while propagandists' stories of China's progress, her determination to establish a sound republican government and her nationalistic aspirations are so plausible on the face of them that the rational mind naturally rejects the former and accepts the latter. This, equally naturally, makes the idea of intervention and the use of force on the part of outside nations to put China to rights repugnant. Such action is considered out of date, an anachronism. The world to-day is said to have outgrown this kind of thing—and yet, as everybody who has carefully studied the whole question knows, there is no other possible way of restoring law and order in China within a sufficiently short time to save her from utter collapse and ruin. Short of leaving China to exhaust herself and then slowly to rebuild upon the old ruins, a process that would take many decades, there is nothing to be done but for the big nations of the world to step in and straighten things out, using force if necessary, but acting always concertedly and with China's own good in view. There is a vast difference between such an action and the conquest and subsequent exploitation of China, which is what the Chinese fear. And, what is more, there is plenty of evidence to show that a large section of the Chinese community, especially the merchant class, would welcome such intervention.

General Survey of Situation

A survey of the present situation will amply prove that China, as she

now is, has demonstrated her inability to pull herself out of the morass into which she has sunk.

The Central Government, that is, the Peking Government, the only one that shows even a semblance of being constitutional, has practically ceased to function outside the walls of Peking. The country is dominated by a number of warlords, or political factions, as the case may be, who have usurped the offices of government over various more or less extensive areas, and who are all at war with each other.

Five Main Warring Factions

They are as follow:

(1) Chang Tso-lin, who now dominates Manchuria and the provinces of Chihli and Shantung and parts of Honan, Anhui and Kiangsu. Under him is Chang Chung-chang, who is pressing down upon Nanking along the Tientsin-Pukou Railway against Chang Kai-shek. Chang Tso-lin's troops, known as the Fengtien troops, are also pressing down upon Hankow along the Peking-Hankow Railway. More or less loosely allied to him are Sun Chuan-fang, now in North Kiangsu, north of the Yangtze, and Wu Pei-fu, somewhere in Honan or Hupei. This is the Ankuochun party and its avowed intentions are the annihilation of the Communists.

(2) Chang Kai-shek, who was commander-in-chief of the southern or Nationalist armies up to the time of the split in that party. He now heads the moderates, supporting the late Dr. Sun Yat-sen's "Three Principles," and has launched an attack on the left wing or communistic section of the Nationalist party represented by Eugene Chen, Borodin and Co. at Hankow. He holds Kiangsu, south of the Yangtze, Chekiang, Fukien and Kuangtung, but has two fronts to face, that looking north whence Chang Chung-chang and Sun Chuan-fang are attacking him, and that looking west up the valley of the Yangtze, where lie his enemies of the Nationalist left wing.

(3) Feng Yu-hsiang, the so-called "Christian General," who exercises control over Kansu and Shensi in the north-west, and whose sympathies are with the southerners, though it is not yet clear whether he favours the right or left wing. He is the enemy of Chang Tso-lin, and it is expected that he will launch attacks upon the Fengtienites either through North Shansi, or along the Pien-lo Railway in Honan, south of the Yellow River.

(4) Yen Hsi-shan, the military governor of the "Model Province," Shansi, whose one object is to keep Shansi from becoming involved in the general turmoil and who has succeeded in keeping that province on an even keel ever since the day of the outbreak of the revolution in 1911, when he took charge. This is the only bright spot in the whole dark picture.

(5) The fifth group, that of the Hankow Nationalists, is not under any one military man, but is dominated by Borodin, the Soviet agent from Moscow, and Eugene Chen. It is not easy to say just how much territory this group controls, but it may be put down roughly as Central China and the Yangtze Valley as far as Kiukiang. This group is frankly communistic, and the most bitterly anti-foreign, and all the outrages hitherto committed upon foreigners and foreign property in China are either the direct action of members of this group or are traceable to their influence.

This leaves West China to be accounted for. The Province of Kueichow appears to be fairly quiet. Szechuan is in more or less of a turmoil and is frankly anti-foreign. General Yang Sen, whose high-handed action in seizing British ships precipitated the Wanhsien incident, is the leading figure here, and he appears to be acting independently, though at one time owning allegiance to Wu Pei-fu. Yunnan scarcely counts for anything just now, and, except for bandits which are very bad in the province, appears to be fairly quiet; though even here there are rival military factions that indulge in sporadic fights with each other.

