

(April 26, 1927)

The Situation in China

By MR. T. Z. Koo.*

This being the Annual Meeting, the reports of the Honorary Secretary, Mr. W. C. James, the Honorary Treasurer, Mr. L. L. Grabill and the Nominating Committee, (presented by Mr. J. F. MacKay) were read and adopted. These reports are printed on pages 380 and 381 respectively.

PRESIDENT SEDGEWICK: We hope that you will give Major Norsworthy and his executive the same kind consideration you have given us. When we try to get an understanding of things that are different, we find how feebly we can do it. It is difficult enough for a Canadian to get a real idea of the civilization and life and aspirations of people living in England five hundred years ago. How much more difficult it is for us to try or to hope to appreciate the problems and difficulties of a great country that was civilized while our ancestors were still savages, such a country as China; and if we can, by any way, understand its problems we are very much the gainers not only for ourselves, but for our own country which has a real interest in the problems of the East. We are, therefore, very fortunate in having as our guest today a gentleman educated in our civilization and brought up in his own, who has achieved a high position among his own people and who, in England and the United States and at Geneva, has come to

*Mr. Koo is a graduate of St. John's University Shanghai, and after nine years in the Chinese railway service was chosen as a representative for his people in the Opium Conference at Geneva (1924) and the Institute of Pacific Relations at Honolulu (1925). He is an Associate Secretary of the Y.M.C.A. of China and Chief Secretary of the Chinese Student Christian Movement. He was chosen by Chinese merchants and industrialists to make clear to Americans the present state of China.

the front able to take his own part among the people he would meet on these occasions. I have, therefore, very much pleasure in introducing to you, today, Mr. Koo.

MR. KOO: Mr. President and members of the Canadian Club, you certainly have given me a great honor today to ask me to come here and try to explain China's situation to you. Not only you who are outside of China have had difficulty to understand our situation; even some of us who are in the midst of the situation ourselves sometimes feel rather puzzled as to what is happening in our country.

I have come on this visit not to try and paint a good picture of China, neither have I come to speak for any political organization in China. My mission is one charged by the commercial bodies in China to come and give a sketch of what is happening in China. I do not know where to begin, as a matter of fact, because you have old China with nearly two thousand years of history behind her, and patently I cannot go back that far in a short half hour. I am only going to deal with modern history, and that only goes back to 1911, and that makes it a little easier.

That was the date of our revolution. You all know that in 1911 the Chinese people overthrew the Manchu Dynasty and established the Republic of China. Many of you have gained the impression that during the sixteen years we have been fighting among ourselves and have troubles of one nature or another, but I want you to realize the real significance of what these sixteen years have been to China.

When our Revolutionary Government was set up we soon found out it was merely a change in a political label. We had changed from a monarchy to a republic in name, but the feeling had never changed. It was the same as trying to swing an elephant by its tail. Well, you soon find it a very hopeless task. Our leaders found, as a small group, they could not swing the mass of China, and so the revolution was only a change in name and not in effect, and so in these sixteen years we have created movement after movement simply to bring the ideas of the revolution down to the masses. And the movements, some of which you have heard of, like that we call the renaissance movement, are designed to reach the masses. We have created what

we call a mass education movement, teaching the masses to write certain of our characters. All these processes tend to spread ideas to the masses, and during the sixteen years you can see the different stratum of society which has come into being. That appears from 1911 to 1919 in the student and merchant classes until, in 1919, the students and merchants were able to rise as a mass in China and compel our Government to refrain from signing the Peace Treaty in Paris. Now, we would not have been able to do that if the processes had not gone on. And that movement, since 1919, went down into the masses of the laborers. You found the same movement growing apace among the ranks of the laboring people until, in 1925, when the so-called Shanghai episode happened, the laborers co-operated with the students and merchants to demonstrate their displeasure. And that movement went further down into the farm hands. Eighty per cent. of our population live in country districts. That class has been the backbone of China, but it has also been the class least affected by any intellectual movement of any kind. Since 1926 that movement is growing through that class and they have organized farmers' unions, and that has grown to a tremendous extent in China. And therefore the significance of these sixteen years is not to be seen in the troubles we have been going through, but in spreading our ideals through the masses of the people, step by step, and we are not yet at the end of this process and we have to go on for several years more before we can say the whole country will be enriched. But enough work has been done to let us know that the movement is no longer a movement confined to a certain section of the people. In the Nationalist movement there is no north and south. If you go to the borders of Siberia in the north and to Canton in the south, and east and west, you find the people now gripped by this consciousness of a new nation gradually emerging from the basis of old China.

