

THE JAPANESE CRISIS

IN less than eighteen months Japan has lost two premiers, one from each of the two major political parties, to assassins' bullets; a cabinet minister of high rank has perished in the same way; so has a leading industrialist. Baron Wawatsuki, ex-premier and leader of the Minseito, has had an attempt made on his life, other prominent men have been threatened. The victims, it will be noticed, are not confined to one political complexion, or to any one department of life. One might almost be excused for believing some malignant spirit to have suddenly seized on the country, but, demoniacal possession being nowadays hardly a tenable political theory, some other explanation must be sought for these crimes. It is not sufficient to put them down to the peculiar obliquity of mental vision which makes the Japanese condone assassination if patriotic motives are alleged in excuse. Political murder has not been uncommon in Japan; there have been cases before where misguided individuals have felt that their country's good demanded the removal of a particular person, but they were the isolated acts of solitary fanatics. Here there is a series; an organized body, the 'Blood Brotherhood,' has been at work. We must, therefore, look deeper, and examine the unrest and ferment of which these acts are a manifestation.

Japan to-day is in a state of flux, largely as a result of the sudden impact of Western ideas on a society that was essentially static. Seventy years ago she was a feudal state, her society was one of fixed ranks and gradations, her economy was mainly agricultural, industry was still in the handicraft stage, the population was stationary. With the eager adoption of the Western ideas, this old society, with its accepted standards of manners and morals, began to disintegrate. The family system is now rapidly breaking up, the old feudal traditions of loyalty to one's superiors and responsibility for one's dependents have practically disap-

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peared, to be replaced by Carlyle's 'cash nexus.' The cement which held society together has fallen out, and the resultant spectacle is one that arouses deep apprehension in the minds of the old school, which stands aghast at the 'café' civilization of the larger cities, and the acceptance of Hollywood standards by the younger generation. Meanwhile the average Japanese is torn two ways, living a 'double life,' symbolized by the Japanese style house he lives in, with its little concrete excrescence fitted up in Western style.

Undoubtedly the greatest effects of this rapid Westernization have been seen in the economic sphere. Japan has been undergoing an industrial revolution, with all those miseries which seem inseparably attendant on such revolutions. There has been a tremendous increase in population, and the increase is still going on at the enormous rate of three-quarters of a million yearly. Industry has been stimulated and developed, and a huge industrial population has been created, dependent solely on its earnings. In the present economic depression the lot of these workers is hard, very hard, and naturally there is discontent. Yet as things are, there seems little chance of raising wages, and the attitude of employers, as revealed by its opposition to labour union bills which would legalise workers' combinations, is distinctly illiberal. Big business indeed is, whether rightly or wrongly, in very bad odour with the general public, which attributes a great deal of the country's distress to the domination it exercises over policy, an opinion which is shared, incidentally, by the military element.

Distress in the countryside is as great as in the towns. The average holding is under two and a half acres, and the income from this is less than £1 a week, which, at the very modest computation of six in a family, works out at less than 6d. per head per day. Moreover, over thirty per cent. of the agricultural

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community farms less than half this amount of land. The main reasons for the farmer's poverty are the heavy taxation, the decline of subsidiary employments such as straw sandal making, the ousting of silk by rayon, and above all the low price of their stable commodity, rice. To raise the price of this, however, would mean raising the industrial worker's cost of living, and so lead to an irresistible demand for higher wages; and higher wages would mean an increase in industry's production costs, which would impair very seriously its ability to compete in world markets. Both in the countryside and in the towns, Japan's rulers are faced with serious difficulties; they are on the horns of a dilemma, and this explains the insistence on Japan's rights in Manchuria. That district, it is hoped, will provide both the cheap and assured supply of raw materials and the market so essential for her industrial development, an outlet for her surplus population, and later, in consequence of the higher wages which industrial prosperity will enable to be paid, lead to an improvement in the farmer's lot.

Meanwhile, distress and discontent provide the agitator's opportunity. There is a very active, if numerically small, communist party, which causes the authorities constant and considerable perturbation. Very strong repressive measures are resorted to to keep the movement in check. At the same time, the inherent patriotism of the people and their loyalty to the Emperor operates to prevent the spread of communist ideas. Indeed, communist activities have led to a reaction, and it is this reaction which partly explains the recent swing of one section of the labour movement in the direction of Fascism.

But not only the farmers and workers are dissatisfied; the small man generally finds times hard, and is ready to seize on anything which promises to make them better. He is rapidly ceasing to place any trust

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in the existing political parties, their corruption is notorious, and they are believed to be dominated by the big industrial and financial interests which supply the bulk of their funds. Politicians are regarded as ambitious self-seekers, a belief which their behaviour does nothing to belie, and the Diet's prestige is very low. The doctrines which lie at the root of Western democratic institutions have never taken a very firm hold on the general Japanese public, and the ineptitude of the existing parties and the comparative futility of the Diet have brought parliamentarism into discredit.