From the above survey it will be seen that, with the exception of Shansi and Kueichow, the whole of the 18 provinces of China are the scene of actual warfare. Add to this the facts that throughout the whole of China well organized bandit hordes are operating each on a more or less extensive scale, that in certain areas, notably in the north-central regions, the local populace is extensively mobilized into bands such as the "Red Spears Society," for protection against bandits and the military alike, and that the soldiers everywhere do as much looting and plundering of the people as fighting, and we have a picture of such unutterable chaos and misery that it is hard for the western mind to envisage it.

There is no hope from any of the warlords, because not one of them, except Yen Hsi-shan of Shansi, cares for anything but his own enrichment and personal aggrandizement. Each is in the game entirely for what he can get out of it, while everywhere is the sinister influence of the Communist agents of Moscow, working ceaselessly to increase the confusion and chaos, never allowing it to die down, egging the Chinese on against the foreigner—in short doing everything within their power to bring about a cataclysm such as the world has never before seen. In Central China they have succeeded in rousing the labouring classes to a point even beyond their control, so that all commercial and industrial enterprise is at a standstill and nothing but ruin faces the manufacturers and the merchant and shopkeeper classes, while the wealthy are being mulcted by the self-appointed government and made to contribute large sums to its support. As the factories are all closed, the labouring and artisan classes are all out of employment, and the self-appointed government is being hard put to it to keep the hungry masses from starvation.

No Really Strong Element

There is no hope of a settlement in the near future, since not one of these warring elements is strong enough to defeat the others, and the tide of battle sweeps ceaselessly up and down the country. Now one party advances, only to retreat in disorder. This is followed by the crumpling up of the erstwhile victors. As soon as one of the militarists or one of the parties gets strong enough so as to look like succeeding in dominating the whole situation, treachery brings him or it down again to the common level. And ever the people suffer, their homes are looted and burned, they are impressed into the army as soldiers or are marched off as carriers, mere beasts of burden for the looting soldiers. At best, the troops are billeted upon them and they are made to feed the latter without payment of any sort. There is no end to the picture of horror that could be drawn; the sum total of the misery and suffering in China since the outbreak of the revolution in 1911 is not to be calculated; the loss of life must run into hundreds of thousands if not millions, while the destruction of property is beyond computing. And the appalling thing is that it is growing steadily worse: there is no solution from within, nothing but a dreary vista of wars, intrigue, massacres, corruption, rapine, and the final dissolution of a once proud Empire into a number of petty mutually antagonistic states. There are no longer any forces in China that will hold it together; only disintegrating forces are left.

The Asiatic Break-up

The break-up of China, the destruction of foreign prestige and interests and the domination of the Bolsheviks would be the signal for similar disturbances to commence in other Asiatic countries.

India would follow suit, and Japan would not escape. Flushed with success the Russian Communists would sweep through Asia destroying existing systems and forcing the whole continent back into the misery of the dark ages.

And there are those who actually suggest that to this mess and welter

shall be abandoned the foreign concessions, that foreign interests shall be placed in the hands of those who have shown themselves utterly incapable of managing their own affairs and that foreign residents in China shall give themselves up to be governed by the rogues who have brought about the ruin of this great country.

As has already been pointed out, the only hope for a speedy and permanent solution of the Chinese problem is intervention on the part of the leading nations of the world, acting in unison. That this is practicable is obvious to the majority of those who know and have studied China, and following is an outline of a general scheme that might be adopted.

