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THE UNIVERSITY OF OKLAHOMA
GRADUATE COLLEGE

THE USE OF CHINESE LABOUR BY THE BRITISH ARMY, 1916-1920:
THE "RAW IMPORTATION," ITS SCOPE AND PROBLEMS

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1973

THE USE OF CHINESE LABOUR BY THE BRITISH ARMY, 1916-1920:

THE "RAW IMPORTATION," ITS SCOPE AND PROBLEMS

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TABLE OF CONTENTS

Chapter	Page
I. INTRODUCTION	1
II. THE ORIGINS AND ORGANIZATION OF THE CHINESE LABOUR CORPS: 1916-1917	33
III. DISCUSSION OF THE DEPLOYMENT OF LABOR RESOURCES BY THE BRITISH ARMIES IN FRANCE AND THE IMPACT THEREON OF THE CHINESE LABOUR CORPS	95
IV. THE RESPONSE OF ORGANIZED LABOR IN BRITAIN TO THE RAISING OF THE CHINESE LABOUR CORPS	136
V. THE CHINESE AT WORK: 1917-1918	163
VI. THE CHRISTIAN MISSIONARY EFFORT: ITS EFFECT UPON THE CHINESE LABOUR CORPS: 1918-1920	203
VII. THE DEMOBILIZATION AND REPATRIATION OF THE CHINESE LABOUR CORPS	236
VIII. CONCLUSION	253

APPENDIXES

'A' Distribution of Chinese Labor Companies at Peak Strength, July 27, 1918	261
'B' List of Vessels Carrying Coolies to France, and Numbers of Men Reported on Each	264
'C' Schedule of Tasks Showing Superiority of Chinese Labor over White	267

BIBLIOGRAPHY	268
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CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

I

Between March, 1917, and the beginning of 1920, the British Army, first in France, and then in occupied territory, employed an establishment of Chinese coolie labor which at one point totalled over ninety-two thousand men.¹ The so called "Chinese Labour Corps" was the result of a somewhat complicated series of understandings and maneuvers between the War Office, the Foreign and Colonial Offices, the High Command in France, and the Chinese government in Peking.

This corps of laborers which so dramatically began to materialize behind the lines in the spring of 1917 has

¹The exact total remains uncertain. The official statistics place the number at its peak at 92,129, while a reliable War Office source suggests a maximum figure in August, 1918, of 95,594 men and 956 officers. See: Statistics of the Military Effort of the British Empire during the Great War, 1914-1920 (London: H.M.S.O., 1922), p. 160, London. Public Record Office. War Office papers, category 107, file /or box/ no. 37, Report on the Work of Labour with the B.E.F. during the War, "Notes on Chinese Labour," August, 1918, para. 8. (Hereafter Public Record Office citations will adhere to the pattern of the following shortened form: P.R.O./W.O. 107/37. This reference shall hereafter appear as Labour Report.)

had little to memorialize it during the course of the last fifty years. Public references to it at the time were few, often quite inaccurate, and occasionally deliberately biased for the purposes of Allied propaganda. The War Office wittingly discouraged contemporary comment for fear that organized labor in Great Britain itself would raise its voice in protest, not so much at the exploitation of Chinese workers in France, but against their possible use in dilution or substitution schemes then contemplated or in operation in England.

The strategists in Whitehall also learned that their political superiors feared repercussions of a different nature involving, perhaps, embarrassing parallels with the importation into South Africa of nearly fifty-thousand Chinese coolies in 1903 and 1904. These laborers, whose indenture was approved and facilitated by the Conservative and Unionist government of J. Arthur Balfour, worked in the Rand mines under conditions which even British officials who sanctioned the plan for their use admitted were inhumane. Criticisms of Balfour and his colleagues made on that occasion by the Liberal party had been a prominent but intangible element in their return to power in December, 1905.²

²R. C. K. Ensor, England: 1870-1914 (Oxford: The Clarendon Press, 1936), p. 377. Current interpretations tend to give the issue greater substance. One writer has

The Liberals kept alive for many years the memory of "Balfour's Blunder" and "Chinese Slavery," and regarded their crusade on behalf of the coolies as something of a confirmation of the principles which Mr. Gladstone had imparted to them before his death in 1898. When the use of Chinese workers in France was first contemplated in mid-1916, many of the leading actors in this earlier drama, men like Sir Edward Grey, H. H. Asquith, and Arthur Balfour himself, remained recognizably prominent in the political arena. They all played some part in the raising of the Chinese Labour Corps, and it lay in all of their interests to subdue the least hint of public outrage. Not surprisingly, the major newspapers remained strangely muted and uninformed, with the comments that did filter through to the public subject to close scrutiny at Whitehall and liable to bring prompt indications of displeasure.³ At the same time, the War Office was willing

called the Chinese Labour question without doubt the second main plank in the Liberals' 1905 campaign, tariff reform being the first. See R. Hyam, Elgin and Churchill at the Colonial Office, 1905-1908 (London: Macmillan, 1968), p. 48.

³Through one of its military attachés, the British Legation in Peking protested vehemently to the War Office concerning an article hinting at the proposed use of Chinese Labour which had appeared in the November 15, 1916, issue of The Manchester Guardian. See P.R.O./W.O. 106/33, History of the Chinese Labour Corps, Alston, Peking, to Director of Military Intelligence (D.M.I.), London, December 21, 1916. (Hereafter cited as C.L.C. History.)

to sanction a quasi-official coverage of the Chinese presence in France once the Chinese Labour Corps had become a fait accompli there.

The leftist and labor oriented press, while failing to mind so urgently the government's quest for circum-spection or outright abstention from comment, remained characteristically preoccupied with domestic and parochial matters, or with interpretations of socialist theory. The Parliamentary and Independent Labour Parties both expressed anxiety over the use of colored labor in general, but their concern extended only to the effects this might have upon the British Isles.

This paper will seriously examine for the first time the decision making process which led to the use of the Chinese coolies. It will also attempt to fit them into the context of the social, political, and military ethos of the times. The Chinese Labour Corps will be seen as a part of the Imperial response to the demands of total war. The use of the Chinese under harsh conditions and terms will be presented as an event considered regrettable but nonetheless sanctioned and legitimated by the continued manifestation of Britain's Imperial destiny and the need to preserve the Empire from the hands of the enemy.

When committed to employing Chinese workers in France under dubious conditions, Britain's political and

military spokesmen could clothe their actions with surprisingly plausible defences. To understand why this was possible it is essential that some of the ingredients of the mentality which subsisted among the men who raised and directed the Chinese be clarified and understood. If this is done, the main thrust of the attempt to place the Chinese Labour Corps within a social, political, and military perspective can be given added depth and substance, and the conditions and men governing its use can be appreciated more readily. The decay in standards of political morality that these plausible defences came to represent may also become suggestively apparent.

The problems of clarification and understanding are historically grounded. They lay in the early years of the present century, which saw the development among all classes of a specific ethos with regard to the treatment of the contemptuously named subject races. As Evelyn Baring, the first Earl of Cromer and cousin to Sir Edward Grey, phrased it in The Spectator on the eve of war,

We reluctantly admit the necessity of compulsory labour in certain cases . . . we do not stigmatise as slavery such labour when, under all possible safeguards against the occurrence of abuses, it is employed for recognised and indispensable purposes of public utility.⁴

⁴Cromer, "What is Slavery?" The Spectator, January 17, 1914, p. 135.

If such labor were recruited under the "safeguards" of commonsense and legal respectability, British concepts of fair play and decency, as understood in pre-war days, were not compromised. So long as no sordid private profit motive were present, and only the "benefit of the state" were served, the work of impressed labor could in no sense be regarded as slavery. Grey, as Foreign Secretary, said as much in a speech before the House of Commons in August, 1907.⁵

This serene confidence in the ability of her administrators to do the right thing was born of Britain's acknowledgment of a moral responsibility for the welfare of the natives who came under her charge. It was part of her colonial burden. Later, the responsibility came to imply a trusteeship, followed in modern times by a recognition of a principle of accountability which has in turn led to the granting of independence to Britain's colonial possessions.⁶ Naturally, this process was not foreseen before the war.

In the days before the advent of the great conflict it was the Liberals who were most preoccupied with the

⁵Great Britain, Parliament, Parliamentary Debates (House of Commons), 4th series, August 1, 1907, col. 1317.

⁶W. D. McIntyre, Colonies into Commonwealth (New York: Walker, 1967), p. 147.

moral regeneration of British colonialism. The Empire as they saw it was to be a civilizing force transcending mere Anglo-European comprehension.⁷ It was true that natives were to be treated in line with the canons of civilized European society, but the impact of this benefit would, it was hoped, create a world wide community of decent men who owed their allegiance to Britain.

The Liberal ministry which came into office in December, 1905, was committed to the administration of an empire at the apogee of its power and extent. Their rhetoric committed them too to the belief that justice, fair play, and Christian morality⁸ were synonymous with the civilizing mission which they saw as one of the primary rationales for continued Imperial status. Men like the ninth Lord Elgin typified this confident outlook. As Colonial Secretary from December, 1905, to April, 1908, Elgin set an enlightened pattern for the direction of colonial natives by substitution of persuasive for coercive methods in their handling.⁹ His conduct in office

⁷H. Samuel, Memoirs (London: 1945), p. 33, quoted in R. Hyam, Elgin and Churchill at the Colonial Office, p. 51.

⁸The conscience of English Nonconformity was present in the House as never before in the ranks of the Liberal Members of 1905. See J. F. Glaser, "English Nonconformity and the Decline of Liberalism," The American Historical Review, Vol. LXIII, January, 1958, pp. 352-53.

⁹Hyam, Elgin and Churchill at the Colonial Office, p. 25.

influenced a whole school of Liberal Imperialists, among them Asquith and Grey.

It was Elgin who had to clear up the problems that the previous government bequeathed him concerning the use of Chinese labor on the Rand. Elgin, influenced by the moral commitment of his own government to end the scheme, still saw the legal and economic problems which faced him in the repatriation of the coolies. Legal restraints prevented the immediate ending of the labor scheme, and he feared the economic ruin of the Transvaal mine investors should he act precipitately. On this occasion it was the Prime Minister, Campbell-Bannerman, who reminded Elgin and the country of the Liberals' identification with the principles of morality in the handling of natives,¹⁰ thus bringing the Colonial Secretary back to the substance of the party's view on colonial policy.

But was this substance merely window dressing? One authority on the period believes that to many Liberals the issue of Chinese labor on the Rand became a symbol of capitalist and Tory inequity, rather than a real moral dilemma.¹¹ The Liberals "refused . . . to be deflected from realistic course of action by the pressure of their

¹⁰L. T. Hobhouse, Liberalism (London: Oxford University Press, 1964), p. 58.

¹¹Hyam, Elgin and Churchill at the Colonial Office, p. 93.

radical rank and file, whom they pejoratively referred to . . . as sentimentalists."¹²

Was it then in the minds of the "radical rank and file" that the true substance of the Liberals' moral outlook on the rule of natives lay? It is true that some at least of the more radical among party members and adherents believed themselves to be the genuine recipients of the Gladstonian code of human values promulgated in the 1870's. They professed an anti-Imperialism if not an anti-colonialism, and their opposition to the worst features of the Imperialist mentality received a boost from the debacle of the Boer War.

By 1900 the criticisms expressed by some of the Liberal radicals were fairly well organized. They represented something of an intellectual synthesis as well as a response to the added burdens of extended Empire.¹³ Views ranging across a wide spectrum of interests and concerns found a single means of expression. Dilke, for example, showed a deep concern for the cultural attributes of subject peoples.¹⁴ Labouchere was equally vocal. As early as 1900 he had advocated the establishment of labor

¹²Ibid., p. 531.

¹³B. Porter, Critics of Empire: British radical attitudes to Colonialism in Africa, 1895-1914 (London: Macmillan, 1968), p. 35.

¹⁴Ibid., p. 84.

bureaux in the Transvaal to prevent the exploitation of native labor. Wedgwood, C. V. Harcourt, and E. D. Morel¹⁵ were also prominent, along with Henry Broadhurst, the Lib-Lab and sometime protégé of Gladstone.

But still this synthesis, with its important vestiges of Gladstonian high-mindedness, was not sufficient to have any profound influence upon the government's concern for the plight of exploited natives. One suspects that it was used most often and most effectively as a stick with which to beat incumbent ministers and complacent party colleagues. In short, the Radical critics of Empire remained narrow minded in their outlook. Harcourt, for instance, was a Little Englander, who merely saw the economic disadvantages to Britain of continued colonial exploitation.¹⁶

Their overall cry was one of non-involvement rather than of active intervention to secure better conditions in imperially administered territories. As a result their critique turned out to be vague and disappointing. It is true that Courtney could call imperial administration

¹⁵Morel's reaction to the plight of the natives in the Congo is well commemorated in E. Halévy, A History of the English People in the Nineteenth Century, Vol. VI: The Rule of Democracy: 1905-1914 (London: Ernest Benn, 1961), pp. 40-43.

¹⁶Porter, Critics of Empire, p. 84.

of subject races "an engrossing arrogance,"¹⁷ something that left no room for humanitarian considerations, and which led to the exercise of a sterile legalism often allied to executive brutality. But it was at home that he and his colleagues looked for evidences of the worst of Imperial mismanagement. They found it in the vulgarity, chauvinism, and materialism of the Jingoists, and when they spoke of these offensive crudities as "a violation of the principles of rational morality in international affairs,"¹⁸ they were verbalizing prejudices against their compatriots rather than coming to grips with the real issues confronting the Empire in its management and direction of vast alien populations. But they cared, and their views affected many thoughtful men of that pre-war generation.

Organized labor and its representatives consistently emphasized the element of capitalist exploitation which they believed they discerned in the processes of colonial government. This essentially theoretical principle became a preoccupation.¹⁹ One scholar at least has maintained that this pinched outlook on the part of Labour

¹⁷Ibid., p. 88, quoting Courtney, Letter to L. S. Amery, November 30, 1899. Courtney Papers, Vol VII, p. 49.

¹⁸Ibid., p. 91.

¹⁹See Broadhurst's excoriation of the Tories on this head during debate on Chinese labor in South Africa in Parliamentary Debates (House of Commons), 4th series, Feb-

politicians in particular began to change after 1906, when the Labour Representation Committee returned twenty-nine Members to the House. Then, it is suggested, Labour began to form a defensible and substantive anti-colonialist ideology.²⁰ But any progressive ideology formed by Labour on the question of native rights was always likely to be compromised by the strong racist feelings shown by many rank and file and trade union members, among whom there subsisted what can only be described as a strong xenophobic streak.²¹ The fear of natives as potential immigrant strike breakers persisted long after the Labour Aliens Bill of 1906, and became an ingrained part of the working class response to questions dealing with colonial policy.²²

A generalized feeling of moral outrage at the exploitation of natives continued to animate the far left, with figures like G. N. Barnes, Keir Hardie, and J. R. MacDonald²³ as well established spokesmen, but the resultant rhetoric concealed an inability to come to grips with the problem in realistic terms. It echoed the Liberals' demands for respect, fair play, and justice in

ruary 16, 1904, cols. 1579-1580.

²⁰Porter, Critics of Empire, p. 137.

²¹J. A. Garrard, The English and Immigration, 1880-1910 (London: Oxford University Press, 1971), p. 71.

²²Ibid., p. 20.

²³See especially J. R. MacDonald, Labour and the Empire (London: n.p., 1912), passim.

dealing with the Black and Yellow subject races, but it rarely, if ever, explicitly repudiated the right of the white man to rule. Later in these pages it will be seen how the actions of Labour and the left in the response to the use of Chinese coolies during the war tend to support the view expressed above.