At the present moment what you find in our people is a new urge, a new soul, that is welling up from the heart of the Chinese people; and it is beginning to express itself along three very definite lines, and they comprise at the moment what is termed the program for national reconstruction.

Now, what are the three big lines that have emerged in the nation? First, you see a very large desire to establish a national government for the whole of China, and that Government should be based on the will of the people. Now, that is our first objective. During the last ten years our military generals, by seizing the reins of civil government, have split our country into little feudal states, each governed by a military general. If one of your generals should rise in revolt and drive out your civil government, you would have exactly the situation we have in China. They have become a law unto themselves, and by doing that, they have destroyed authority and any semblance of central government. Before we can establish a national government for the whole of China, we must eliminate these people, and that is the reason for the war started last year by the Canton general; and at the present moment there is only one group that remains, the so-called Mukden party, and it is ruling in North China under the leadership of Chang Tso Lin. We think we can do it this year if no external efforts or pressure of any kind is put on China.

Now that is what is happening in China today. There is such a wave of hope and expectancy in the hearts of the people. It is because we feel the day is fairly close when we can begin to talk of a national government again. We are not foolish enough to think it will come in a day. We have set ourselves three stages. The first is the military stage, and that means we must go on fighting and eliminate province after province. Then we will begin the second stage, what we call the training stage. We shall give our people an opportunity to have exercise in the processes of certain democratic forms of government. That may occupy fifteen or twenty years.

The third period, when we hope we shall have a national government which we can control, will be a government of the people, by the people and for the people of China.

Then we come to the second great objective, and that is a desire on the part of the Chinese people, particularly in its masses, to struggle for a higher form of life economically. Now, China is passing from an agricultural stage to an industrial stage and from handicraft to the machine

stage, and unfortunately for us, in passing through that transformation we are seeing all the labor unrest and social changes that characterized similar changes in the west several years ago. In this whole change we can see two trends very clearly, one on the part of labor and the other on the part of the new national government. What are the main features in these two economic lines. The labor movement expresses only three demands—shorter working hours, higher wages and provision against sickness, accidents, etc. That is the real demand of labor. Their slogan is that there shall be nobody in China so poor as not to satisfy his hunger. Many of our masses today live very close indeed to starvation.

On the Government side they have two ideas. First of all, to promote what they term the basic industries of China. The Government realizes that in China at the present moment we have to go through this economic change and therefore the Government shall take a very prominent position in promoting the establishment of basic industries, and they are grouped under four heads. First of all, those relating to the feeding of the people; then that relating to the clothing of the people; then to the housing of the people; and lastly, transportation. Now, that is one big part of the Government program. But there is another part to that, the international development of China. We realize that if we are going to develop this tremendous area in its modern industrial aspect, then we have to come to the Western nations for skill and capital. We will invite them into China, only if they operate under our laws.

The third great objective is to regain a place of equality in the family of nations. Many people have heard, of course, of the so-called unequal treaties. What is the fundamental issue involved in this international side of our struggle. The real, basic fact can be very easily stated and understood. Here you have a country. For the last eighty years Western nations have come into our country, have taken certain territory and wrested certain lands from our people. The psychology of the Western peoples is to hang on to these rights as long as they can. Now, as the Chinese people are now awakened to the sense of nationalism, they

realize that certain privileges have been taken from them. Our psychology is that we want to recover the things taken from us as soon as we can. I venture to say there will be no peace in the Far East until these two forces are in some way bridged. That is at the bottom of the so-called unequal treaties in China at the present moment. The real problem before the Western nations is not the protection of life and property. You can protect your nationals very easily by withdrawing some who live in the interior, and protect them at Shanghai and Tien-Tsing. A lot of your property is located where long range guns cannot reach it. Even after the struggle is over, if we have destroyed some of your property the Chinese people will be reasonable enough to take up the matter of paying for it.

There is very little use in the foreign nations saving your properties and so on, if you have lost the goodwill of the Chinese people. I was talking to a Chinese merchant in Shanghai who had been talking to a British resident of Shanghai, and the British merchant said to him, "You should not complain about us sending gunboats here because they not only protect us, but they protect you." And the Chinese merchant told me he said to the British resident, "You know, I am Chairman of the Piece Goods Association. Our Association does with Manchester alone about six million dollars worth of trade in piece goods a year, but since 1925 even without a boycott against British goods our trade has dwindled to less than a million. You protect my person, but you ruin my trade." By this incident you see how you are losing the goodwill of the Chinese people. That is the one point I hope business men in various countries will realize, that goodwill counts much more than all the special privileges and territories put together. There, in these few simple words, you find these three great struggles that are, unfortunately for us, happening in China at the same time. We have to fight a revolution, and on the side we have to take up the question of international status with other nations.