The Powers Involved

The powers at present involved, arranged in the order of the extent of their interests, are Great Britain, Japan, France, the United States of America, and Italy. It is these powers that should combine to formulate a joint policy. There should be no special spheres of influence, as these lead to international jealousies, but all military and civil operations should be carried out in the spirit of closest co-operation. Plans should be made for the despatching to China of naval and military forces large enough to patrol the coasts and the Yangtze River and to garrison the treaty ports and guard the railways. To do this very few more war vessels than are now on the China coast would be needed, while well under a hundred thousand foreign troops would be ample to occupy all the railways and treaty ports. In order to give China one more chance of setting her house in order, the Powers should then send an ultimatum to the various warlords and the heads of the political factions immediately to cease hostilities, and to meet at some central point for a round table consultation with a view to coming to terms and establishing adequate government for the country, either as a whole or in sections. The safety of all would be guaranteed by the Powers, whose representatives would watch the proceedings. If this round-table conference were successful, well and good. The plans for despatching foreign troops to China would be shelved for the time being, though the threat of intervention would be maintained till such time as the system or systems of government evolved at the conference had been put into effect and had proved to be adequate for the maintenance of law and order, the restoration of peace and the reestablishment of amicable relations with foreign powers. If the militarists and political leaders failed to comply with the demand to hold such a conference, or if, having been called, it proved a failure, then the plans for occupation would be put into effect.

A Provisional Government

A provisional government by the five Powers would be established, which would operate with due consideration of the Chinese legal code, and would have complete jurisdiction over all foreigners in China as well as the Chinese. The customs, postal and salt and land tax services would be taken over and conducted in such a way as to provide the necessary funds to run the country and maintain the army of pacification. Illegal taxation would be stopped. Chinese district magistrates would be retained in office and backed by the provisional government as long as they administered their districts satisfactorily. Wherever possible Chinese would be used in the higher administrative posts. The military and naval commands would at once begin organizing and training Chinese soldiers and sailors and out of the present rabble armies would be made smaller, but efficient, well-trained and well-disciplined forces under foreign officers capable of preventing the recrudescence of banditry and maintaining the peace of the country. In a silmilar way a navy strong enough to patrol the inland

waterways and coastal waters and suppress piracy would be built up.

Forming a Stable Officialdom

As soon as this had been done, a process of withdrawal would begin, both civil and military. On the civil side well-trained Chinese officials would gradually be worked into higher and higher positions of responsibility. The same would apply to the military side, and in the end China would be left with a stable and efficient government that would be wholly Chinese, and which would enjoy complete sovereignty in its own dominions. Automatically all questions of extraterritorial rights, the holding of Chinese soil by foreign powers and customs autonomy would be solved by elimination. Thus would China be given a good government, regain her peace and prosperity, and be placed on a footing of equality with other nations.

That a certain amount of fighting would be necessary at first is evident, but it would not be of long duration, nor would it be very sanguinary. It is certain that the Chinese armies to-day have no stomach for serious fighting, while with the strategic points and railways occupied they would soon run out of munitions. Wholesale surrender and disarmament would take place. A few salutary lessons inflicted on the bandit hordes would soon render the profession of brigandage unpopular. A wholesale repatriation of soldiers and bandits would take place, and with the workers back on the land, prosperity would be assured. Famine and flood prevention would be undertaken and many new and much needed services inaugurated by the Provisional Government. Railway construction would be pushed on. Foreign capital would pour into the country for the development of its resources. There would be no end to the development in this country and the Chinese would soon realize the advantages of good government, which would result in the founding of traditions that would guide the rulers when finally the foreign powers had withdrawn.

Justification of Intervention

The justification of intervention in China lies in the menace that continued chaos in this country would be to world peace and prosperity. That it would be bitterly resented by certain classes in China is to be expected, but have those classes proved their right to be considered? The warlords and present official classes would resent it, but what justification have these shown to hold their present exalted positions?

The student classes would raise their voice in protest, but it is a proved fact that the students have been the chief tools in the hands of the World's enemies, the Communists from Russia, and have done more than any other group in China to bring about the present chaos, and the world must judge whether it is going to allow its peace to be jeopardized by the frenzy of a group of school boys or the selfish schemes of ruthless militarists.

Opposed to these would be the merchant classes, the gentry, a large section of the labouring classes, and the farming classes, who would welcome the restoration of law and order, but who now are dumb, daring not openly to give voice to their feelings, but secretly wishing that the foreign Powers would step in and clean up the hordes of soldiers and bandits and do away with the oppression of the militarists. The masses of China are dumb. By nature a peaceable people, the Chinese are easy victims to terrorism; but their inarticulate call rings out to the nations of the West to save them from the appalling oppression and ravages of the terrorists and militarists, and heavy indeed will be the responsibility of those who have it in their power to give the needed aid but who fail to respond.

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