Among yet another stratum of society, the professional civil servant class, the ethos which governed the direction of natives was better developed. It stood apart from the gesturings of the cheap press and the politicians. With the permanent staffs of the Colonial, Foreign, and War Offices the outlook on native rights and welfare was primarily a socially inherited one, molded by a tradition of leadership and cultural superiority inculcated at the public school level, and confirmed in the cloisters of Oxford and Cambridge. Appointments in these departments of state were made on the basis of personal assessments of character. Candidates were required to display an attitude that comprehended a blend of practicality, honesty, and gentlemanly conduct.²⁴

This mentality was to filter down to most of those whose positions involved them in the raising and direction

²⁴This process is well described in H. Heussler, Yesterday's Rulers: The Making of the British Colonial Service (Syracuse: Syracuse University Press, 1963), pp. 43-46, and see G. H. Nadel and P. Curtis, eds., Imperialism and Colonialism (London: Macmillan, 1970), passim.

of the Chinese Labour Corps. The rigid code it stood for forbade any hint of sentimental sympathy with colonial or subject peoples. Sternness in dealings with the heathen became a virtue never to be compromised; they were children to be judged, ruled, and directed. And yet mixed with this arrogant belief in racial domination one often finds elements of incredible ignorance concerning, say, Oriental or African customs and cultures.²⁵ Frankly, it was easier for the average educated Englishman of the day to identify with the far off era of Greek and Roman civilization. The largely imaginary rigors of the moral code of Classical Antiquity meant more to him than the savage world of Oriental or African politics and society, and was infinitely more worthy of preservation. If he was in the colonial service or involved in the government of natives he had little wish to learn about the cultures he ruled, and when a few intellectuals like Mary Kingsley or Marjorie Perham dared to suggest a species of cultural relativism which spoke of the similarities rather than the disparities between British and native customs, he was likely to be shocked, but remained steadfast in his prejudices. To such men it was preferable to keep in

²⁵V. G. Kiernan, The Lords of Human Kind: Black Man, Yellow Man, and White Man in an Age of Empire (Boston: Little, Brown, 1969), p. 321.

mind the words of the patriotic historian, J. A. Cramb, who remarked "Britain shall become the name of an ideal as well as the designation of a race, the description of an attitude of mind as well as of traits of blood."²⁶

It was a part of the myth of superiority generated in these pre-war days that in particular no Oriental was capable of lasting "improvement." Even the progressively minded Hubert Bland, writing in 1912, stated,

Education at Harvard or Oxford may imbue the Chinese student with ideas and social tendencies, apparently antagonistic to those of the patriarchal system of his native land; but they do not, and cannot, create in him . . . the Anglo-Saxon outlook on life, the standards of conduct and the beliefs which are the results of centuries of our process of civilisation and structured character . . . the Chinese remains true to type . . . /and/ will revert in six months to the ancestral type of morals and manners . . .²⁷

This attitude helps to explain why the War Office was so reluctant to admit the existence of intelligent and versatile men within the ranks of the Chinese Labour Corps, and unwilling to train them once their talents had been discovered.

Back in the political world the Tory leader, Lord Hugh Cecil, was more sanguine than Bland. Writing in

²⁶J. A. Cramb, The Origins and Destiny of Imperial Britain (London: J. Murray, 1915), p. 219.

²⁷H. Bland, Recent Events and Present Policies in China (London: n.p., 1912), p. 150.

the same year he suggested, "our vocation has been to undertake the government of vast uncivilised populations and to raise them to a higher level of life."²⁸ Cecil repudiated the carping of the Liberal moralizers who urged "that in foreign affairs there prevails an immoral doctrine, disregardful of the rights of other nations and inconsistent with honest dealing . . . and the normal morality of Christians."²⁹ Writing the year before in the same vein of political ideology the Liberal, L. T. Hobhouse, summed up his views in an unusually vitriolic sally:

If men say equality they mean oppression by forms of justice . . . In such an atmosphere, perhaps, our safest course, so far as principles and dedication avail at all, is to fix our eyes on the elements of the matter, and in any part of the world to support whatever method succeeds in securing the 'coloured' man from personal violence, from the lash, from expropriation . . . and from the white man himself.³⁰

Such words were a blow to those who complacently believed that in colonial administration they saw at work "British law, the most enlightened distillation of the best in the human intellect."³¹

²⁸Lord Hugh Cecil, Conservatism (London: Thorton Butterworth, 1928), p. 214.

²⁹Ibid., p. 200.

³⁰Hobhouse, Liberalism, p. 27.

³¹R. Koebner, "The Concept of Economic Imperialism," The Economic History Review, 2nd ser., Vol. II (1949), p. 15.

Hobhouse called on "principles and dedication." Cecil had larger guns at his command, and shrewdly called for support on "the normal morality of Christians." As a Tory he saw clearly how important was the dispensation of the Established Church in maintaining a religious framework for the work of "civilising" the native. Cromer regarded the Christian church in general as "an ally without whose assistance continued success [in the government of subject races] was unattainable."³² The granite rock of the Christian code was the only really necessary foundation, he felt, in dealings with such natives as "the Child-like Eastern . . ."³³ It was a belief such as this which led the War Office in 1916 and after to employ Christian missionaries in efforts to raise and manage its coolie laborers. Although these missionaries were drawn mainly from the Baptist and Presbyterian persuasions, they knew enough of the workings of the Establishment and its code to appreciate the necessity of supporting the exclusive racial attitude of their compatriots who handled the Chinese.

This is a brief outline of the system of values against which the men who handled the Chinese Labour

³²Cromer, "The Government of Subject Races," in Political and Literary Essays, 1908-1913 (New York: Books for Libraries Press, 1969), p. 9.

³³Ibid., p. 43.

Corps functioned. It represents a mixture of vague moralizings, confidence in Britain's world destiny, belief in the paramountcy of her rule of justice and law, recognition that there was a "commonsense" way of doing things, and certainty that in many ways the subject races would benefit from their albeit unwilling exposure to British cultural patterns. A colonial administrator, or one in charge of native labor, had merely to adapt this consensus "to suit the customs and intellectual standard of the subject race with which he has to deal."³⁴ For all its vagueness it seemed like a wonderfully workable formula.

And yet compounded in this ethos was a very real fear of the hordes that Britain had so providentially come to govern and exploit. The prominent French historian, E. Halévy has suggested that this fear became more tangible after the victories of Japan over China and Russia. Could these triumphs and the restlessness of Africa be regarded as the first actions in a general insurrection "of the non-European races against western domination?"³⁵ But so long as the natives subject to Britain remained amenable to the discipline under which they were kept all was well. Complacency could reign. Of all the colonialists of the

³⁴Ibid., p. 44.

³⁵Halevy, The Rule of Democracy: 1905-1914, p. 43.

pre-war era, the Englishman could survey current history "with a conscience more serene and less clouded with doubt"³⁶ than any other. But should the hordes become agitated and unstable to any great degree, or should they attempt to probe the limits of the authority set over them, more genuinely repressive measures would be necessary which might seriously compromise the satisfying moral value system of their white masters.

As the history of the Chinese Labour Corps unfolds in the following pages it will be seen how this process of reaction actually did evolve until, by 1919, only rigid and cruelly authoritarian management kept the disaffected coolies in check. Their treatment was a portent, symbol of the end of British colonial reign. Although non-colonial in origin, the Chinese experienced the full impact of the pre-war colonial-imperial ethos as it modified to meet the challenges of a new and uncertain chapter in the ruling of subject races.

It was probably the Liberals and their Radical fellow travellers who cared most what happened to the native victims of pre-war colonial oppression. It is a commentary upon the debasing and dehumanizing effects of war that this

³⁶The words are those of Aimé Césaire, the Black Martinican, in A. Césaire, Discourse on Colonialism, trans., J. Pinkham. (New York: Monthly Review Press, 1972), p. 51.

concern barely survived to 1918, and had in fact been seriously decayed long before that date. When the Chinese were used after the Armistice of 1918 in the collecting of war material for the enrichment and profit of the British government they became, according to Grey's own definition of 1906,³⁷ little more than slaves. The high moral tone the Liberals tried so hard to maintain as part of their politics collapsed in the face of the harsh realities of a new age. It was the death of security and respectability.³⁸ The events of the war were the final blow. When the war ended it was not the Liberals, but the newly coherent Labourites who were most clearly identified with the "moral tone" in politics. If the story of the raising and management of the Chinese Labour Corps shows the decline in the standards of the Liberals, it also points up the same decline in the social and military spheres of the British Establishment.

II

There are important background themes against which this study will unfold. Some of them have been touched

³⁷Supra., p. 5.

³⁸This belief has been expounded in the well-known Dangerfield thesis. See G. Dangerfield, The Strange Death of Liberal England, Capricorn Books (New York: G. P. Putnam's Sons, 1961), passim.

upon above. For example, in the procedures of British officialdom during the raising and direction of the Chinese Labour Corps it is possible to discern a recognizable, if sometimes ephemeral, feature of the psychology of the times. This feature is the accommodation sought between the legal distinctions of a given situation and the often pressing exigencies which impinge upon it and must also be given due weight and consideration. The Chinese actually furnish two examples of this theme, which cuts across party lines.

It has already been seen how, in the months before the election of 1905, the Liberal party adopted the stance of condemning the government's support for the importation of coolies into South Africa. Political exigency in the shape of campaign promises imparted a momentum which served to keep the Liberals' efforts on behalf of the coolies alive even after the former had returned to office in December. But the Liberals were legalists as well as moralists, and they quickly found upon assuming government that the pledges they had given to immediately end the exploitation of the Chinese would have to be subordinated to the juridical aspects involved.³⁹ Stated simply, it proved impossible to terminate the legally binding con-

³⁹Supra., p. 7.

tracts of the coolies, and it was not until 1910 that the last laborer left the Rand.⁴⁰

The same conflict between exigency and legality beset some of the same politicians and civil servants in the two or three years after the initiation of the Chinese labor scheme of 1916. On this latter occasion, however, the bias was more in favor of the Chinese.

Despite its ambiguous nature, a contract to indenture and protect the coolies had been drawn up and subscribed to by the Liberal government. It must be admitted that this contract offered very advantageous and economical terms to Britain, and that this was one reason for any failure to modify it, but it did contain in addition some clauses which benefited the Chinese. For example, they were to be allowed their religious holidays, opportunities for the special burial of their dead, and guaranteed repatriation. There can be no doubt that the government experienced pressures to alter this situation to the detriment of the coolies, especially as manpower needs became more crucial and every man was needed to support the Allied combat effort. In practice, as one may easily envisage, strict observation of fine legal niceties sometimes broke down under the stress of manpower shortages, the sudden reverses of war, or the indiffer-

⁴⁰Ensor, England: 1870-1914, p. 390.

ence sometimes manifested by local commanders in the field, whose primary consideration in the use of the Chinese often extended only to the completion of a given task in as little time as possible. But the important point is that the demands of the military effort, however great they occasionally became, failed to provoke any official breakdown of the complementary compromise between legality and expediency upon which it had originally been decided to base the establishment of the Chinese Labour Corps.

This is not to say that Whitehall or the politicians involved would not have bowed completely to fresh exigencies had they perhaps been great or intimidating enough. All that is trying to gain establishment here is the recognition of the existence of a certain psychology at work throughout the British dealings with the Chinese. As has already been suggested, it was a part of the ethos of the times. Statesmen called it "fair play," and hoped the Chinese themselves might someday emulate it. Others spoke of the long traditions of British justice and the wonder of their continued existence under the threat of global war. It has already been hinted that this common-sense modus vivendi between legalism and expediency was indeed close to collapse by the war's end, but this contention should not obscure the fact that in 1916 the modus

vivendi still worked and, although tenuous on occasions, worked in favor of the Chinese to prevent their complete and utter exploitation at the hands of the armies which they served in France.

Yet another important point, to which more detailed reference will be made in the body of this work, consists in the role the Chinese workers played in the overall manipulation of labor resources by the army establishment during the war. The Chinese constituted a significant element in what may be construed as a revolution in the use of labor to sustain hostile action. An attempt will be made to offer some brief analysis of this role.

Before the war and during its early stages the utilization of available labor resources was poorly planned and organized. Indeed, it is no exaggeration to suggest that no coherent plan for the use of labor existed before the outbreak of hostilities in 1914. It was always hoped by British strategists that any country in which the army fought would provide auxiliaries to do the heavy work, as was the case during the Boer War, or that colonial subjects would rally to the flag and provide the additional manpower strengths.⁴¹ Today it has

⁴¹P.R.O./W.O. 32/8303, Organisation of Colonial Troops for Imperial Service, 1902, p. 2, para. 5. (Even at this juncture though the possible future usefulness of African and other native forces as conscripted ancillaries was noted, and the optimistic belief in spontaneous colon-

grown trite to accuse the military planners of pre-1914 days of infatuation with outdated nineteenth century concepts of warfare in which the logistical elements were always underestimated. In mitigation, it must be recalled too that before 1914 three additional factors inhibited the strategists in the planning for labor resources. They expected any war to be relatively short, they feared the cost of budgeting for a labor establishment, and they had no wish to needlessly arouse German passions by providing even on paper for an army of laborers to serve in any future European war.

The advent of trench warfare swept away many inhibitions and brought to bear on hitherto inflexible minds the value, extent, and importance of modern technology, as well as the need for a unique and unanticipated reliance upon vast masses of common labor to accomplish the tasks of digging defences and communications trenches, laying railway lines, building heavy gun emplacements, handling vast quantities of ammunition, unloading mountains of provisions, and generally maintaining the status of hundreds of thousands of unusually static combat personnel.

It was into this situation that the Chinese blindly

ial aid doubted. This realism was dictated by the experiences of the South African campaigns.)

stepped. They became part of an exercise in the marshalling and exploitation of a great labor reservoir which borrowed its managerial techniques both from the early days of the so-called Industrial Revolution and from modern and supposedly advanced notions involving concepts of scientific labor direction. Later, when they were used on a profit producing basis, the Chinese came to be regarded purely as "a business proposition."⁴²

No wonder that serious differences of opinion resulted among officers responsible for the direction of the coolies. Some preferred literally to exult in the fact that before them lay tens of thousands of manual workers upon whom they could draw prodigally when any emergency demanded. This attitude proved damaging to the efficiency of the Chinese Labour Corps. Large contingents of coolies could wait impotently in base camps until needed to plug a gap in the resources of some "employer" in the forward positions.

The more progressive school of military labor managers, attempted to use logical and centralized management methods, and assigned the Chinese specific and clearly

⁴²J. Blick, "The Chinese Labour Corps in World War I," East Asia Regional Studies Seminar, Harvard, Papers on China, Vol. IX (1955), p. 122. (Miss Blick's represents the only academic attempt to date to deal with the Chinese Labour Corps. Unfortunately, the work is necessarily superficial owing to its brevity and to the unavailability of official sources at the time during which she wrote.)

outlined tasks under the aegis of one "employer." This school relied heavily on graphs and charts of performance, wished to predict and control performance, and expected a genuine return in completed work for their manpower investment. Careful experiments were designed and staged in order to determine more clearly the levels of achievement to which the coolies might attain.⁴³ These levels could be phenomenal. Not surprisingly, some officers responsible for the deployment of military labor refused "to admit that certain work could possibly be done by other than British labour."⁴⁴

It is impossible within the compass of this work to do more than hint at the outlines of the lively controversy which sprang up around the implementation of the viewpoints just described. The war was on the verge of conclusion before either side won a clear advantage, and the changing patterns of strategy had by then begun to reduce the contest to the realm of the academic. But even an ad-

⁴³P.R.O./W.O. 107/37, Labour Report, "Notes on Chinese Labour," August, 1918, para. 4. (One such experiment made use of groups of six coolies chosen at random from the Corps' strength. One of the parties excavated at the rate of 230 cubic feet of chalk and flint and about 1 foot of surface soil per man per 8 hours. It was this kind of performance that astonished the labor management officers and provoked uncomplimentary comparisons with the work of white laborers.) See Supra., Appendix "C", p. 267.

⁴⁴Ibid.

umbration of the problems suggests an addition to the history of capitalist and labor relations, compressed in this instance into a frenzy under the pressures generated by the first of modern wars, and suggests too an answer to questions of how well the Chinese were exploited. To do them credit, some socialist theorists of the day saw what repercussions the lessons learned during this period might have on the civil sphere after the war's end.⁴⁵

Another aspect of the use of Chinese labor in France upon which the following pages will touch is the potentially emotive one of the religious involvement of British missionaries, many of whom undeniably saw the contrived circumstances of the coolies' existence in France in terms of an unrivalled opportunity to proselytize for the Christian faith. Missionaries gathered from China and elsewhere received encouragement in pursuit of this goal from the military establishment in Whitehall, some even entering positions of command as officers in the Chinese Labour Corps. It was felt by the War Office that the application of religious principles would render the coolies tractable and more subservient to the conditions of military discipline which prevailed in their camps. The Foreign and Colonial Offices believed in addition

⁴⁵For example, see "Capitalism After the War," The New Statesman, February 3, 1917, p. 413.

that the religious influence exerted by missionaries would encourage a nucleus of converted Chinese to view with favor the extension of British influence in their homeland after the war. Missionaries, many working under the auspices of the Young Mens' Christian Association, were eventually permitted to conduct classes in reading and writing for the uneducated members of the Chinese Labour Corps. These efforts signified an unrivalled opportunity to put across British views of politics, society, and religion in the simplest and most effective manner. They also exhibit the natural outworking of the value system outlined in the first half of this introductory chapter.⁴⁶

III

It is appropriate to conclude with a note on the sources employed in the construction of the work as a whole, although additional comments will appear from time to time in the following text.

