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蔡元培題



Long Live Their Britannic Majesties King George VI and Queen Elizabeth

Sino-British Relations

THE sentiment the Chinese people have for the British people on the occasion of the coronation of Their Britannic Majesties, King George VI and Queen Elizabeth, has been adequately expressed elsewhere in this issue. We shall confine ourselves here to an examination of the political relations between the two peoples and see if the friendship will last. The relations were anything but satisfactory a little over a decade ago, and yet today there is a marked change. Let us look into causes of this change.

The boycott of British goods consequent upon the Nanking Road "shoot-to-kill" affair on May 30, 1925, the forceful rendition of the British concession in Hankow, the unilateral declaration to end extraterritoriality (though not carried out in practice) by the Chinese government, Nanking's insistence on the revision of the unequal treaties, the Thorburn case—all these were anything but conducive to amicable relations between the two countries, and they gave the British statesmen, especially the conservatives, a rather unfavorable impression of China. And so we found British sympathy among the government circles definitely on the side of the Japanese at the beginning of the Manchurian "incident."

There were, however, a number of other causes contributing to such an apathetic attitude of the British government towards the Chinese cause. The Japanese delegate to sign the Briand-Kellogg Peace pact, after his mission had been accomplished in Paris, went to London to confer with the British government. Though the rumor concerning a revival of the Anglo-Japanese alliance proved unfounded, yet he was able to obtain an agreement with the British government that should occasion arise, the two countries would apply article 7 of the Nine Power pact between themselves. That article 7 of the said treaty, however, provides full and frank communication, not between two countries, but between all the contracting Powers concerned, should a situation arise which involves the application of the treaty. In other words, Japan and Britain formed a ring within the ring of the Powers who signed the treaty at the Washington conference.

Moreover, at that time the conservatives in Power had favorable impressions of the Japanese, and the relations between Britain and Russia were very bad, so that the conservatives swallowed the Japanese propaganda and were secretly glad that after all "the Japs are going to fight the Bolshies for us". The British suffered loss of trade because of the unsettled condition in China and hoped that the Japanese would put the house in order in Manchuria and respect the open door policy there as well as elsewhere in China so that British trade might pick up. Furthermore, should Japan become gravely engaged in the Manchurian adventure, she would have no time to expand elsewhere in China or in the South Seas and Australia. Finally the British national defence was not up to par, and its weakest link was in the Far East, and so the British government was unwilling to take a strong stand in an imbroglio which might mean military sanctions and then Britain and America would have to bear the weight of the burden. America was not sufficiently aroused to be willing to take

a strong hand in the matter until February, 1932, but long before that the Japanese had undoubtedly made full and frank communication with Britain as well as obtaining her approval of the adventure.

But all these calculations of the British conservatives have not proved accurate. Japan did not respect the open door in Manchuria, continued to expand, and with military assistance too, southward and at one time even threatened Shanghai. The creation of "Manchoukuo" in September 1932 clearly violated the Nine Power pact and was in open defiance of the League of Nations. America had already clarified her attitude, and criticisms of the British policy were heard both inside and outside the Parliament. But the last straw that broke the camel's back was the nationalization of the sale of petroleum in "Manchoukuo" during the winter of 1934. From then on the British government adopted a stiffer attitude towards Japan.

The British government became convinced that a strong Chinese government, and not a foreign regime imposed upon China, is the true solution of the Far Eastern problem. It will stop foreign aggressions and afford the best means of protection to the British interests in this country. Closer cooperation between America and Britain was also seen in the various official utterances of the statesmen of the two Anglo-Saxon countries. At the same time the British statesmen did not let any opportunity pass without urging China and Japan to come to an understanding.

When the British statesmen saw the necessity of lending a helping hand to the Chinese government, they did not hesitate to do so. The sending of three experts—Hammond, Taylor, and Lean—to help the Chinese government improve its railway system was a proof of this, the investigation conducted by Sir Frederick Leith-Ross and his assistance in our monetary reform, another, and the loan of several million pounds sterling of industrial credit to our government, the third. This loan came, it may be noted, after China had successfully fended off the most menacing of Japanese diplomatic manoeuvres to encroach upon her.

From the above analysis, we may draw a few conclusions. The British are realists, they act as any given situation demands. They gave up their Hankow concession, and they allowed the Japanese a free hand in Manchuria, when it was to their interest to do so. But above all they keep their eyes on their interests, which must not be jeopardized, as the change of their attitude toward Japan clearly indicates. In other words, when we do not try to gain at their expense, they will be friendly to us and when we prove ourselves worthy of the help they will not hesitate to lend a helping hand. We certainly do not wish to gain at another's expense. Both countries desire peace in the Far East. And we hope we have proved ourselves worthy of international assistance in stabilizing the Far Eastern situation. Thus we see a bright future for closer relations between the two peoples, and thus we may express here our warmest and heart-felt congratulations to the British people upon the occasion of the coronation of their new king and queen.