I do not want you at all to get the impression that we shall reach all these objectives in a few years. I think those of us in the situation, who have lived, fought and

suffered with it, realize that we have many years before us before we can say we have something definitely happening in China. We are like the Children of Israel. We have just left Egypt. We are in that period of forty years wandering in the wilderness and in this wandering we will make mistakes and perhaps play with false friends and suffer attacks from various sources. But the main fact to remember is that our face is set on the forward march to the promised land, and I hope nothing will turn our face from it.

And then, I want to touch on the Russian situation in China. People have often asked, "Why is Russia in China; and can you shake off the Russian influence?" The leader of our revolution appealed to America, to Great Britain, to Japan, to ask these powers to help the Nationalist movement to succeed in China. Well, naturally speaking, from a legal point of view, they turned him down in a way that made him feel, "You are a sort of a joke in China; you could never amount to anything." Dr. Sun told me himself that these Western nations "think I am not the strong man of China, but I will show them"; and so the next power he approached was Russia.

Whether Russia has good motives or not we do not know, but anyway she has the perspicacity to pose as a friend of China. Why should she not do so? The situation is simply this: Russia, no matter what her motives are, has so far helped the one thing the people in China want. The other powers have not. And that is at the bottom of the psychology of the Chinese people toward other nations at the present moment.

What has the Russian movement done for China? It has given alone a great help in organizing the masses of China. They came in in 1922 and helped greatly by supplying experience in organizing the masses. At the same time, the Chinese people realize the danger in the situation because here you have a vast mass of people not well educated and subject to be led by any people. They furnish a very fertile field for all sorts of radical propaganda, and we realize that danger and are trying to checkmate it in various forms. One of our leaders started out to clean up a bunch of radical offices at Canton. The result was that he dis-

armed the Laborists and deported about thirty Russians and others. He put on this movement to disarm the laborers and the farmers guards, and that is the real reason for the so-called split in the Nationalist movement.

People ask me, "Do you think you can throw off this extremist influence in China?" I don't know, but I am simply going to paint for you the fix we are in. If you think of China, you may think of our movement as a very delicate vase. Inside that vase a rat has hidden itself. Let us call that rat the extremist faction. Our fix is to try and dislodge that rat without breaking the vase. We are now beginning to do it, but many Western nations are impatient. They want us to do it quickly, forgetting that we may break the vase and that would be no good.

Where is the heart of the Chinese people in this Russian business? I may tell you we have no reason to love her, and therefore we tolerate Russia as long as she continues giving us help; but as soon as we feel she is turning against us, there will be a movement in China to overthrow the Russian influence.

And then I just want to quit with one or two observations. Particularly I wish the people in the West to realize that I am asked by sixty or more commercial and industrial organizations just to put before the public certain pleas. The first plea is simply this: China has been referred to as a sleeping giant. I think the position is a little reversed. The sleeping giant has wakened up. The process of awakening has come into the West. Your psychology is still trying to deal with a sleeping giant. We need an awakening on the part of the West to deal with an awakened giant.

The second point is: we would like very much at this moment to plead with the people here and your Governments to allow us to work out our problems in our own way. You realize that what is happening in China today is a great transformation of an old people coming out into a new day. If that process is to succeed, you must give our genius, our temperament, our capacity a free play in the development and working out of our own problems. You should not force us to work our problems in our way. Of course, I realize that it may be a little inconvenient to you,

but it means much more to us because we are going through a period of struggle almost of life and death.

So the last point I want to plead is: Please do not forget that what is happening in China is a great human drama.

Now, I have been speaking for about two weeks in the United States. I have heard people with a legal mind speak of China as a legal problem. I have also heard experts analyse the case of China. I have also heard scholars—I remember a professor in a New York university analyse the situation as a scholarly dissertation. But they forget that behind all this there are four hundred millions of people groaning, suffering and yearning for a higher and better form of life, a mass of people like yours, of the same capacity for feeling, for wanting better things; and that is what is going on, and that is why I ask you to be patient and sympathetic with us.

Now, just one word of thanks for the grace of your hospitality this afternoon, and also for the very cordial bearing you have given me, a stranger in your midst.