Recently revealed official documents, mostly from the War Office files in the Public Record Office in Lon-

⁴⁶A typical description is found in the following extract from an officially sanctioned article in The Times. "The coolie is also taught to conform to British ideas of sanitation, cleanliness and discipline . . ." "An Army of Labour," The Times, December 28, 1917, p. 8.

don, comprise the bulk of the original material used. The war diaries of units using Chinese labor were scanned to provide some hint of the actual conditions under which the Chinese worked. These official diaries vary in quality from the perfunctory one-line-a-day variety to those containing more elaborate descriptions of day-to-day events. This promising source fails to reveal as much as could be hoped about events at the company level because in 1917 some armies in the field ordered the discontinuation of such diaries in favor of those written by officers commanding at various group headquarters.

The files of the Colonial Office were also consulted, but many dispatches on the topic of Chinese labor sent out by it and the Foreign Office are found in duplicate in the War Office records, and have been cited under the latter heading as often as possible. There was at one time a Chinese Labour Corps Record Office housed in Whitehall, but this important resource has disappeared, perhaps as a result of enemy action during the last war. Copies of some of the material originally deposited in it can be found among files at the Public Record Office, however.

The Newspaper Library of the British Museum at Colindale provided examples of contemporary press comment on the Chinese Labour Corps. This source was not as forthcoming as one might have wished, for the War Office carefully

withheld information on the Corps from the press. Examples of officially approved press releases can still be found in some of the relevant War Office files. They furnish an interesting sidelight on the extent of press censorship during the war.

Because the Corps was quickly forgotten after the war, secondary material on its existence is so slight as to be negligible. Thanks are due to Mr. Rigby of the Library of the Imperial War Museum in London for suggesting avenues of approach to the problems of providing an adequate preliminary bibliography on the topic, and for sharing photographs and other memorabilia of the Corps' existence as an aid in forming a tangible impression of the actual conditions under which the Chinese worked.

Material on the missionary involvement with the Chinese is also disappointingly sparse. Much of it was not saved in the first place, or was lost during the last war. The London headquarters of the YMCA, The Baptist Missionary Society, and the Christian Missionary Society were all most helpful in attempting to find existing original material. The libraries of the TUC and the Labour Party furnished important indications of the attitudes of organized labor toward the use of the Chinese, and especial thanks are due to Mrs. Wagner of the latter institution for suggesting the use of the exchange of letters on the

issue between J. S. Middleton and H. H. Asquith which definitely, though briefly, outline labor's stand on the question. The Library of the School for Eastern Studies at the Birkbeck Institute provided essential background reading on the topic.

Some attempt was made to communicate with survivors who once directed or officered the Chinese. Through the medium of announcements in the Journal of the Royal British Legion and elsewhere some thirty-five persons were contacted, and their reminiscences solicited. But because of the very subjective nature of many of the responses gained it has proven possible to include only a few references to them in the body of the text.

CHAPTER II
THE ORIGINS AND ORGANIZATION OF THE CHINESE
LABOUR CORPS: 1916-1917

I

In an address to the House of Commons in July, 1916, Mr. Winston Churchill, then temporarily between administrative offices, raised the question of the employment of native labor.⁴⁷ He regarded the colored population of the British Empire as a vast and important reserve that would have to be tapped and employed in labor battalions if manpower strengths on the various fronts were to be maintained.

This flamboyant and typical sally of Churchill's did not meet with the approval of the War Office.⁴⁸ But it echoed authentically the growing development among the Chiefs of Staff of an opinion that the large scale conscription of non-white labor was indeed likely to become necessary if the armies in France were to be sustained. The Army Council discussed the possibility of recruiting

⁴⁷Parliamentary Debates (House of Commons), 5th ser., July 24, 1916, col. 1379. ("I would not even shrink from the word Chinese for the purpose of carrying on the War.")

⁴⁸P.R.O./W.O. 32/11345, Recruitment of Chinese Labour, Memorandum on Use of Chinese Labour, 1916. (Hereafter cited Recruitment.)

Chinese workers already in residence in small numbers in London and Liverpool, and also resolved to approach the Foreign and Colonial Offices in regard to the raising of Chinese, perhaps in Hong Kong, for work in France.⁴⁹ Here was the first concrete step in the raising of what was to become the Chinese Labour Corps.

The Army Council had been stimulated to action by the urgings of David Lloyd George, who had succeeded the drowned Earl Kitchener as Secretary for War in the same month of July, 1916. Lloyd George was a passionate and consistent advocate of the need to exploit the manpower resources of China. Three days before the Army Council meeting just referred to, he had pressed the Colonial Secretary, Bonar Law, to prepare to embark upon the securing of coolies for work in France at the earliest possible opportunity.⁵⁰ In the Secretary for War's fertile imagining it seemed as though vast coolie contingents were already on hand ready to ease the manpower burden in France. He apparently thought that men raised in Crown territory at Hong Kong would provide the cheapest, most readily available, and most accessible source of manual labor. When the Army Council accepted this latter belief

⁴⁹P.R.O./W.O. 163/21, Minutes of the Proceedings of the Army Council, 1915/1916, Precis 832, meeting of July 28, 1916.

⁵⁰P.R.O./W.O. 32/11345, Recruitment, Secretary for War to Colonial Secretary, London, July 25, 1916.

and approached Bonar Law on the matter he rather diffidently estimated in response that perhaps ten thousand Chinese might be enlisted there.⁵¹ Lloyd George, as prime mover, was disappointed at the small number. Law, on the other hand, saw possibilities in so small a scheme, and agreed readily with the suggestion of the Army Council that this potential labor force might be conveniently organized into battalions of one thousand men each, to be employed for the duration of the war.

It is apparent that Law lacked an appreciation of the extent of Lloyd George's plans for the possible uses of Chinese labor. The Secretary for War saw as many as two hundred thousand coolies at work not only in France but in England as well, and there can be no doubt that some military members of the Army Council particularly appreciated this latter aspect of Lloyd George's vision. But Law understood that any of his colonial Chinese used in England would be employed solely to ameliorate "the existing shortage of men available for agricultural and industrial work at home,"⁵² and never as substitutes for men who might be ordered to the fighting fronts. Later, when it became generally known that Law had uncritically accepted the view that Chinese might work in Britain it-

⁵¹Ibid., Army Council Memorandum, August 2, 1916.

⁵²Ibid., noted in War Office Memorandum to Commander-in-Chief, B.E.F., France, August 5, 1916.

self, he was accused along with others of originating the Chinese labor scheme specifically in order that white men working on the home front could be released for combat duties. There is no evidence to connect Law with such an outlook. He saw any coolie presence in Britain as numerically small and as purely supernumerary, and not as part of a dilution or substitution plan. He later regretted his hasty endorsement of Lloyd George's enthusiastic suggestions in regard to the use of Chinese, made as it was without any satisfactory assurances as to the planned scheme's scope or intent.⁵³

Sir Edward Grey at the Foreign Office was much more cautious about supporting Lloyd George's grand designs, even if they did emerge from the comparatively sober circle of the Army Council. He remembered the "Chinese Slavery" issue of 1905, and had joined his Liberal colleagues on that occasion in opposing Balfour's Tories. Now he was being asked to sanction a new scheme for the importation of Chinese coolies. He determined to proceed very carefully. When asked, he voiced two very immediate and pressing objections to the scheme as it appeared to him to be emerging from the Army Council and the Colonial Office.

What, Grey wanted to know, would be the impact upon

⁵³P.R.O./C.O. /Colonial Office/ 521/33, Correspondence on the Chinese Labour Scheme, Memorandum of A. Bonar Law, 1918.

public opinion and morale if it became known that the government intended to repeat the fundamentals of the South African experiment? Surely the indictment that was likely to follow any such revelation would be given additional momentum by the fact that it was proposed to gather coolies from Hong Kong, whose warm blooded southern natives were likely to collapse under any prolonged subjection to the rigors of a French winter campaign. With these practical and sensible cautions Grey also coupled a plea for the greatest circumspection in case the suspicions of the press were aroused, and the whole tentative project be jeopardized by sensationalist speculation.⁵⁴ Obviously he believed that the nation's moral value system would not support the blatant exploitation of natives even under the stresses of war.

Grey at this juncture enjoyed his own trusted source of information in China in the form of Colonel D. S. Robertson, a senior military attaché in the Peking legation. Robertson's reports, although generally addressed formally to the Director of Military Intelligence in Whitehall,⁵⁵

⁵⁴P.R.O./F.O. /Foreign Office/ 17/7273, Correspondence, 1916, Grey, Foreign Office, to Under Secretary of State, Colonial Office, London, September 11, 1916.

⁵⁵Robertson correctly addressed all his communications to the Director of Military Intelligence, but he tacitly understood that most of them would be read and digested by his friend, Captain Denny, of M.I. 3. Citations of Robertson's official correspondence which follow will be headed D.M.I.

often contained material compiled especially for the eyes of Grey. Robertson had himself long been an advocate of the use of Chinese manpower resources in some form by the British armies in France. By coincidence, he had forwarded Grey one of his special reports touching upon this particular topic, and it arrived on the Foreign Secretary's desk during the very week of the Army Council conference which sanctioned the first formal moves toward the setting up of the Chinese Labour Corps. Incidentally, this particular communique later enabled Sir John Jordan, the British minister in Peking, to claim that the idea for the Chinese Labour Corps actually originated within the confines of his own legation.⁵⁶

The Robertson report to Grey is worth examining in some detail, for it proves that Grey was aware of military thinking on the question of the use of Chinese manpower resources and also of the full utilization to which those resources might be put. Robertson's recommendations on this occasion were outspoken. Chinese should be used in British factories to release men for the colors, said Robertson, explicitly enjoining that Chinese labor reserves, once opted for, be ruthlessly exploited by the

⁵⁶P.R.O./W.O. 106/33, C.L.C. History, "Report on China: no. 31, 'x,' Chinese Labour Corps," Sir John Jordan, Peking, January 20, 1920.

Imperial government. The military members of the Army Council would be in full accord with this, he added. But Robertson was aware, too, of the trouble which might arise were British trade unions to learn of the extent of the planned uses he foresaw for coolies. The French, he observed, had already experienced problems in this direction when embarking upon a similar scheme to employ Chinese in early 1916, only they had forged ahead regardless. Somehow, not only for factories at home and trench digging in France, but so that Britain's prestige and influence could be sustained in the Far East after the war, "this inexhaustible supply of human material"⁵⁷ in China had to be exploited. If Britain did this, claimed Robertson arrogantly, she could legitimately "claim a share in the policy of China, should this require to be done under foreign supervision /after the war/."⁵⁸ It is not clear what Robertson was suggesting here, but clearly he felt that the use of Chinese by Britain would in some way help to extend her influence in Chinese politics at some later date.

⁵⁷P.R.O./W.O. 106/35, Proposed Employment of Chinese, "Memorandum on the Employment of Chinese for War," Robertson, Peking, to D.M.I., London, July 23, 1916. (The memorandum was copied and forwarded under a covering note from Jordan to Grey by D.M.I. on July 25.) (This file will hereafter be cited Employment.)

⁵⁸Ibid.

Robertson also impressed upon Grey the economy of using coolies for the heaviest labor. The Russians, he noted, already used large numbers of them in their Don and Ural mines, and for a fraction of the cost of their own indigenous labor. But, went on the attaché, "In England we should without doubt meet . . . difficulties from our Labour Party . . . though of course use of Chinese would release for combatant work a number of able-bodied miners, transport workers, etc."⁵⁹ In conclusion, Robertson saw no objection to the use of Chinese as fighting troops. Why not engage them ostensibly for non-combatant purposes and afterward enlist them voluntarily for combatant work at increased pay, he mused.

What effect this memorandum had upon Grey is not known. Certainly it must have caused him to reflect that the initiatives of Lloyd George and the Army Council were steering the government perilously close to parallels with earlier and discredited schemes for the indenture of native labor. Perhaps he felt that the resolution of the matter lay out of his hands once having been declared militarily sound by the Army Council, but his close attention to the scheme as it developed and his occasional cautions would seem to indicate that he maintained serious reservations concerning it.

⁵⁹Ibid.

The Army Council, having sounded out both the Colonial and Foreign Offices, was eager to move ahead with the implementation of the coolies' collection and exploitation. At first it authorized the War Office to explore fully the possibilities of raising the necessary natives in Hong Kong, thus ignoring Grey's concerns on the unsuitability of the colony's coolies. Robertson in Peking was surprised that the Army Council had chosen Hong Kong, for he too believed that its inhabitants would never stand the pace of a winter in France. Later he remarked that,

The first impression gained was that the Government and the Army Council for political reasons were fighting shy of reviving anything in the shape of the South African indentured coolie Convention and therefore had asked the Hong Kong Government to arrange the matter quietly.⁶⁰

It seems more likely that the endorsement of Hong Kong as a recruiting ground was made because of Bonar Law's enthusiastic espousal of the idea. He saw in it a means of keeping control of the scheme under his own department, besides which the vision of colonial natives rallying to the flag in time of Imperial distress appealed to his views on the solidarity of Empire.

Law clung tenaciously to the Hong Kong proposal even

⁶⁰P.R.O./W.O. 106/33, C.L.C. History, Robertson, Peking, to D.M.I., London, September 19, 1916.

after its feasibility had long been rejected by the War Office and the Army Council. As late as November 21, 1916, Law was in contact with the Governor of Hong Kong, May, asking him if it were still possible to raise a separate contingent of coolies there.⁶¹ So annoying had Law's continued interference become by then that the Army Council itself responded by asking the Colonial Office to desist finally from any further prosecution of a plan to raise men in Hong Kong. Law, who had also been attracted to the lower pay scales obtained for Hong Kong coolies,⁶² was obliged to submit. He saw, too, that the Colony could never have supplied the huge numbers of men that Lloyd George had in mind. Law's independent line on the matter offers an interesting glimpse of the stubborn nature of his character and of his refusal to cooperate with his Liberal colleagues in the Coalition. Sir Edward Grey, in harmony with his earlier cautions, had already made perfectly clear his repudiation of Law's preoccupation with Hong Kong as a labor recruiting ground.⁶³

It had not taken the Army Council long to abandon

⁶¹P.R.O./W.O. 32/11345, Recruitment, Law, London, to Sir H. May, Hong Kong, November 21, 1916.

⁶²P.R.O./C.O. 521/32, Wei-hai-Wei Correspondence, Bonar Law, London, to Commissioner, Wei-hai-Wei, September 30, 1916.

⁶³P.R.O./W.O. 32/11345, Recruitment, Grey, London, to Jordan, Peking, September 30, 1916.

the Hong Kong project. On August 14, 1916, it informed Aristide Briand, President of the French Republic, of the British Army's intention to employ large numbers of Chinese in France.⁶⁴ Briand apparently saw no objection. Two days later a conference at the War Office discussed the merits of Hong Kong as a recruiting ground and came to the decision that it was inappropriate to seek workers there. Lloyd George and Mr. Asquith were informed.⁶⁵ Asquith had been one of the most outspoken Liberal opponents of what he called "Chinese Slavery" during the campaign against the Tories twelve years earlier.⁶⁶ It is both ironic and saddening that he should now have been involved in the process of approving a similar and much more extensive employment of Chinese laborers. His inability to contribute any substantial comment on what he had once regarded as grossly reprehensible behavior indicates both the subsidence in the Liberals' moral value system and the erosion of his own hold on government. He

⁶⁴Ibid., War Office Memorandum, August 14, 1916. (The French were already employing substantial numbers of Chinese coolies in France and in their North African possessions. The British and French schemes remained entirely autonomous, however.)

⁶⁵Ibid., War Office Memorandum, August 17, 1916.

⁶⁶H. H. Asquith, The Chinese Labour Question: Speech in the House of Commons, March 21, 1904, in Support of the Vote of Censure (London: Liberal Publications Dept., 1904), passim.

was content to let Lloyd George handle the situation in conjunction with the military establishment.

