The Report of the Lytton Commission

BY

M. THOMAS TCHOU

Former Director of the Labor Department of China, Chinese Government Delegate to the Twelfth, Fourteenth, and Fifteenth Sessions, and Vice-President of the Fourteenth Session, of the International Labor Conference.
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WONDER whether you realize that at this moment a drama of first importance for the future of the world is being enacted at Geneva. The nations of the world have now to decide whether the future relationships between them shall be regulated by law and order, based upon the principles of peace and justice, or whether they are going to revert to the mediaeval state of international depredation and lawlessness. Permit me to quote what Lord Lytton said on November 20th last with regard to the situation in the Far East, as a result of Japan’s military invasion of Manchuria in violation of the Covenant of the League of Nations, the Nine Power Treaty, and the Kellogg-Briand Anti-War Pact, which Japan has voluntarily signed and pledged herself to respect. Lord Lytton said:

“The issue at stake is a much larger one than whether China or Japan shall control the future destinies of Manchuria; it is whether the principles of collective responsibility and the maintenance of peace and justice between nations shall be preserved or sacrificed. The choice lies between the continued organization of peace by cooperation, or a return to the anarchy of competitive force.”

After the dreadful sufferings of the World War and the incalculable sacrifices in lives and treasures, these instruments of peace, which I have referred to above, are the hope of a better world, and if we cannot uphold them, we are headed for a catastrophic disaster which will engulf the whole world.

When the Japanese launched their attack on China on September 18th, 1931, which resulted in their progressive occupation of Manchuria, the beginning of such a disaster was only avoided through the wonderful self-restraint that China had imposed upon herself by offering no military resistance, which, as you know, was a most difficult thing to enforce among our troops who were stationed there. But China succeeded in doing this and has thereby demonstrated to the world that she takes these treaties seriously and has complete faith in the good faith of other signatories to uphold them. As a result of the discussions by the League of Nations, a neutral Commission, composed of five members under the chairmanship of the Earl of Lytton of Great Britain and including an American in the person of Major General Frank D. McCoy, was dispatched to the Far East to investigate the facts and to make a report and recommenda-
tions for a possible solution of the conflict. Both China and Japan pledged themselves to give every facility to this Commission to carry out its work. China kept her word, but when the Commission went to Manchuria they were surrounded by Japanese spies and agents and were not allowed to see anyone—the latter did not approve.

The Commission had a large number of questions under investigation. It is impossible to give a comprehensive review here beyond stating some of the chief contentions between China and Japan and the Commission's unanimous conclusions.

Japan having fought two wars over Korea and Manchuria and having annexed Korea in 1910, thinks that Manchuria is not necessarily Chinese territory, which is a point often emphasized by Japanese speakers in public. China has never paid much attention to such propaganda because it was plainly pure fiction spread by the Japanese for their own purpose. The Commission has the following to say about it:

The Chinese people regard Manchuria as an integral part of China and deeply resent any attempt to separate it from the rest of their country. Hitherto, these three Eastern provinces have always been considered both by China and by foreign powers as a part of China, and the de jure authority of the Chinese Government there has been unquestioned. This is evidenced in many Sino-Japanese treaties and agreements, as well as in other international conventions, and has been reiterated in numerous statements issued officially by Foreign Offices, including that of Japan.

Japan has repeatedly claimed a "special position" in Manchuria and actually tried to ask other countries to recognize it. While China recognizes that Japan, like some other countries, has certain economic interests in Manchuria, she maintains that Japan has no claim to a "special position" in any sense. The Commission has the following to say about this matter:

The signatories of the Nine Power Treaty of the Washington Conference of February 6th, 1922, by agreeing to "respect the sovereignty, the independence, and the territorial and administrative integrity" of China, to maintain "equality of opportunity in China for the trade and industry of all nations," by refraining from taking advantage of conditions in China "in order to seek special rights or privileges" there, and by providing "the fullest and most unembarrassing opportunity to China to develop and maintain for herself an effective and stable government," challenged to a large extent the claims of any signatory State to a "special position" or to "special rights and interests" in any part of China, including Manchuria.

Japan often charges that China is "not an organized State" and that China is only a "geographical expression" or "is in a condition of com-
plete chaos and incredible anarchy”; therefore Japan thinks she is en-
titled to take Manchuria for herself. China’s contention is that she is
being transformed from an ancient country into a modern nation and
being a country larger than Europe and with a population larger than
that of Europe, it necessarily takes time and she is already well on the
road to national stability and progress, and China holds that Japan has
repeatedly endeavored to promote dissension in China and is now com-
mitting international banditry in seizing Manchuria. China, with her
transition, is not a menace to the peace of the world, while Japan with
her defiant violation of international treaties and military depredation
is the greatest menace to the peace of the world. With regard to de-
velopment in China, the Commission says in effect that China is today
in a better condition than in 1922 when the Nine Power Treaty was
signed and that

“although at present the Central Government’s authority
is still weak in a number of provinces, the central authority is
not, at least openly, repudiated, and there is reason to hope that,
if the Central Government as such can be maintained, provin-
cial administration, military forces, and finance will acquire an
increasingly national character. These, among others, were
doubtless the reasons which induced the Assembly of the League
of Nations last September to elect China to the Council.”
The Commission, in another passage, said:

“*The vision of a China unified, strong, and hostile, a nation
of four hundred millions, dominant in Manchuria and in East-
ern Asia, is disturbing to many Japanese.* . . .”
The Japanese claim that on the night of September 18th, 1931, when
they seized Mukden and several other cities, they were attacked by the
Chinese and they only acted in self-defence. The Commission, after go-
ing over the situation carefully and examining witnesses, gave the fol-
lowing verdict:

The Chinese, in accordance with the instructions referred
to on page 187, had no plan of attacking the Japanese troops,
or of endangering the lives or property of Japanese nationals at
this particular time or place. They made no concerted or au-
thorized attack on the Japanese forces and were surprised by
the Japanese attack and subsequent operation . . . the military
operations of the Japanese troops during this night, which have
been described above, cannot be regarded as measures of
legitimate self-defense.