Various other factors are also at work. There is a reaction sedulously fostered by one group against that Westernization of the country which is held to be so that things Western have been adopted too rapidly and indiscriminately without enough consideration as to their suitability for Japanese psychology and conditions. Thus the legal code, which was taken over almost unaltered from Germany, is held to be turning out to be in many respects unsatisfactory. Similarly, in the industrial world, Western conceptions as to the relative duties and rights of employers and workmen have crept in, much to that world's disadvantage. There is, it is said, much in Japan's laws and institutions incompatible with the Japanese temperament. It is necessary to recover the genuine national spirit.

Nationalist sentiments have been stimulated also by the reduction in armaments following on the London Treaty, a reduction held by many to have endangered very seriously the country's defence. Then there has been the lack of success which marked Baron Shidehara's diplomatic methods in regard to China. The latter country's failure to respond to that statesman's more liberal policy, and the apparent impossibility of securing a satisfactory settlement with her by a process of negotiation and reasoned argument, has led to a re-

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action in favour of the 'positive' policy of Baron Tanaka. The Japanese people are particularly jealous of their rights in Manchuria, and when these rights and interests were constantly flouted and disregarded with no signs of any intention on the part of China to observe her treaty obligations, they grew more and more impatient. This was particularly so in the case of the military, which take a high view of its duties and responsibilities as protector of the national interests. Finally, when once the policy of a firm stand backed by arms was adopted in Manchuria, its success gave a great fillip to the nationalism of which it was a manifestation.

The ordinary man, convinced that something is wrong, anxious to see something done to set things right, is yet unable to make up his mind exactly as to what is wrong or what needs doing. The existing parties have failed; he mistrusts the big financial and commercial interests he sees controlling and, he believes, exploiting his country. In the sense that he wishes to see these interests brought under some sort of control by the state he is anti-capitalist. Yet he is definitely opposed to Marxian doctrines, his patriotism revolts against their internationalism; he hates the communists and their Moscow affiliations. In this mood Fascism makes a strong appeal, and the Fascist movement is compounded of so many diverse elements that somewhere or other he is almost bound to find a home in it. There is the Kokuhonsha led by Baron Hiarnuma. With its ultra-nationalism it is the patriotic society *par excellence*. Japan is the land of the Gods, the Emperor is the Divine Head of the State, Japan has an almost divine mission, and military strength is necessary to enable her to defend her ideals. The Diet is corrupt and does not represent the people. The time has come for another period of reform, for another 'Restoration.' The crown must have restored

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to it the authority usurped by politicians and big business. Thus it preaches, carrying on very active propaganda with the reservists' associations, three million strong, and the young men's societies. Then there are the various groups which have split off from the old labour parties. They call themselves National Socialists or State Socialists, but, as one writer has put it, they are far more national than socialist. Their point of view may be summed up as anti-parliamentary in politics, pro-state control in economics, and anti-international in diplomacy. They have consistently supported the Manchurian expedition, with the proviso that its fruits must be the prize of the proletariat and not of capitalist concession hunters, a point of view which the army, judging by its action, seems to share. The military authorities there have intimated very clearly to big business that it will not be allowed to exploit that region for its own private benefit. A certain Mr. Akamatsu, late Chief Secretary of the Shakai Minshyuto (Social Democrats), is the chief personage in these groups, and he is reported to have been in communication with the Adachi faction which left the Minseito last autumn, when that statesman's proposals for a coalition government were turned down.

Finally, mention must be made of the army which has viewed with great disgust the growth of the power of the political parties at the expense of its own, a disgust which is all the greater owing to the character of these parties. Its high view of its position as the protector of the nation has been mentioned, and in a sense it takes a far wider view of its duties as such than do the politicians. It has very real sympathy with the distressed workers and farmers, especially the latter, with which class it has very close connections, and, as one of its spokesmen recently remarked, its influence is just as likely to be used on the side of labour as on the side of capital.

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The present situation is thus the outcome of many diverse and at times almost conflicting factors, but the chief cause is economic distress. Japan must find a solution to the problem caused by a rapidly growing population for which there is no room on the land, which industry, on the other hand, cannot absorb, let alone pay a wage sufficient to guarantee a decent standard of life. It is essential that her industries should expand and prosper, and, as Japan sees it, that can only be assured by her gaining control of Manchuria. Any government will be bound to pursue a 'positive' policy there, and it is futile for the world to blink its eyes to the fact. At the present moment Japan has a supper-party government led by one whose record as a moderate and liberal-minded statesman is a guarantee that as long as he remains in office his country's policy will not be one of mere blind chauvinism. It is worth considering what his fall would mean. The resultant period of confusion would be the extremist's opportunity. No one wishes to see a communistic Japan—that might well mean the Bolshevization of the whole Far East. Almost equally as disastrous would be the triumph of the ultra-imperialists—that would bring with it the almost certain threat of war. Every consideration, therefore, demands that nothing be done to make Viscount Saito's already difficult task more difficult. The fate of his administration depends in the last resort on its success or failure in Manchuria. Bearing in mind what its fall would mean, people would do well to ask themselves whether a rather exaggerated doctrine of nationalism and China's very theoretical claims to sovereign rights are to outweigh the economic needs of a great nation, the happiness and prosperity of its millions of people, and the peace of the world.

E. H. ANSTICE.