By the early days of September, 1916, the Army Council was quite sure that it should press ahead with plans to recruit coolies from the northern Chinese province of Shantung. These men were tougher by far than their Hong Kong brothers, and used to a colder climate. The Council had been under considerable pressure from the Commander-in-Chief, Sir Douglas Haig, to produce additional laborers for use in France. Having given pledges of assistance to its importunate C.-in-C.,⁶⁷ it had no option but to move as quickly as possible to produce some of the desired men. The War Office was instructed to send a representative out to the Far East to superintend the early stages of a massive labor recruitment effort.

But so hasty an action was frowned upon by Sir John Jordan, British minister in Peking, who insisted to his London superiors that the War Office be restrained until the full political and diplomatic ramifications of the plan to raise coolies had been thoroughly explored by him and his professional advisors on the spot.⁶⁸ Jordan's

⁶⁷P.R.O./W.O. 32/5094, Substitution of Coloured for White Personnel in France, C.-in-C., B.E.F., France, to Army Council, London, September 1, 1916. (Hereafter cited Substitution.)

⁶⁸Jordan referred to his irritation at this time during the course of a later complaint on the continued blateness of War Office tactics in China. See P.R.O./W.O.

London colleagues at the Foreign Office agreed with his call for restraint. These professional civil servants often had resented the virtual autonomy enjoyed by the war establishment, especially in time of crisis. Now they were determined to see the War Office consult with them if the coolie scheme were to succeed. Chinese recruitment direct from China was bound to provoke the fullest attentions of the government in Peking, and to require the mediatory powers of the Foreign Office experts both in London and in China. It is no exaggeration to suggest that this inter-departmental rivalry, evident in the sources examined, considerably delayed the eventual materialization of the Chinese Labour Corps in the European theater of operations.

A compromise was eventually agreed upon which satisfied both sides. The Chinese government was nominally neutral. It was also unstable. It was clear that any compromise would have to bear these two factors in mind and must be drawn up so as to allow control of the situation to reside in British hands while at the same time preserving the face of the Chinese. A line somewhere between obvious exigency and strict legality must be arrived at. To facilitate this, close cooperation between the Foreign and War Offices was an obvious necessity.

32/11345, Recruitment, Jordan, Peking, to Foreign Office, London, November 12, 1916.

It was the Colonial Office that broke the deadlock. Within its confines arose the suggestion that the desired number of coolies be raised in Chinese territory by means of contracts with independent recruiting companies, and then directed⁶⁹ to Wei-hai-Wei, a small Crown enclave at the northeastern end of the Shantung peninsula. This suggestion effectively brought Bonar Law back into the picture, for the Colonial Office was responsible for the administration of Wei-hai-Wei through its commissioner there, Lockhart.

As it transpired, Wei-hai-Wei was indeed to offer the perfect compromise solution to the problem of securing the Chinese laborers. To understand why, it is necessary to spend a moment in reviewing the enclave's origins and status. In area, Wei-hai-Wei measured approximately two hundred and eighty-eight square miles, with Port Edward as its administrative center. Infinitesimal in terms of economic as well as geographical scope, the dependency had received a small annual grant from the Exchequer since its acquisition by the Crown, which saw the possession as a useful counter for Russia's seizure of Port Arthur in 1895. The circumstances of its acquisition are thus fairly clear. Grey always believed that China had given

⁶⁹"Allowing them to find their way" was the cautious official phrasing eventually employed.

Wei-hai-Wei "willingly,"⁷⁰ and he always regarded it as a legitimate possession. But the situation regarding the enclave's actual status is not so easy to determine. The original lease under which Britain took possession was dated July 1, 1898. The official documents are silent on the territory until early 1901, when the enclave was in the hands of one Major-General Donwarde. He was virtually self-appointed, his courts were dispensers of a rigorous variety of colonial justice, and their proclamations were adhered to "as if they had the force of law."⁷¹

When the Colonial Office examined Wei-hai-Wei's status in 1916 it found itself unable to clarify the actual legal situation obtaining there. The original lease was ambiguous. The administration of the enclave had apparently never been legitimized by Orders in Council. The succeeding Commissioners had functioned almost independently, and had long since arrived at an agreement with the Chinese in neighboring Shantung province concerning the practical direction of the enclave's day to day affairs and its relations with the Chinese government. There was no mandate to govern. Neither was Wei-hai-Wei a colony. Few if any tangible payments had been made China for its

⁷⁰E. Grey, Twenty-five Years: 1892-1916 (London: Hodder & Stoughton, 1925), Vol. II, p. 24.

⁷¹P.R.O./C.O. 521/32, Wei-hai-Wei Correspondence, Memorandum on History, 1916.

possession. In late 1916, when it suddenly became the unwonted cynosure of the combined staffs of the Colonial, Foreign and War Offices, Wei-hai-Wei owed the only allegiance it knew directly to Commissioner Lockhart, an autocratic governor of the old school.⁷²

These ambiguities suited London perfectly. They could be fallen back upon by the Chinese in explaining British actions there in regard to the assembling of coolies for shipment to France. At Wei-hai-Wei, too, the coolies could sign or affirm their contracts on soil that was de facto British; an important point for the legalists in Whitehall. The Germans would be irritated, no doubt, but impotent in the face of China's "inability" to stop Britain doing what she wanted on her own soil. Britain, on the other hand, could claim that Wei-hai-Wei fell outside formal regulations governing most Crown colonies or possessions contiguous to neutral states. In additional bonus the War Office found that Wei-hai-Wei's port facilities would allow the operation of large transport ships.

And so this compromise was offered the Peking government, along with strong hints of a possible remission

⁷²"Notes on Chinese at Wei-hai-Wei," The Empire at War (London: Oxford University Press, 1926), V, C. Lucas, ed., pp. 45-46. See too P.R.O./W.O. 32/8244 and P.R.O./W.O. 32/8245, Military Intelligence Reports, China. (The territory was handed back to China in 1931.)

of, or moratorium on, the British share of the outstanding Boxer Indemnity, should a reasonable amount of co-operation be forthcoming.⁷³ Although still greatly afraid of German retaliation,⁷⁴ the Chinese administration could not resist such inducements. If it failed to lend an active hand in the working out of the Weihai-Wei compromise, it at least did nothing to hinder it. Indeed, it is doubtful whether the Chinese were strong enough to have opposed British designs had they wished to.

Shantung province itself presented problems to the implementation of London's plans. It had never been an easy area for the Chinese to control, although geographically close to Peking. In 1895, Germany insisted upon the virtual cession of the province in compensation for the murder of one of her missionaries, and German presence there remained strong until China's belated adherence to the Entente in August, 1918. Rebel Chinese warlords daily increased the civil unrest in the province, and the Japanese eyed it greedily as a potential sphere of influence.

⁷³P.R.O./W.O. 106/33, C.L.C. History, Alston, Peking, to D.M.I., London, September 1, 1917. (The reference is to events of 1916.)

⁷⁴Ibid., Jordan, Peking, to D.M.I., London, January 18, 1918. (Here Jordan revealed that one reason for Chinese diffidence had been fear of reprisals against one hundred Chinese students interned in Germany and Austria as "hostages" for her good behavior.)

If anything, the Chinese government in Peking seemed to have regarded the British efforts to raise men there as a possible release valve for some of the pressures generated by rural poverty, hunger, and disaffection; a view that they held earlier when negotiating with the Russians for a supply of coolies.⁷⁵

And so it was to Shantung that Britain now resorted as the major source of manpower for her so called "Raw Importation"⁷⁶ of laborers. With the manifest ineffectiveness of the central government in controlling the course of events in the province, it rested with local Chinese officials to approve the moves Britain intended to make. Bribery of these men was readily sanctioned by the British legation in Peking, and resorted to freely, the funds coming from the legation's military intelligence budget.⁷⁷

The War Office was happy to accept the Wei-hai-Wei expedient, and the major threads of the immediate situa-

⁷⁵P.R.O./C.O. 873/482, Memoranda of Wei-hei-Wei Commissioner, Lockhart, Wei-hai-Wei, to Colonial Office, London, September /?/, 1916. (Lockhart reveals the Russians hoped to use Wei-hai-Wei.)

⁷⁶This phrase occurs frequently in the documents, hence its employment in the title of this work.

⁷⁷P.R.O./W.O. 106/33, C.L.C. History, Robertson, Peking, to D.M.I., London, October 30, 1916. (Robertson lamented the extra cost this would involve Ibid., Robertson, Peking, to D.M.I., London, December 16, 1916.)

tion passed for a time more decisively into the hands of the Foreign and Colonial Offices. Grey thought the plan a splendid one. He proposed a procedure for recruitment:

The procedure proposed is that local recruiting agents who would be Chinese should endeavour in Chinese territory to get Coolies: large numbers to go to Wei-hei-Wei where they would be regularly recruited as though they were ordinary inhabitants of that district, in order that battalions may be externally /sic/ British . . . there would seem to be no reason why Chinese Government should be 'officially' cognisant . . .⁷⁸

Grey particularly hoped to avoid the kind of formal agreement or convention that had proved so damaging to his political opponents in 1904, when the South African coolie scandal broke. Since he himself was now involved in a parallel undertaking, he urged Jordan at whatever cost to come to "a private understanding"⁷⁹ with the Chinese authorities if it looked as though they were likely to demand guarantees in regard to the recruited coolies.

But what actual processes should be adopted for recruitment? Grey's advice was vague in relation to the realities involved, for it was one thing to recommend the use of "Local recruiting agents who would be Chinese," another to find such persons in the middle of the turmoil and confusion of Shantung province. Before London could grapple with this issue a more important one arose that

⁷⁸P.R.O./W.O. 32/11345, Recruitment, Sir Edward Grey, London, to Jordan, Peking, September 30, 1916.

⁷⁹Ibid.

would have to be settled even before the raising of the coolies actually began.

The legal experts at the War Office had come up with serious doubts about whether or not coolies could be "recruited" by the British Army. For them the right choice of word involved far more than a mere semantic issue. They saw the expediency of the Wei-hai-Wei compromise, but they also had to think in strictly legal terms as well, and would be responsible for the result long after the emergencies of war had ceased to exist and the reputation of British justice was standing on its own once again. The War Office was advised that "enrollment" rather than recruitment was the best term under which to determine the coolies' legal status. Recruitment would imply enlistment, and enlistment in turn implied the government's formal and lasting responsibility in terms of pensions, gratuities, and benefits. There was a possibility that Section 95 of The Army Act, which provided for certain classes of camp follower, could be revised to cover the coolies, but this too would have involved the government in distinct liabilities for the coolies' maintenance and welfare after demobilization. All of this was most undesirable so far as Whitehall in general was concerned.⁸⁰

⁸⁰P.R.O./W.O. 106/33, C.L.C. History, Memorandum on the Legal Status of Chinese Labour, 1916.

What the legal experts really wanted was some form of convention with China that would release Britain from liability. This was undesirable, too, because if any agreement became public it would call forth unpleasant comparisons with former coolie schemes, perhaps even the South African affair. Under such circumstances it was reasonably certain that the Chinese government would demand sizeable tangible benefits in return for jeopardizing its "neutrality." Besides, Robertson doubted that any form of agreement could ever "be twisted to apply" to the essentials of the Wei-hai-Wei compromise.⁸¹

In Peking Sir John Jordan too had addressed himself to the problem. Jordan was a product in part of the ethos that was described during the first chapter of this work. He was desperately eager that the good name of Britain be preserved in her dealings with the Chinese. He knew it was necessary to stoop to bribery to win Chinese support, but this he rationalized by reflecting that it was a time honored custom in the East. The concept under which the coolies were to be raised was different. It must be as just, fair, and as legally defensible as the situation permitted. He recommended enrollment as the best all around solution, and as the one most likely to uphold the

⁸¹Ibid., Robertson, Peking, to D.M.I., London, September 19, 1916.

neutrality of the Peking government.⁸²

What emerged from Whitehall as a result of these considerations was a piece of casuistry pure and simple under which coolies were recruited in Shantung and "enrolled" at Wei-hai-Wei. As a result, the Chinese laborers stood in something of a legal hiatus, and had no defensible or strictly logical relationship to their ultimate employers in Europe. Happily for London, this legal fiction was never construed in a court of law. It serves, however, to emphasize the insubstantial nature of the ground on which expediency, legality, and moral values met over the composition of the Chinese Labour Corps. The coolies were to remain de jure aliens, but were completely at the disposal of the British with little hope of any recourse to their own government.⁸³

Having cleared this issue from its path, the War Office was most eager to get on with the actual process of raising and enrolling the men it had promised Haig for use in France. The weeks were passing, and little of a constructive nature seemed to have been accomplished.

⁸²P.R.O./W.O. 32/11345, Recruitment, Jordan, Peking, to War Office, London, September 26, 1916.

⁸³Chinese legation officials in London were supposed to watch over Chinese Labour Corps workers. See H. F. MacNair, "The Chinese as Contract Labourers," China Weekly Review, Vol. XXV, June 2, 1923, p. 4.

Satisfying all the parties concerned was proving harder than anyone had anticipated when the Army Council made its initial move back in July. In fact, though, the War Office had not allowed discussion to hold it back, and had already set the wheels in motion through its attachés, Robertson and Alston, in Peking, who had been instructed to see what private firms would offer the most suitable terms for the raising of coolies in Shantung province.

Apparently Jordan, who was always nervous concerning the actions of the military attachés in case they offended the Chinese government's sense of neutrality,⁸⁴ did see eye to eye with Colonel Robertson when it came to selecting these contractors. Why not let "local British firms . . . who have had experience of recruiting for South Africa"⁸⁵ be used, opined Jordan. A day or two later Robertson, who had reluctantly agreed on the necessity of maintaining a low military profile during these delicate negotiations, wrote to Military Intelligence in London, "we are now collecting as many of the recruiting agents who worked in the South African scheme as possible."⁸⁶

⁸⁴P.R.O./W.O. 32/11345, Recruitment, Jordan, Peking, to Sir Edward Grey, London, October 2, 1916.

⁸⁵Ibid.

⁸⁶P.R.O./W.O. 106/33, C.L.C. History, Robertson, Peking, to D.M.I., London, October 10, 1916.

London agreed that the cost of these efforts to raise men, when underway, should be borne in London, the Exchequer paying direct to designated agents like Forbes and Company, of Canon Street.

Recruitment, then, was to be handled by British contractors in China, who would raise coolies and then direct them to Wei-hai-Wei by means as clandestine as possible. Agents in the employ of the British legation in Peking would supervise this enterprise, and the Chinese government would, it was confidently hoped, continue to turn a blind eye.

Grey remained very closely identified with this progress. He had in his hands clear recommendations from Jordan and Robertson which spoke of methods very similar to those which he and his colleagues in the Liberal Party had outspokenly condemned a decade earlier. Even closer parallels with that earlier situation existed, as Grey soon learned. He discovered, for example, that the barracks at Wei-hai-Wei in which it was planned to assemble the laborers while they awaited transportation to France where none other than the buildings employed for a similar purpose during the South African emigration.⁸⁷

⁸⁷P.R.O./C.O. 521/32, Wei-hai-Wei Correspondence, Commissioner, Wei-hai-Wei, to Colonial Secretary, London, October 10, 1916.

Fortunately for the already tarnished reputation of what has been called Grey's "puzzled rectitude,"⁸⁸ it was Bonar Law who handled the barracks issue. The Colonial Secretary agreed to approach the Witwatersrand Native Labour Association of Johannesburg, premier importer of Chinese in 1903 and after,⁸⁹ to ascertain whether these buildings in Wei-hai-Wei which belonged to it could be rented or borrowed by His Britannic Majesty's Government for the duration of the war.⁹⁰ The government of the Union of South Africa kindly responded to Law's queries by suggesting that Britain make full and free use of the somewhat dilapidated Wei-hai-Wei installation for the remainder of hostilities.⁹¹

No wonder that in Robertson's estimation the advice of the Peking legation's Chinese Secretary, Barton, might

⁸⁸A.J.P. Taylor, English History: 1914-1945 (Harmondsworth: Penguin Books, 1970), p. 459.

⁸⁹A. Bailey, Speeches on the Chinese Question (Cape Town: Cape Times Ltd., 1904), p. 5.

⁹⁰P.R.O./W.O. 32/ 11345, Recruitment, Under-Secretary of State for the Colonies, London, to Commissioner, Wei-hai-Wei, October 11, 1916.