After the Japanese had extended their military operations through-
out Manchuria, they created a puppet state called “Manchukuo” and
filled the important positions with Japanese. Japan, having “recog-
nized” this so-called new state, insists that it was created as a result of
the spontaneous will of the Manchurians. The Commission’s conclusion
was as follows:

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The evidence received from all sources has satisfied the Commission that while there were a number of factors which contributed to the creation of “Manchukuo,” the two which in combination were most effective, and without which, in our judgment, the new State could not have been formed, were the presence of Japanese troops and the activities of Japanese officials, both civil and military. For this reason the present regime cannot be considered to have been called into existence by a genuine and spontaneous independence movement.

The lack of time will not permit mentioning many other points which I have in mind, but the above points show that practically all China’s main contentions have been upheld and Japan has been found guilty of the violation of the Covenant of the League of Nations, the Nine Power Treaty, and the Kellogg-Briand Anti-War Pact, all of which she voluntarily signed and pledged herself to respect. Japan is an international outlaw or bandit, and she has the nerve to call the inhabitants of Manchuria bandits and to carry out a so-called bandit-suppression campaign which is nothing but an orgy of slaughtering of thousands of innocent men, women, and children, and the wholesale destruction of farms, villages, schools, and public institutions. The militarists of Japan, who are responsible for what the Japanese have done in Manchuria, have resorted to assassination in Japan to suppress any opposition by enlightened people at home and have inaugurated a reign of terror in China. In Shanghai alone last winter over 20,000 innocent people, chiefly women and children, were cruelly put to death and the homes of a quarter-million people were destroyed by air bombing and incendiariism. Libraries, universities, schools and factories were their special targets, and these Japanese think they have done it and got off with it!

Having gone through such unspeakable experiences what do you think the Chinese now want? Do they want to do the same thing to Japan? No. What they want is not vengeance, but justice, namely that Japan must restore all her ill-gotten gains to China and pay full damages and that China be insured against such brutality in the future.

Now the recommendations of the Lytton Commission as a possible solution of the situation were extremely mild. They have not even reprimanded Japan, but have sought a compromise. They have not even insisted on the immediate evacuation of the Japanese troops from Chinese territory, which the Japanese undertook to do twice before the League of Nations, nor have they mentioned that Japan must pay China due reparations. They have proposed in brief ten principles as a basis of a solution, and a series of conferences which should lead to the settlement of all outstanding issues between all parties concerned.

China being the wronged party, is entitled to reparations for damages and the full restoration of her rights. The compromise proposed by the Commission can hardly be said to give China any satisfaction. Yet China has refrained so far from giving any direct criticism at Geneva,
as we consider that it would be bad taste at this stage to criticize the report of the Commission, whose appointment had the approval of China and Japan, as well as over two scores of other nations. But the Japanese have openly rejected the recommendations of the Commission and insist that nothing but a recommendation for the recognition of their puppet state Manchukuo, would be acceptable to them. In other words, Japan defies the public opinion of the whole civilized world and she makes it known beyond a shadow of doubt that she will continue in her policy of aggression and depredation in the Far East in defiance of existing treaties. She has put herself in the position of an outlaw and insists upon continuing her career as an outlawed nation, and she challenges the world with impunity.

Japan is asking the world to wait patiently to see the results of her exploits, while her armed forces are daily putting scores and hundreds of innocent men, women, and children to death. At the same time, she is stifling the trade of other countries. She says she is maintaining the "Open Door" in Manchuria, but the trade of the United States has been reduced to less than one-quarter of its former volume. The Japanese are so crowding this "Open Door," that there is no room for other people to come in and out. This is what is going to happen all over the Pacific and the Far East, if the Japanese are allowed to continue as they have done during the last fourteen months. This will deal such a blow to the industry and trade of other nations, that their economic recovery will be hopelessly retarded.

Of all the nations that have cherished the cause of international peace and justice, America can be justly proud that she has taken the leadership. The Covenant of the League of Nations was proposed by an American president, the Nine Power Treaty, which guarantees China's territorial and administrative integrity and which maintains the "Open Door" in China, was sponsored by the United States. The Kellogg-Briand Anti-War Pact was also sponsored by this country. So long as this country and the other signatories insist on these treaties being respected and hold themselves responsible as a matter of national honor to have them enforced, Japan will be powerless in her present efforts to disturb world peace; but apparently the Japanese militarists do not believe that the world is sincere in its peace efforts so they think they can persuade other nations by strengthening their military forces. During the last few days, the Japanese militarists have adopted a budget calling for enormous increases in expenditures during the coming year for their army and navy. They have practically doubled the estimates for the previous year. And that is the way they proposed to back up their protestation for the promotion of world peace!

We are today at the cross-roads. Will the nations of the world unite to enforce peace, or shall we drift back to a world of competitive armament and international chaos?