⁹¹P.R.O./F.O. 25/0933, Correspondence, 1916, Buxton, for Government of Union of South Africa, to Colonial Secretary, London, October 26, 1916. (The cost of repairing the barracks was lower than anticipated - 2,563 Mexican dollars at ten to the pound. See P.R.O./C.O. 843/488, Wei-hai-Wei Memoranda, Commissioner, Wei-hai-Wei, to Colonial Office, London, October 27, 1916.)

just as well be followed and the whole machinery for the immigration handled "something like the Coolies in the Rand."⁹² Indeed, Robertson reported to London that one Mr. Jameson, who actually directed the Chinese camps on the Rand after 1903,⁹³ had been considered by the legation's military staff, to which he had returned as an advisor, as potential organizer of this new effort to raise native labor. Grey may have been relieved to find that Robertson doubted very much whether this unhappy reminder of the South African experiment would be satisfactory under the conditions of restraint involved in 1916, for Jameson displayed a violent temperament, and was generally considered "very difficile."⁹⁴

It was also proposed in China that the ships used for transporting the Chinese to France be modified in exactly the same way as for the South African arrangement.⁹⁵ And to further underline the similarity between

⁹²P.R.O./W.O. 106/33, C.L.C. History, Robertson, Peking, to D.M.I., London, October 17, 1916.

⁹³It was Sydney Buxton who at the time said the position of the Chinese in these camps was a moral question of the highest significance. See Parliamentary Debates (House of Commons), 4th ser., February 16, 1904, col. 1555.

⁹⁴P.R.O./W.O. 106/33, C.L.C. History, Robertson, Peking, to D.M.I., London, October 30, 1916.

⁹⁵P.R.O./W.O. 32/11345, Recruitment, Jordan, Peking, to Foreign Office, London, October 28, 1916.

the schemes of 1903-1904 and 1916, one sees that even the sum asked for each coolie by the local recruiting syndicates in China stood at one pound seventeen shillings and sixpence; the same amount paid them by the Rand importers.⁹⁶

II

By the end of October, 1916, the War Office had settled on someone to represent it at Wei-hai-Wei, and to take full responsibility for coordinating the enrollment and shipment of the coolies. This individual was T. J. Bourne, former Engineer in Chief of the Pukou-Sin Yang Railway in China, who now owed his allegiance directly to the Directorate General of Military Railways, presided over by Sir Eric Geddes. In deference to the Foreign and Colonial Offices, and in order to be brought up to date by Robertson, Bourne was ordered by the War Office to go first to Peking. He was specifically instructed to leave in the hands of Jordan and his legation the delicate diplomatic situation which existed outside Wei-hai-Wei itself.⁹⁷ The conciliatory attitude adopted by the War Office in

⁹⁶Ibid., Jordan, Peking, to Foreign Office, London, October 22, 1916.

⁹⁷Ibid., War Office Memorandum, October 6, 1916. (Bourne left London post haste on October 9.)

choosing Bourne, a civilian, and in sending him to Peking to consult, indicates that a degree of working cooperation and accommodation had at last been arrived between it and the other parties interested in the prompt formation of the Chinese Labour Corps.

After his visit to Jordan and Robertson in Peking, Bourne set about consolidating the agreements these two had been making with firms of local British contractors operating mainly in the province of Shantung, but also with interests in Chihli and elsewhere. More agents in the pay of the British legation also materialized in Shantung to help maintain the subterranean and delicate balance between the labor contractors and local Chinese civil servants. Bourne settled in at Wei-hai-Wei to await the expected influx of coolies. Bonar Law had already cabled from London to remind Commissioner Lockhart once again that the men who would soon be raised from the farms and villages of the Chinese countryside were to be filtered quietly and unobtrusively into the enclave, "in the name of the Government of that Territory."⁹⁸

Bourne soon encountered frustrations. For one thing, it proved hard for London to agree on what form the con-

⁹⁸P.R.O./C.O. 521/32, Wei-hai-Wei Correspondence, Colonial Secretary, London, to Commissioner, Wei-hai-Wei, October 6, 1916.

tract under which the coolies were to enroll should take. Whitehall was most anxious that the contract not commit the British government to any long standing liability in relation to the coolies. Repatriation would be guaranteed, but after this responsibility must cease. The Army Council had before it copies of the old South African contract and was aware too of the contents of contracts used by the French in their Chinese labor scheme. The text of the so called South African Labour Ordinance bears some resemblances to the British contract of 1916, especially on matters of transport, hygiene, and segregation, but it was a much more lengthy and complicated document, and was not intended to be read or even understood by the coolies, who merely affirmed that they accepted its contents.⁹⁹

The Army Council was agreed with the rest of Whitehall that the British contract should be simple in form even if deliberately vague in phrasing. The Peking legation also gave a hand in the composition of the contract.¹⁰⁰ But the discussions and draftings took time, and Bourne con-

⁹⁹Chinese Labour Ordinance, as Amended in Committee, and Submitted to the Legislative Council of the Transvaal by the Attorney General (London: New Reform Club, n.d.), passim. (The Council got a copy of the latest French contract from Robertson, who remarked that it was "usefully vague on purpose" and might be worth some emulation. See P.R.O./W.O. 106/33, C.L.C. History, Robertson, Peking, to D.M.I., London, October 30, 1916.)

¹⁰⁰Ibid., Alston, Peking, to D.M.I., London, November 24, 1916.

tinued to fret in Wei-hai-Wei, aware as he was of the War Office's impatience to get the scheme under weigh. After the war it was frankly admitted by the History of War Committee that the framing of the contract had been a major cause of delay, and also of "a certain amount of misunderstanding and difficulty,"¹⁰¹ not to say variations of interpretation.

It was to be the end of the year before Bourne had in his hands the final contract which the coolies were actually to sign and take with them to France. He himself marvelled at the composition of the document, with its clever ambiguities and occasional deliberate duplicities,¹⁰² and appreciated that it represented a clever *modus vivendi* between the desire of the legalists to have a specific document under which to enroll the coolies and protect the British government, and the exigencies of war which made it desirable to get the Chinese to France

¹⁰¹Ibid., A History of War Committee Report, June 5, 1919, "Formation of Labour Corps." ("It gave us power to hold them for a long period with the option of getting rid of them in a moderately short time.")

¹⁰²Unfortunately, no final draft of the contract seems to be extant, although a number of tentative drafts and suggestions exist in the relevant War Office files. Examples of the ambiguities and deliberate duplicities referred to above may be found in the following citations. Others will be discussed in specific detail in a later chapter. See P.R.O./W.O. 106/33, C.L.C. History, Alston, Peking, to D.M.I., London, December 3, 1916, and P.R.O./W.O. 32/11345, Recruitment, Jordan, Peking, to Foreign Office, London, October 13, 1916.

without delay. He saw clearly how it was designed too to protect the post-war reputations of those who had always maintained that British fair play and justice were the cornerstones of Britain's mandate to rule the subject races.

After having been forced to admit the temporary suspension of his activities due to difficulties with local officials in Shantung, Bourne was at last able to report on December 3, 1916, that one hundred coolies had actually enrolled at Wei-hai-Wei preparatory to shipment to France. Many more laborers had arrived within the confines of the tiny enclave.¹⁰³ One reason for the hesitation of the coolies to enroll appeared to be the Chinese government's non-involvement policy, which apparently fostered a climate of doubt, suspicion, and uncertainty among some of the imaginative coolies, who feared sanctions or recriminations as a result of their defection to Wei-hai-Wei. But this belief, which existed only in the minds of the laborers, was easily dispelled once the willing support of local Chinese bureaucrats in Shantung

¹⁰³P.R.O./W.O. 106/33, C.L.C. History, Alston, Peking, to D.M.I., London, February 19, 1917. (The contents of this dispatch reveal that initial policy was "to rush as many coolies as possible" into Wei-hai-Wei in order to take the Chinese authorities by surprise, thus causing them to realize that any belated obstruction inspired by the Germans was futile.)

had been bought.¹⁰⁴

Bourne soon discovered more substantial reasons for the coolies' hesitations. He took into account the civil turmoil which racked the northern provinces, and realized that it contributed to the confused and rootless state of some of the men who arrived in quasi-secrecy, having been propelled across the border by the contractors' agents. But he learned too of the appearance of French recruiters in Shantung around Christmas, 1917. The French syndicates had no intention of abiding by the British pay scales and contract terms which Bourne had laboriously established, and they further claimed to be empowered to raise all the laborers needed for the Allied war effort. An unseemly wrangle ensued as the prices of flesh as a commodity were discussed,¹⁰⁵ but the damage to the coolies' confidence had already been done.

The French provided yet another frustration for Bourne in the form of a sudden territorial claim in Tientsin to land considered due to them as compensation for the Boxer uprising of a decade earlier. Why they

¹⁰⁴P.R.O./W.O. 32/11345, Recruitment, /unsigned/
Memorandum from Wei-hai-Wei, to War Office, London, December /?/. 1916.

¹⁰⁵P.R.O./W.O. 106/33, C.L.C. History, Alston, Pe-
king, to D.M.I., London, February 22, 1917. (The French effort collapsed. See P.R.O./W.O. 083/5022, China Reports, 1917.)

unaccountably chose late 1916 and early 1917 as the time in which to assert this belated claim is not clear, but the action provoked a political and diplomatic storm whose impact Bourne felt as he struggled to respect Chinese government policies and to enroll the disturbed and sometimes resentful coolies. It was at this juncture that he even countenanced some sub rosa efforts to win laborers from Chilhi province, as was later admitted.¹⁰⁶

Fighting the French for coolie labor was an occupational hazard, admitted Bourne, but having to fight his fellow countrymen as well should not have been necessary. Since late 1916 a campaign had been on foot to recruit coolies for the British campaign in Mesopotamia. It was carried on by the garrison command at Singapore on behalf of the Indian Army and its headquarters at Simla. For many years the Indian branch of the service had enjoyed a special freedom to design and conduct its own campaigns. It regarded the Mesopotamian business as its own especial preserve. It needed a few hundred coolie laborers and so resolved to get them from Shantung, where, it learned, the coolies were supposed to be tougher and more resilient than their southern brothers. Ignoring the possibility of compromising the official London-directed

¹⁰⁶P.R.O./W.O. 106/33, C.L.C. History, Robertson, Peking, to D.M.I., London, October 2, 1917.

scheme,¹⁰⁷ or of embarrassing Bourne, Singapore sent its agents to Shantung to raise the needed men. The efforts of these agents were blatant beyond belief, and soon threatened what little goodwill Bourne enjoyed in the province. The support of the local Chinese functionaries, always a frail foundation upon which to base reliance, was strained by the arbitrariness of these men. The fickle trust of the coolies faltered, veering instead in the direction of believing the propaganda offered them by the Germans to the effect that their destination was bound to be a combat zone somewhere on a front line exposed to the murderous fire of Krupp cannon.

It is certain that both Singapore and Simla enjoyed some support for their operation within the confines of the War Office in London, otherwise they could not have persisted for as long as they did to the undeniable detriment of Bourne's work. At last the War Office officially demanded Simla's reconsideration of its labor policy. But it was not abandoned even then, and continued to afford reason for complaint for as long as the Mesopotamian Campaign remained the exclusive sphere of influence of the Indian Army, which always refused to acknowledge the seriousness of London's representations on the question.¹⁰⁸

¹⁰⁷Ibid., Alston, Peking, to D.M.I., London, November 18, 1916.

¹⁰⁸P.R.O./W.O. 32/11345, Recruitment, G.O.C., Singa-

From the involvement with the Singapore and Simla issue Bourne learned something of the effectiveness of the German propaganda barrage he was up against. The German legation, under von Hintz, guessed the planned extent if not the exact purpose of the events taking place in and around Wei-hai-Wei. The lurid broad-sheets that had frightened the Mesopotamia-bound coolies appeared in ever-increasing numbers, and promised any coolie who sold himself to the British a life cut short by German shells. The compass of the German effort can be gauged when it is recalled that the German consulate in Shanghai disposed of a budget of six thousand pounds a day, derived from the Boxer Indemnity, for use solely in espionage and related subversive activities. In early 1917 the War Office in London had good reason to suspect that the bulk of this sum was being spent in opposing the Wei-hai-Wei compromise.¹⁰⁹

Bourne had no idea of how to cope with this type of opposition. He wrote to London for advice. But Colonel

pore, to War Office, London, October 12, 1916. A strenuous representation against Singapore and Simla may be found in P.R.O./W.O. 106/33, C.L.C. History, Jordan, Peking, to Foreign Office, London, January 3, 1917. Hints of the fate of the Chinese in Mesopotamia are in P.R.O./W.O. 161/17, and P.R.O./W.O. 161/18, Mesopotamia: Narrative Accounts of Operations of A.S.C. Units.

¹⁰⁹P.R.O./W.O. 32/5348, Action Against German Agents in China, 1916, passim.

Robertson's contact in Whitehall, Captain Denny of Military Intelligence, had already grasped the possible impact of German opposition in China. He proposed a campaign of deliberate intimidation in return which might force the Chinese government to oust the Germans altogether. He advocated threats of arrest of Germans by Chinese, and even demands for the seizure of the German consulate in Shanghai.¹¹⁰ There is no doubt that Denny saw the situation as a fruitful opportunity to encourage Chinese adherence to the Entente Powers in open defiance of Germany, whose eventual post war role in the far east the British had every intention of undermining.

But the Foreign Office objected to extreme provocation, and told the War Office so.¹¹¹ In early 1917 Bourne was informed only that a counter propaganda strike would be launched under the aegis of the British legation in Peking. The legation was allowed to pressure the Chinese government,¹¹² and the harassment of Germans it succeeded

¹¹⁰P.R.O./W.O. 106/33, C.L.C. History, Memorandum from Captain R. B. Denny, M.I.3, London, November 21, 1916.

¹¹¹Ibid., where urgent cautions from the Foreign Office are registered on the back of the Memorandum.

¹¹²Attaché Alston remarked that if Britain could oust the Germans and secure China's adherence to the Entente, "we should have the whole field of China open to us for labour recruiting." In Ibid., Alston, Peking, to D.M.I., London, February 4, 1917.

in effecting by this means did have a significant influence upon China's entry into the war upon the Allied side.¹¹³

It is hard to estimate the effectiveness of the counter propaganda offensive mounted by the British. Apparently it was directed at the more literate among the Chinese population, or at government levels in Peking itself.¹¹⁴ The Germans, on the other hand, shrewdly concentrated on alarming the inhabitants of the villages and farms from which the enrolled coolies came. Already in Europe angry questions had been asked in the French Chamber concerning German insinuations regarding Allied use of Chinese labor,¹¹⁵ and the French government expressed eagerness to join in the British propaganda operation. Mr. Woodhead, of The Peking and Tientsin Times, and Mr. Donald, of the prestigious Far Eastern Review, were named by Military Intelligence in London as Britain's premier organizers of biased publicity on the Wei-hai-Wei scheme,¹¹⁶

¹¹³Ibid., Memorandum on Enemy Activity and China's Entry into the War, 1918. (There were only 3,290 enemy aliens in China, and 1,724 of these were minors, but the Germans combined to mount an opposition out of all proportion to their numerical strength.)

¹¹⁴The Times (London), May 28, 1917, p. 5.

¹¹⁵Ibid., January 18, 1917, p. 7.

¹¹⁶P.R.O./W.O. 106/33, C.L.C. History, Memorandum from Captain R. B. Denny, M.I.3, London, November 21, 1916.

while the London and China Telegraph was employed for the same purpose at home where it provided a popular forum for the defence both of British and French activities.¹¹⁷

On occasion the Foreign Office itself dictated the texts of articles designed to quell Chinese fears on the use of coolies,¹¹⁸ and British missionaries were pressed into service to distribute material in Shantung and elsewhere explaining their government's point of view.¹¹⁹ But still the Germans persisted, Bourne was annoyed to find some of their more inflammatory propaganda productions in Wei-hai-Wei itself, a circumstance that was repeated fre-

(A sample of the efforts of the Far Eastern Review can be found in B. Manico Gull, "The Story of the Chinese Labour Corps: A Highly Efficient British Organization to Protect the Personal and Financial Interests of the Chinese Coolies Labouring Behind the Lines in France," The Far Eastern Review: Engineering, Finance, Commerce, Vol. XIV (April, 1918), pp. 125-135. Here, Wei-hai-Wei was described as "the gateway to an Eldorado." The article, although late, is typical of the counter propaganda rhetoric employed after March, 1917. The Gull material can still be found quoted as an authoritative source. See N. Wales /Helen F. Snow/, The Chinese Labour Movement (New York: Books for Libraries Press, 1971), p. 25.

¹¹⁷For example, see London and China Telegraph, February 26, 1917, p. 5.

¹¹⁸A suggested text, discussing the use of the coolies, commented, "England has been guided by no selfish motive and will reap no material benefit." See P.R.O./W.O. 106/35, Employment, Foreign Office, London, to Alston, Peking, March 12, 1917.

¹¹⁹P.R.O./W.O. 106/33, C.L.C. History, Robertson, Peking, to D.M.I., London, January 8, 1917.

quently until the German's projected expulsion from China in 1918.¹²⁰

The Chinese government remained well aware of the value to the Allied cause of its vast manpower resources. It watched the propaganda battle with care, and never failed to extract advantage for itself from any support given the Allies. One anonymous Chinese politician noted in an English language communiqué, "My country's ability to supply manual labour is a point of supreme value,"¹²¹ and trusted that China's growing manpower contribution, whether covert or openly agreed to, would one day earn her something more tangible than the mere gratitude of the victors. It is correct to suggest that China saw the Labour Corps transaction as a potential foot in the door when it came to the question of her post war status vis-à-vis Franco-British intentions in the Far East.

T. J. Bourne disliked the sinister and sometimes underground form of warfare that has been discussed above. He preferred to get on with the paramount task of inden-

¹²⁰The Germans cleverly exploited various aspects of the Chinese psychology, including its xenophobic tendencies. For instance, a translated extract from a poster circulated by German agents in Wei-hai-Wei reads in part, "in France, you will have to associate with African negroes, . . . and such other remnants of 'dead' nations." See Ibid., Translation of Propaganda Posters, 1917.

¹²¹P.R.O./W.O. 106/35, Employment, Printed Memorandum, February /?/, 1917.

turing, "enrolling," the coolies, leaving to Robertson or Alston the task of refuting the German allegations. Robertson was equally disgusted, not at the nature of his work, but at the growing amount of time it began to consume, and the frequent trips to Wei-hai-Wei and Shantung province that it soon entailed. Along with Alston, Robertson insisted that London do more to control the uncensored minor leakages that had occurred in the English press concerning speculation on the use of Chinese labor. They jointly recommended a most stringent clamp down on all references to it.¹²²

The New Statesman was the newspaper they most objected to, although a comment in the Manchester Guardian, perhaps the first in public regarding the possible extent of the Chinese labor scheme, had earlier stimulated Robertson's critical concern for the regulation of the British press.¹²³ When the columns of The New Statesman suggested that soon colored labor was to be "lodged in compounds, and required to undertake unloading of ships, and any other work . . . under the authority of the present 'governing class,'" ¹²⁴ the War Office needed little

¹²²P.R.O./W.O. 106/33, C.L.C. History, Alston, Peking, to D.M.I., London, December 21, 1916.

¹²³Manchester Guardian, November 15, 1916, p. 4.

¹²⁴"The Conduct of the War," The New Statesman, December 9, 1916, pp. 222-223.

urging from Robertson to exert a tougher censorship. But in point of fact it could do little for fear of exaggerating the issue into one of major proportions that would involve questions of freedom of the press besides the use of colored labor. It was better to keep a close watch on the press and to discourage rather than block comment. That the War Office did maintain a keen interest in all public references to the Wei-hai-Wei experiment is apparent from clippings from relevant articles which are found sprinkled throughout the original sources, along with marginal comments on their significance.

In London too the Army Council, tired of the protracted nature of the negotiations and machinations in China, and frustrated by checks which had arisen at home, applied pressure to Bourne, hinting very strongly that it was still possible to raise the needed men in other spheres if he could not promise some very real progress within the shortest space of time. This was bluff. No nation, except perhaps India whose natives Britain was already using, could match the resources of China. Besides, the War Office and the Army Council had already learned that no where else in the world could men be got so cheaply as in China. West Indians, for example, expected grossly inflated rates of pay by comparison.¹²⁵

¹²⁵P.R.O./W.O. 32/5145, Construction of Light Rail-

Justifiably nettled at this goading, Bourne responded bluntly in a telegram which even the prosaic cypher could not disguise as evidently dictated under stress. He promised unequivocally that the first battalion of Chinese would leave Wei-hai-Wei for France on or very close to January 14, 1917.¹²⁶ Waterproof canvass pocket books had already been issued to each coolie for the inclosure of his photograph, thumbprint,¹²⁷ certification of physical fitness to serve, and copy of contract. Each man had also received a brass identity disc, which was permanently riveted by chain to his wrist in a blacksmith's shop at Wei-hai-Wei. This piece of ingenuity was of Bourne's own devising. Not surprisingly, a number of the more sophisticated laborers violently objected to this humiliation,¹²⁸ but apparently Bourne actually thought

ways in France, Governor of Jamaica, to Colonial Secretary, London, October 4, 1916. (Natives from Jamaica demanded upwards of four shillings a day. The Governor of Barbados expected calls for higher rates yet if men from his island were recruited. See Ibid., Governor of Barbados to Colonial Secretary, London, October 4, 1916.)

¹²⁶P.R.O./W.O. 32/11345, Recruitment, T. J. Bourne, Wei-hai-Wei, to "Milrail," London, December 19, 1916.

¹²⁷After the war it was revealed that Mr. Welch, a Scotland Yard expert, had remained in charge of this important plan to keep a record of the Chinese. See The Times (London), April 23, 1919, p. 5.

¹²⁸P.R.O./W.O. 106/ 33, C.L.C. History, Robertson, Peking, to D.M.I., London, August 16, 1917.

he was being solicitous for their welfare. Everybody knew all Chinamen looked alike, so if they got lost in France they could be promptly returned to the right units despite difficulties of recognition and language.

The identity disc was a needless humiliation, however, as each coolie had with him a photograph and other identity documents. The use of the disc implied that he would either lose these, or perhaps dispose of them deliberately in an attempt to "escape." Bourne considered himself progressive, not only in his thinking but in his politics, too. He must have been aware of that part of the Liberal ethos which repudiated the use of men as articles rather than as human beings. Perhaps his liberalism, tinged with long years of foreign service, recognized with Herbert Samuel that there were two types of Chinese, and "the class of Chinamen who were accustomed to emigrate were in the main a degraded people . . . vicious, immoral, and unclean."¹²⁹ Perhaps Bourne was too eager to please the War Office to care very much about the human value system that he claimed to represent. Could he have believed that his attitude was "a flagrant denial on all points, of the principles of freedom and

¹²⁹The words are Samuel's during a debate on the South African importation. See Parliamentary Debates (House of Commons), 4th ser., February 16, 1904, col. 1502.

equity . . . which the Liberals believed had given Britain her position in the world?"¹³⁰

As January, 1917, drew to a close Bourne realized with immense relief that he was on schedule as promised, and that the first contingent of one thousand and eighty-six men would leave for France via the Cape of Good Hope aboard the "Teucer," a converted passenger-cargo vessel.¹³¹ Long and varied routes were deliberately taken in order to confuse German intelligence and to avoid the submarine menace, so the first shipment did not reach France until April 19, 1917.¹³² But at last the scheme was working, and Bourne could turn to issues of a more trifling but nonetheless important nature if the momentum he had painstakingly begun were to be successfully maintained. He had been in China for less than three months.

During this brief yet hectic period one of Bourne's continual worries had been the officer corps which "trained" the coolies at Wei-hai-Wei, and later at Tsangkou, an additional camp near the port of Tsingtao some hundred

¹³⁰Hyam, Elgin and Churchill at the Colonial Office, p. 63. (The quotation refers to the similar South African scheme.)

¹³¹A full table of all shipments to Europe from Wei-hai-Wei and other ports will be found in Appendix 'B' at the end of this paper, pp. 264-66.

¹³²Three routes were employed; via the Cape, Suez, and overland via Canada. No coolie transports were ever lost.

miles down the Shantung peninsula. These men, whose job it was to give the "raw importation" some semblance of order and discipline, were a polyglot command at best. A glimpse of their psychology and methods reveals that the coolies were handed over to them to be "hammered and coaxed and cursed into a disciplined body . . . there is rivalry among the officers in regard to the number of canes broken on backs, legs, shins or heads."¹³³

Among these so-called officers, who included an American adventurer, a stereotypically dour Scot, a fervent missionary, and a renegade White Russian aristocrat of considerable military eminence, was one lieutenant in particular who was "well practised at drawing a coolie's blood at the first slap."¹³⁴ No doubt this picture involved some retrospective artistic license. It is only fair to mention that at the other end of the spectrum of opinions regarding the treatment of the coolies in Wei-hai-Wei, is found in the estimation of one who was present, the belief that they were generally well treated and subject to no apparent brutality.¹³⁵ But there seems

¹³³Klein, *With the 'Chinks' in the C.L.C.* (London: Bodley Head, 1919), p. 72. (This is the only full-length published account of these days.)

¹³⁴Ibid.

¹³⁵Reverend A. J. Garnier, Sevenoaks, Kent, England, letter to the writer, September 4, 1972. (Reverend Garnier, a Baptist, worked in Wei-hai-Wei for six months during 1916-1917.)

to be little doubt that the Chinese did receive a tough initiation, and some companies must certainly have been subject to harsher treatment than the rest. Bourne himself agreed that the type of man initially placed in charge of the laborers often failed to inspire the necessary trust and confidence.

In connection with the question of his officers, Bourne also had to deal with the local British colonials, led by a Major Nathan, who were contemptuous of the white establishment at Wei-hai-Wei felt that the whole Chinese Labour Corps should be "their show," and agitated for months to be allowed the premier role in receiving and training the coolies.¹³⁶ The situation which developed as a result provoked Bourne to rely on Robertson's superior rank for support. For some months the climate of relations between the whites in Wei-hai-Wei remained acrimonious. The aspersions cast by Nathan and his followers were particularly resented by Robertson because most of the officers found for the barracks in Wei-hai-Wei were appointed by Peking legation staff acting on his advice.¹³⁷

¹³⁶P.R.O./W.O. 106/33, C.L.C. History, Memorandum on Supply of Officers in Tientsin, etc., Robertson, Wei-hai-Wei, to D.M.I., London, November 3, 1916. (Major Nathan appears to have been late Corps of Royal Engineers, and was civilian manager of the Kailan Mining Company at the time of his opposition to Bourne, et al.)

¹³⁷Ibid., Jordan, Peking, to D.M.I., London, October 28, 1916.

Long before this trying tension was alleviated, Bourne had to face renewed pressures from London, this time in the form of the new Foreign Secretary, Arthur Balfour. One of Balfour's first acts in relation to the Chinese program, which he was most eager to expand, was to recommend negotiating with the Japanese for the opening of their port facilities at Tsingtao, taken by them in November, 1914. This port was served by the Shantung railway, and would make an ideal shipping point for coolies raised in Shantung and enrolled at Wei-hai-Wei.¹³⁸ The port itself had advantages over Wei-hai-Wei, and Balfour was sure that Japanese efficiency could smooth the running of the scheme. Why not use Orientals to direct Orientals, he reasoned?

Bourne was not so sure. To him it meant an additional harassment to open a facility at Tsingtao. But under Balfour's prodding he did so, and the first shipload of coolies for France left there on April 4, 1917. Tsingtao actually became more important as a port of re-entry for coolies returning to China after the war, and it was not until August, 1918, that the base of British operations was moved to there from Wei-hai-Wei. Bourne lamented that this latter move relinquished to the Japan-

¹³⁸P.R.O./W.O. 32/11345, Recruitment, Foreign Office to Army Council, London, December 30, 1916.

ese the auspices for the concluding of the Chinese labor scheme, a task he would have preferred Britain to handle exclusively.¹³⁹

III

During Bourne's physical implementation of the early stages for the creation of an army of Chinese labor, the War Office in London was building a climate of opinion among staff and officers that would provide for the reception of the coolies. Because this involved so many intangible and psychological elements, it proved in many ways to be a more difficult task than Bourne's. Emotional and professional variables entered into the issue, too. Could two hundred thousand Orientals be absorbed into the British army establishment, and if so, how? Could professional standards of order and discipline be maintained? What units or branches of the service should be responsible for the coolies? Would they respond to their white officers and the non-commissioned personnel necessary to run their companies? Would prejudice on the part

¹³⁹P.R.O./C.O. 873/538, T. J. Bourne's Report to Commissioner of Wei-hai-Wei on Reasons for Moving Chinese Labour Corps to Tsingtao, August 9, 1918. (Commissioner Lockhart used this issue to lobby Walter Long, the Colonial Secretary in 1918, for improved status and facilities for Wei-hai-Wei. See Ibid., Commissioner, Wei-hai-Wei, to Colonial Secretary, London, August 21, 1918.)

of white units serving in the field necessitate the rigid segregation of the "natives?" These and other questions had to be faced in Whitehall. The planners there had had experience in the use of colored troops and workers before, but on a limited scale and with purely colonial natives, often from India, who were used to the methods and discipline of the British Raj. Orientals were an unknown quantity.

During the latter part of 1916, while Bourne, Robertson, Jordan, and the other actors in the drama played their roles in far off China, the War Office maintained a fairly quiescent posture to avoid needlessly alarming its armies in the field with gratuitous chatter concerning the establishment of a coolie force. But rumors quickly circulated throughout all echelons of command, and it was soon known that Whitehall was taking professional counsel on the treatment of a potentially vast labor force from the east. Even though the initial number of Chinese envisaged as a practicable proposition by the Army Council had at one time been a mere ten thousand,¹⁴⁰ it became apparent to many high ranking officers that this number had long since been greatly enhanced. For one

¹⁴⁰P.R.O./W.O. 32/11345, Recruitment, Minutes of a Conference to Consider Proposals that African Native Labour and Chinese Labour be Employed in France, August 25, 1916.

thing, it was known that Haig had been promised vast contingents of laborers for use in trench digging and defence-work building, and no where in Europe were there enough available white men for the task.

Not surprisingly, then, some staff officers began to express open doubts about the status of this proposed army of alien labor, and about the role of the personnel who would be expected to govern and control it. The War Office had taken the plunge in mid-December, 1916, and begun the formal construction of an officer establishment to take care of the anticipated influx of Chinese.¹⁴¹ Senior officers were gazetted, and the question of N.C.O.'s seriously considered. It was hoped by the War Office that a functioning framework would be on hand to receive the Chinese when they began to land, as Bourne had promised, in the spring of 1917.

Now wilder rumors began to circulate, and Major General Curtis, a senior staff officer, stepped forward as an important spokesman for a substantial body of professional military opinion. He submitted a sharply worded memorandum to the War Office asserting that in his opinion and in that of his brother officers it would be nothing short of disastrous if, as had been heard, thirty-

¹⁴¹Lieut.-Col. Faifax was to take command. See Army List for 1917, January, part iii, col 2023d.

five thousand Corps of Royal Engineers' personnel were replaced by Chinese or coloreds. The only direction in which he personally saw any practicable reduction of white men was in substitution of natives for the most menial of mess room tasks, or perhaps in trench and tunnelling units.¹⁴² Curtis and others knew that large numbers of Chinese might be incredibly difficult to absorb or utilize in a short space of time. In a substitution list of his own, Curtis presented his and other officers' opinions, and recommended that great care be used in employing only a few hundred colored auxiliaries in France.¹⁴³

The War Office was sensible of the fears expressed. To some extent it shared them.¹⁴⁴ For one thing, Mr. Lloyd George's continued and impatient insistence on the prompt production of two hundred thousand Chinese coolies in France was the kind of aggressive demand which the strategists there had not encountered before.¹⁴⁵ In ad-

¹⁴²P.R.O./W.O. 32/5094, Substitution, Memorandum of Major-General Curtis to War Office, London, January 7, 1916.

¹⁴³Ibid., "Appendix."

¹⁴⁴For example, Ibid., Memorandum of Directorate General of Transport, January 22, 1917.

¹⁴⁵Ibid., Memoranda on Substitution of Coloured for White Personnel in France, January 20, 1917.

dition, the War Office learned that Haig himself, despite the need for men and the promises made him, had indicated increasing concern over the nature and extent of proposed native labor schemes.

And so the War Office decided to take the unusually democratic step of circulating among staff officers a series of questionnaires regarding the use of colored troops and laborers. In a summation of the replies received as a result of this action one finds an almost universal belief among high ranking officers that the proposed number of colored substitutes or auxiliaries of any origin was far too high, and that caution should be exercised in pursuing existing policies for their use. Discipline, efficiency, and cohesion of units would certainly suffer, it was maintained. The Corps of Royal Engineers, itself numbering one hundred and two thousand effectives in 1916, urged most strenuously that they could absorb, or direct, at the most some twenty-three thousand of the hundred thousand native laborers it heard were "due" in France, and then only for employment in ammunition columns, on menial tasks, or as diggers of communications trenches.¹⁴⁶ The Corps really felt adequate to take responsibility for seven thousand five hundred

¹⁴⁶Ibid., "A Summary of Replies Received," January [?], 1917.

Chinese, and candidly fancied neither their use in outright substitution, nor their addition to overall strength.¹⁴⁷

In the course of the Summary it is the Chinese who rapidly materialize as the alleged major threat to professional military procedures, for it was known or suspected that they were to be imported in great numbers. By the end of January, 1917, there were already in France one thousand "Cape Boys," ten thousand South African natives, and en route or applied for, an additional fifty thousand South Africans, one thousand Portuguese colonial natives, and one hundred Fijians.¹⁴⁸ In addition, there were at the same time native Indian contingents and some West Indians who had been employed by the Royal Artillery, the Army Service Corps, and some other branches of the service since 1915. But all of these natives were generally accepted as being a part of the total "Imperial Force" rather than as aliens per se.¹⁴⁹ The major anxiety one gathers from the Summary is the fear of the Chinese as natives about whom few people in authority seemed to know very much. How would they react and respond to conditions

¹⁴⁷Ibid.

¹⁴⁸P.R.O./W.O. 32/5097, Units Controlled by the Directorate General of Transportation.

¹⁴⁹For some interesting sidelights on their conditions, see P.R.O./W.O. 32/5110, The Lawrence Report.

in France? Would a large contingent prove unmanageable? It is clear from the views expressed that senior officers felt competent in relating to, and being placed in authority over, natives of a colonial origin, but awkward and uneasy about the problems they might encounter in dealing with representatives of a subject race about which they knew comparatively little.

And yet in terms of pure physical and economic returns the coolies offered more than the other natives employed by the army. Although undeniably devious, mendacious, and potentially troublesome, they were less indolent than Blacks, and more amenable to harsh discipline and coercion, too. This was the dilemma which faced Whitehall, and which the Army Council squarely and realistically faced.¹⁵⁰ The Chinese, it saw, offered the best prospects in what was contemptuously labelled "The Raw Importation." This was the state of mind in which a conference at the War Office in February, 1917, sat to consider just how the supply of Chinese should be apportioned to units serving in France.¹⁵¹ If necessary, firm

¹⁵⁰P.R.O./W.O. 32/5094, Substitution, A Secret Memorandum from the Military Members of the Army Council on a Proposal that certain of the Personnel of Artillery Ammunition Columns, and of Royal Engineer, Army Service Corps, and Royal Army Medical Corps units might be replaced by Coloured Troops, February 6, 1917.

¹⁵¹Ibid., Minutes of a Conference on the Supply of Labour, February 3, and 4, 1917, p. 3.

measures would have to be taken to overcome the professional reservations of some staff officers and field commanders concerning the use of coolies. They were needed, were on their way, and must be adequately exploited when they arrived. Accordingly, the conferees agreed to replace with Chinese as many as possible of the ninety-six thousand white men currently listed as "unskilled laborers" under the orders of the Directorate General of Transportation. Taken into account yet again upon this occasion was the tedious insistence of Lloyd George, now Prime Minister, that two hundred thousand Chinese be employed jointly by the Royal Artillery, the Corps of Royal Engineers, and the Army Service and Royal Army Medical Corps.¹⁵²

Under the pressure of the circumstances brought about by professional doubts concerning the uses of na-

¹⁵²Ibid., War Office to Chief of the Imperial General Staff, /Sir William Robertson/, and Military Members of the /Army/ Council, London, January 20, 1917. (It took until March, 1917, for the War Office planners to accommodate their thinking to the scope envisaged by the Prime Minister. By then they could suggest that the Royal Artillery manage 100,000 "natives," including Chinese, the Royal Engineers more than 35,000, the Army Service Corps, 53,000, and the Royal Army Medical Corps, 35,000. Coolies figured heavily in all these estimates. In taking this view Whitehall remained a very long step ahead of commanders in the field. See Ibid., Minutes of a War Office Conference on the Substitution of Coloured for White Personnel in France, March 13, 1917.)

tive labor, the War Office had deemed it advisable as early as December, 1916, to commission a reliable senior officer to carry out an inquiry into the whole question, not only of the use of Chinese and other native workers, but also into the "economy" of fighting men it was hoped to produce by the move to employ vast numbers of such personnel in France. General Lawson was chosen for the task of producing this rationale upon which the War Office hoped to rely in its distribution of colored labor.

Lawson's two Reports appeared simultaneously for top level distribution in January, 1917, just as opposition to the labor scheme within the ranks of the Army establishment began to reach its height. In his rather sketchy congeries of personal opinions, gathered together through the medium of short visits to units serving in France,¹⁵³ Lawson outlined a tempting picture of how readily the use of Chinese and other aliens could release white personnel for combat duties. He particularly recommended the use of Chinese at railheads and their employment, "if nothing alarming resulted,"¹⁵⁴ in port off-loading duties.

¹⁵³But the visits were reported as quite searching. For example, see P.R.O./W.O. 95/3984, War Diary of Assistant Director of Supplies, B.E.F., Boulogne, January 2, 1917.

¹⁵⁴Lawson, Reports on the Number and Physical Categories of Men Employed out of the Fighting Area in France, and on the Economy of Man Power in the Fighting Areas in France (London: For the War Office, January, 1917), p. 10.

Lawson was the first person to offer a reasonably logical and defensible picture of how all forms of colored labor might be fitted into the existing military establishment in France both as outright substitutes for whites, or as auxiliaries for existing units to employ. Implicit in his pages was the belief that the Army had the men and the understanding necessary to exploit and govern the Chinese without serious untoward effects resulting. Consequently, in terms of their psychological impact alone, his slim Reports are particularly notable in having gone a long way toward breaking down some of the resistance to the use of the Chinese.

In early January, 1917, Field Marshall Haig could reassure the War Office that he himself felt that the principle of the employment of Chinese was at last on the verge of being accepted by his officers, but that a uniform system of classifying the coolies would have to be designed and promulgated if more complete satisfaction were anticipated by London. His men needed a clear understanding of how their coolies could be utilized. Haig recommended the use of a simple ABC system, with "A" representing unskilled labor of the most fundamental coolie sort, "B," men capable of some semi-skilled tasks, and "C," those who might, under certain grave emergencies, be used in combat. Haig agreed that the Lawson Reports,

whose production in draft form he was closely watching, formed the best guide, and would go far to eliminate remaining prejudices.¹⁵⁵

Elsewhere Haig, who had lost much of his earlier uncritical enthusiasm for the broad application of native labor, did still reaffirm that there was no reason why such men when used as substitutes or as auxiliaries should impair the efficiency of certain select echelons of his overall command. He even adverted to their possible use as organic additions to existing branches of the service.¹⁵⁶ This latter view, later abandoned by the Commander-in-Chief, was quite impossible to implement anyway, at least where the Chinese were concerned, for even attempts to attach them as cooks or servants to existing white units met with firm and concerted repudiation from officers and men. In practice, the men of the Chinese Labour Corps were to lead lives as isolated as possible from all the groups they served or supported. As one critic of the colonial era has suggested, such repudiation was to be expected, for the basic emphasis of

¹⁵⁵P.R.O./W.O. 30/6218, Correspondence, 1917, C.-in-C., B.E.F., France, to War Office, London, January 4, 1917. (A class system was eventually imposed upon the coolies. See Supra., pp. 224-26.

¹⁵⁶P.R.O./W.O. 32/5094, Substitution, Memorandum from the C.-in-C., B.E.F., France, to War Office, London, January [?], 1917.

the colonialist value system lay in the imposing of one form of culture upon another, lower form. This led to a defensive segregation of the colonial masters from the lesser breeds. Such defensiveness grew more paranoid as the two elements were forced into closer contact in any situation.¹⁵⁷

The truth of this assertion can be seen in the conditions which obtained in France after the coolies arrived. From a mere repudiation of desire for the slightest contact, there eventuated a real fear of any risk that the coolies should actually see the British common soldier at work or at play in case "unfavorable" comparisons were made, and the status of the "superior" culture diminished. The growth of this mentality gives the lie to those who maintained that the Chinese would gain "cultural exposure" by their stay in Europe; in fact, as will be seen, the coolies became progressively more isolated from every outside human contact as their stay in France grew longer.

In a General Conclusion, based upon Haig's and other responses, the military members of the Army Council eventually suggested that the major employment of Chinese be restricted to the performance of the most menial manual tasks; forestry, trench-digging, quarrying, loading, railroad track laying, burying the dead, and stacking ammuni-

¹⁵⁷A. Césaire, Discourse on Colonialism, p. 11.

tion. Extreme caution was advised in their use in skilled or semi-skilled posts, as "owing to the lower intellectual standard"¹⁵⁸ involved, far greater training than was feasible would be essential if unit commanders were to get value out of the men.

The views expressed in this General Conclusion, and carried into broad effect during the rest of 1917, set the pattern for the employment of the Chinese, and ensured that they functioned virtually within a vacuum upon their arrival in France. No branch of the service wanted to be too closely identified with their use. The skilled and semi-skilled Chinese who came with the Chinese Labour Corps, although recognized, were needlessly neglected until their value and potential later became more readily apparent and urgently needed. The Corps' respective companies, shunted from army group to army group and from branch to branch, lay attached to units only so long as work remained to be done.

A vast, floating, pool was thus established, rather than a series of actual additions to established white commands. This phenomenon was to have important consequences upon the management and efficiency of the coolies, as will be seen in the next chapter. It created in addi-

¹⁵⁸P.R.O./W.O. 32/5094, Substitution, Memoranda on Substitution of Coloured for White Personnel in France, January 20, 1917.

tion an entire caste of second-rate white staff officers and N.C.O.'s who were socially discriminated against by white officers and men in other units, and whose enforced quarantine with their charges proved irksome and damaging to morale long before the war's conclusion. In the early days of the Corps' existence a commission in it was "considered a good billet . . . with periodical home leave, reasonable /sic/ immunity from shells, bombs, etc."¹⁵⁹ The frustrations of a life apart soon vitiated this happy picture.

To make matters worse the Chinese arrived in France to meet officers and N.C.O.'s whom they had never seen before and for whom they could feel little initial respect or affection. In some important service quarters it was considered the height of stupidity to assume that the coolies should become the responsibility of their directors in France without having either the slightest idea of military fundamentals outside of their rough initiation in Wei-hai-Wei, or the elements of trust essential in those who must obey without question or hesitation.¹⁶⁰

No wonder, then, that the War Office later found it

¹⁵⁹Klein, With the 'Chinks' in the C.L.C., p. 72. (Klein left his company before it saw France, and endured none of the frustrations to which Corps commanders became subject.)

¹⁶⁰For example P.R.O./W.O. 31/4953, Memorandum on the Training of Coloured Personnel, by General W. D. Bird, Director General of Staff Duties, March, 1917.

necessary to concoct a morale booster in the form of a general order distributed to all prospective officers in the Chinese Labour Corps. "All ranks," it read,

should have briefly explained to them the object of the work, for what, and by whom, it will be used, what purpose it will serve, and especially, that all the work is being done for the prosecution of the war . . .¹⁶¹

The last injunction, as it was eventually recognized, meant little to the coolies. Later, when there arose embittered comment on the calibre and effectiveness of the officers used to staff the Chinese Labour Corps establishment, the hasty or negligible training of the coolies in the basics of the military life, and their exposure to white personnel who were strange to them, were arguments to be used in cogent if fruitless defence by some of those accused of ineptitude.

At last, by the spring of 1917, the War Office had won the acceptance of the vast majority of its staff and field commanders of the initiation of the Chinese experiment in France. An establishment of sorts had been prepared to receive them. How would they be utilized in practice? How effectively were they to be exploited? An effort to answer these questions will be made in the next chapter.

¹⁶¹G.S.O. /Frank Fox7, G.H.Q. (Montreuil-sur-Mer) (London: Philip Allan & Co., 1920), p. 160.

CHAPTER III
DISCUSSION OF THE DEPLOYMENT OF LABOR RESOURCES BY
THE BRITISH ARMIES IN FRANCE AND THE IMPACT THEREON
OF THE CHINESE LABOUR CORPS

In a leading article on Saturday, December 17, 1917, The Times summed up the eight months during which Chinese laborers had been active with the British armies in France as representing overall "an astonishing testimony to the efficiency of the organization which has gathered them from the ends of the earth."¹⁶²

In the previous pages it has already been suggested that the gathering, while ultimately successful in terms of the production of nearly one hundred thousand coolies, was hardly the result of an efficient process. Valiant, perhaps, especially on the part of T. J. Bourne in Weihai-Wei, and carried on in the face of great difficulties, but hardly efficient. The situation into which the Chinese stepped when they eventually reached Europe gives one genuine leave to doubt whether the preparations for their arrival and deployment were any more adequately handled.

¹⁶²"Behind the Front," The Times (London), December 29, 1917, p. 7.

Lieutenant-Colonel Page-Croft, Conservative and Unionist Member for Christchurch, was closer to the truth than The Times' leader when, even before the arrival in France of the first Chinese contingent, he suggested in the House that the army's use of labor forces in the theater of European operations showed grave lack of preparedness coupled with poor organization.¹⁶³ He expressed the hope that colored laborers would receive better treatment.

When the coolies began to disembark a month later they found the Lieutenant-Colonel's hopes quite unfulfilled. The pressing and continued need for additional labor which prompted their importation in the first place was not solely due to the manpower shortage which existed in the British forces throughout the war. It was also due to a poor disposition of available labor resources which served to convey to contemporary observers a sense of crisis which was serious, but in fact not so crucial as it appeared.

In truth there had been little or no coherent planning for the raising and distribution of manual labor units in the proposed war establishments considered be-

¹⁶³Parliamentary Debates (House of Commons), 5th ser., March 1, 1917, cols. 2205-2219, passim. And see The Times (London), March 2, 1917, p. 10. And see Parliamentary Debates (House of Commons), 5th ser., March 1, 1917, cols. 2207-2219, for further references to dubious efficiency.

fore 1914, and what planning there had been during the decade previous to the outbreak of hostilities was rendered futile by the static nature of the campaigns which then ensued. In the Field Service Regulations on which the armies were mobilized in 1914 the relevant section on labor and auxiliary support was stunted and unrealistic. It was suggested, for example, that:

Freight trains should be loaded or unloaded by civilian labour provided by the department or service concerned, unless military labour can be provided without interfering with the fighting efficiency of the troops.¹⁶⁴

Even this directive was unusually explicit, because it was recognized that railroad freight and its handling would form one of the major modern criteria of military success in the field. The belief that a few British labor companies could easily and quickly be supplemented by a hasty recruitment of local inhabitants, as had been the case in the Boer War where colored labor was fortunately on hand,¹⁶⁵ proved quite inadequate to meet the eventualities of the world war.

¹⁶⁴Field Service Regulations, part II: Organisation and Administration, Amendments, 1913-14 (London: H.M.S.O., 1913), ch. 3, "Functions of the Forces in the Field," p. 33.

¹⁶⁵Colonel E. Gibb, "The Organisation of Labour in the Great War: A Lecture Delivered at the School of Military Administration, Chisledon," The Royal Army Service Corps Quarterly, Vol. XI (1923), p. 172.

In one sense, the prolonged discussion of the lack of preparedness of the Army establishment for the use and exploitation of a large labor force is pointless. The vastness and unpredictability of the great war's operations were bound to have embarrassed even the most prescient of military planners. The planning carried out at the War Office before the war had none of the drama or publicity appeal of the naval race carried out at the Admiralty by the First Sea Lord, J. A. Fisher, and others. R. B. Haldane, under whom much of the military preparation for possible war was carried out, was a serious and cautious individual who had three major emphases constantly thrust before him both by military men and politicians. Too large an establishment or provision for one, he was told, was bound to alarm the Germans unnecessarily. Money grudgingly granted the Army had better be spent only on top priority issues, of which the designing of labor contingents was not one. Above all, the notion was impressed upon Haldane that any war with Germany and her allies was likely to be short and active, therefore, not requiring provision for vast corps of manual workers and supernumeraries. For those who wish to follow a revelation of the Army's unpreparedness in this respect ample evidence survives.¹⁶⁶

¹⁶⁶For example see P.R.O./W.O. 32/6805, Report of

It is what was done to remedy this situation once hostilities were under way that provides a more bona fide grounds for inquiry into the general efficiency of the British Army's labor establishment, and of the Chinese Labour Corps in particular. As The Times once remarked of the Chinese and their use, "modern war is modern industry, organized for a single definite purpose."¹⁶⁷ Whether in the rhetoric of The Times that purpose may be construed as victory, profit, or anything else is immaterial. It is clear, though, that to some of the men who were responsible for deploying the Chinese the idea of war as a modern industry offered an appealing model upon which to base their particular mode of labor management.

This was true to some degree of many of those who handled the entire labor establishment in France. One

the Committee Appointed to Inquire into the Organisation of the Corps of Royal Engineers (The "Wood Committee"), 1906. (Here it was optimistically suggested that one and a quarter miles of new railroad track a day could be laid in a future war with only the aid of the unskilled labor of the country in which the Corps found itself.) See also P.R.O./W.O. 32/5151, Report of Major-General Hickman's Siege Committee, 1914; P.R.O./W.O. 32/8303, Organisation of Colonial Troops for Imperial Service; P.R.O./W.O. 32/7109, Conference on Deficiencies in the B.E.F., 1912; P.R.O./W.O. 32/7108, The Mobilisation of the Expeditionary Force, 1912/13.

¹⁶⁷"An Army of Labour in France," The Times (London), December 26, 1917, p. 8.

who knew that establishment well notes that it was divided about equally between "big business men and typical Oxford men."¹⁶⁸ This is an oversimplification. But the two types did exist side by side in broadly recognizable outlines.

The "big business" labor handlers saw their workers solely in terms of physical production; jobs done, goals achieved, military staffs satisfied. To them, war was an industry in the prosaic sense of the word, only designed in this instance with the very special goal in mind of total victory over the enemy.¹⁶⁹

The "Oxford" men were characterized by university and college educated individuals who regarded themselves as aware of the latest "progressive" management techniques like centralized employment, a very popular innovation of the day, "the natural successor in the evolution of business from the methods which have been common . . . since the industry first began to assume its large importance in the world's affairs."¹⁷⁰ They relished

¹⁶⁸G.S.O., G.H.Q. (Montreuil-sur-Mer), p. 168.

¹⁶⁹Gibb, "The Organisation of Labour in the Great War," p. 180.

¹⁷⁰E. M. Hopkins, "Advantages of Centralized Employment," The Annals of the American Academy of Political and Social Science, Vol. LXXI, (May, 1917), p. 1.

their graphs, comparative performance charts, and "scientific" estimates of capacity and output. They were the first technocrats. To them war was an opportunity to prove their scientific concepts of labor management. They were even accused of maintaining the Chinese coolies at work in Europe after the conclusion of the Armistice merely in order to gratify the demands of their experimental designs.¹⁷¹

It is against these two types of mentality that the use and function of the Chinese must be discussed. At the time there was no history of labor management in war. It was a new experience to handle so many white workers in the field, let alone coolies.¹⁷² No wonder that haste and a lack of clear cut techniques or priorities should have dogged their use from the minute that war stale-mated, and it was realized that the need for manual workers to sustain the armies in the artificially contrived "combat" zones was likely to be of long duration.¹⁷³ Despite all their best intentions, the officers of all shades of politics, opinions, and degrees of expertise who found themselves in charge of the disposition of la-

¹⁷¹"The Art of Wangling," The New Statesman, September 13, 1919, p. 586.

¹⁷²Gibb, "The Organisation of Labour in the Great War," p. 171.

¹⁷³P.R.O./W.O. 106/33, C.L.C. History, "A History of War Committee Report," June 5, 1919.

bor resources occasionally threw up their hands and admitted that "the economical use of men . . . was often a matter of local /sic/ adjustment."¹⁷⁴ On the spot decisions often negated the best laid plans for use and exploitation of workers.

When war commenced, the disbursement of existing non-skilled labor resources rested largely with the Directorate of Fortifications and Works, which had itself been the subject of revision and appraisal in the immediate pre-war period. Indeed, at the very time the Directorate was being mobilized in August, 1914, a plan was put before the Army Council for bringing all works and their direction under its control. This plan, the implementation of which might have saved an infinite amount of squabbling, jealousy, and mismanagement later on, was typically "never definitely rejected, but not proceeded with."¹⁷⁵

Haldane, who stood in for Asquith at the War Office in these early days of war, and the military members of the Army Council, were, it is true, generally in favor of "putting all works under one responsible directorate,"¹⁷⁶

¹⁷⁴P.R.O./W.O. 107/37, Labour Report, p. 156.

¹⁷⁵P.R.O./W.O. 32/4810, Change of Title and Duties of Director of Fortifications and Works, Memorandum on the Attitude of the Army Council.

¹⁷⁶Ibid.

for the pressures of war, even at that stage, made plain the need for coordination of all tasks with the labor resources available to carry them out. When the Directorate of Fortifications and Works later pleaded for its own upgrading, and the inclusion of its director on the Army Council as a step in this direction, the request was refused.

There is no doubt that other branches of the service which disposed of labor contingents, for example, the Corps of Royal Engineers and the Directorate of Transport, viewed with hostility any attempt to give another branch precedence in the organization or disposition of workers. The Corps of Royal Engineers, too, always tried to insist that it alone knew how to dispose of its labor auxiliaries, and possessed the sole technical knowledge requisite in order to place them correctly.¹⁷⁷

In part as a result of the envy and opposition of fellow soldiers, the Directorate of Fortifications and Works failed to win the status of a labor coordinating establishment. Expediency with Belgian labor, and with artisan companies raised in France to supplement British labor companies, although in strict pursuit of the policy laid down in the Field Service Regulations, were not at

¹⁷⁷The Corps of Royal Engineers in the Great War (London: n. p., 1919), p. 161.

all successful.¹⁷⁸ By mid-1916 it became imperative that some coordinating body with greater administrative and executive powers be constituted to plan, control, and predict the course of labor personnel utilization.

The establishment provided to take care of this need was the Directorate of Labour, which actually took over its function on January 5, 1917. The Directorate of Fortifications and Works remained, although with diminished importance, and other branches of the service, like the Directorate of Transportation, were still to retain autonomous control of certain skilled and semi-skilled workers.

The Directorate of Labour was to concern itself mainly with the dispositions of unskilled men, and was in large part inspired by the need to cater to the coming influx of Chinese. Colonel Fairfax, Commander of the Chinese Labour Corps, became Senior Advisor on Chinese Labour to the new Directorate, which was presided over by Colonel, later Brigadier-General, E. G. Wace. In the coming deployments of Chinese labor, Fairfax was to represent the more conservative "business" mentality, while Wace, an Oxfordian, considered himself progressive and

¹⁷⁸p.R.O./W.O. 161/2, The Historical Narrative of the Works Directorate, p. 6. ("no serious steps appear to have been taken to fulfill the needs of unskilled labor.")

ultra-scientific in his management of native labor.

At its peak in late 1917, the Directorate, which owed its loyalty in the army structure to the Quarter-master-General, disposed of a force of approximately three hundred and eighty-seven thousand unskilled workers,¹⁷⁹ of whom over ninety thousand were by then Chinese. In the field, a Labour Group Headquarters was established in each sector to deal with the disposal of from five to six individual companies of perhaps five hundred men each. A lieutenant-colonel and nineteen junior officers staffed each group headquarters.¹⁸⁰ As a part of its records, a Chinese Labour Corps record office was established in Whitehall. No trace now remains of this depository except for some statistical and narrative sources in duplicate at the Public Record Office.¹⁸¹

And so the new Directorate at the start nominally disposed of quite a substantial force.¹⁸² In February,

¹⁷⁹G.S.O., G.H.Q. (Montreuil-sur-Mer), p. 168.

¹⁸⁰Gibb, "The Organisation of Labour in the Great War," p. 177.

¹⁸¹It was officially predicted at the time that these records would disappear, as "no provision has been made for them in the 'after war' establishment." See P. R.O./W.O. 106/33, C.L.C. History. (Some material that did survive was probably lost in the bombing of the second war.)

¹⁸²viz. 32 Infantry Labour Battalions, 119 Infantry Labour Companies, 7 Works Battalions, and 101 Infantry Works Companies.

1917, still before the arrival of the first coolies, supplementary unskilled personnel from other branches were admitted to its jurisdiction, while in May, the Corps of Royal Engineers and the Army Service Corps finally allowed some of their men to fall under the auspices of the Directorate of Labour.¹⁸³

However, as Colonel Wace remarked upon assuming responsibility, "when the Labour Directorate came into being . . . it proved extremely difficult to discover where all the labour was, under whom it was working, and how it was employed."¹⁸⁴ It proved even more difficult to overcome these challenges.

Right at the outset of the use of the Chinese in France Colonel Wace claimed that he saw that their functions were going to be inhibited by confusion of direction and lack of proper management. He was not surprised when Sir Eric Geddes, as head of the Directorate General of Military Railways, felt that he should have pre-eminent claim to the Chinese secured in Wei-hai-Wei. Geddes was finally prevailed upon to accept only the first seven thousand merely because, as it was admitted, the raising of the coolies was technically the responsibility of his

¹⁸³P.R.O./W.O. 106/33, C.L.C. History, Minute Sheet, 1917.

¹⁸⁴P.R.O./W.O. 107/37, Labour Report, p. 132.

department,¹⁸⁵ and also because as early as September 26, 1916, he had written an urgent memorandum on the need for the employment of twelve thousand coolies on a narrow gauge railroad project in which he was involved in France.¹⁸⁶

From the very beginning, noted Wace with ex post facto sanctimony, "this special earmarking was vicious in principle, and should never have been allowed."¹⁸⁷ It resulted all too frequently in "the consequent waste of power due to the employing Officers making /sic/ work for the Chinese when the legitimate work was slack,"¹⁸⁸ merely in order to hold on to them for possible future disposition.

Entries in the war diaries of units employing the Chinese tend to confirm the general tenor of Wace's re-

¹⁸⁵Ibid., p. 47. (Geddes was Bourne's direct superior in London.)

¹⁸⁶p.R.O./W.O. 32/5145, Construction of Light Railways for the B.E.F. in France, "Provision of Material and Personnel, 1916," Memorandum of Director General of Military Railways to Quartermaster-General, War Office, London, September 26, 1916. (Geddes, who became First Lord of the Admiralty in 1917, had a habit of prodigality with the laborers at his disposal and was apt to make promises on their behalf which could not be carried through. See P. R.O./W.O. 158/45, War Cabinet File no. 1, March, 1917 to January, 1918, Minutes of Anglo-French Conference, 10, Downing St., March 12 and 13, 1917.)

¹⁸⁷p.R.O./W.O. 107/37, Labour Report, p. 47.

¹⁸⁸Ibid.

marks. For example, the official diary of the Assistant director of Supplies in Boulogne, Lieutenant T. A. Morgan, records that so poor was the distribution of labor resources at his disposal that on one day too few men were available for a specific task, and on another, too many.¹⁸⁹ By September, 1917, when he was employing additional Chinese, the same problem existed more acutely. On occasion, Morgan had to requisition Army Service Corps' personnel, even though Chinese theoretically assigned to him by the Labour Directorate had not been officially detached.¹⁹⁰ Some of the labor which did finally arrive from the Directorate's pool was unequal to the heavy tasks presented it,¹⁹¹ although this was admittedly an unusual occurrence.

Morgan's frustrations were by no means unique. Examples of similar situations may be found scattered throughout the war diaries which still exist. So difficult did the question of dispositions become that some units were even forced to recruit local labor, although as already suggested, this was a very poor expedient. This embarrassing state of affairs existed at a time when an ade-

¹⁸⁹P.R.O./W.O. 95/3984, War Diary of Assistant Director of Supplies, B.E.F., Boulogne, May 25, 1917.

¹⁹⁰Ibid., September 7, 1917.

¹⁹¹Ibid., October 2, 1917.

quate supply of Chinese and other native labor companies existed in base camp concentrations, waiting to be called upon or requisitioned.¹⁹²

Naturally Wace and his direct subordinates began to experience the annoyance of commanders who failed to receive adequately distributed aid from his Directorate's pool. Wace admitted, although without accepting direct personal responsibility, that,

The intelligent distribution of labour . . . is especially necessary for the Chinese. Everywhere in France instances of the reverse are apparent. . . . The Chinese are not ignorant. They have brains. Orders and counter orders and unintelligent distribution of labour . . . have a demoralising effect . . . and induce them to regard our brains as inferior to their own.¹⁹³

For Wace, the issue of poor deployment was redolent with racial significance as well as suggestions of personal inadequacy; how could the master race be seen in the act of fumbling for a coherent policy? Besides, poor utilization of the Chinese damaged their morale and efficiency as well as their respect for the British.

¹⁹²P.R.O./W.O. 95/3985, War Diary of Assistant Director of Supplies, B.E.F., Abbeville, April 8, 1918. (The Abbeville sector was one of the first in which coolies operated. Their great base camp at Noyelles was a few kilometers from the town. For details, see P.R.O./W.O. 95/3976, War Diary of 'Q' Branch, Abbeville H.Q., 1916-1917, *passim*.)

¹⁹³P.R.O./W.O. 107/37, Labour Report, "Notes on Chinese Labour," para. 8, n.d.

Was all of this just the result of so many bureaucratic blunders, the type that are common in any great war? Did confusion occur because such vast numbers of labor had never been employed before? Or was it the erratic nature of the war's operations, first mobile and then static, that forced its pattern of inconsistency upon the attempts of the Labour Directorate to marshal its resources effectively? All of these elements undoubtedly were present. But present also was the conflict between the two types of mentality referred to earlier; those that were divided between a primitive production determined organization, and those who felt that the disposition of the Chinese and other natives should be the result of either technologically determined or rationally predicted estimates or performance, usefulness, or effectiveness. All the time the emergencies of war played into the hands of the former, who tended to be junior officers in charge of labor battalions or companies. They could not resist the temptation to depart from outlined management structures and procedures to place their coolies at work coping with an unforeseen or unassigned task. In this, the commanders of units "employing" Chinese and native labor were as much to blame, for they knew only the exigencies of the moment, and welcomed the addition of temporary or unasked-

for labor. Under such conditions it was hard for Wace and his "efficients" to run a rational labor distribution machine.

To re-emphasize; the Labour Directorate, with Colonel Wace at its head, had been designed to remedy this eventuality. It was to be the coordinating body of unskilled labor, governing the dispositions of most other Directorates in this sphere, and parcelling out its contingents with thoughtful care.

Wace determined to see this task in a pluralistic way. Each major branch of the service which he served, like the Army Service Corps, was to retain a nucleus of semi-skilled laborers and artisans with the Chinese and other natives cast as part of a floating resource, capable of temporary junction with any such nucleus as specialized demands and needs arose. In adopting such an approach, Wace neglected the problems of integration which were bound to arise. He hoped his floating pool of men would form the basic integrative resource, with each assignment of labor temporarily departing the pool to do a specific task for units who had made plain their requirements through clear requisitions for aid. This was his concept, almost his ideology. Through it he hoped to modify, streamline, and coordinate to some degree the energies of the vast and potentially unmanage-

able pool over which he was given command. This, to Wace, was "scientific" and modern management. His ideas were advanced, of that there can be little doubt.¹⁹⁴ He hoped to act as a contractor rather than as a mere labor exchange.

But the real distinctions to be applied in utilization and distribution of labor resources never became so clear cut. For one thing, his pool was not homogeneous enough to permit objective parceling out. Wace was supposed only to deal in unskilled labor, but as he himself finally recognized,

There is no such thing as really unskilled labour. The Real distinction is that between permanently allotted and interchangeable labour, selected for its aptitude . . . And yet as the needs vary, it is more economical for the Force as a whole that Labour should be pooled and transferred from one unit to another as required.¹⁹⁵

The centrally directed allotment of contingents from one pool remained Wace's ideal, but he could never attain it because the quality, capacity, and skill of his contingents varied as much as the variety of tasks which faced them. "Economy" and "efficiency," his two watchwords,

¹⁹⁴For example, see S. H. Udy, Work in Traditional and Modern Society (Englewood Cliffs: Prentice-Hall, 1970). (Many of Wace's ideas are remarkably akin to those discussed in Udy's chapter "The Development of Pluralistic Organization," pp. 97-115, passim.)

¹⁹⁵P.R.O./W.O. 107/37, Labour Report, p. 5.

paled beside these imperatives.¹⁹⁶

It is the war diaries of commanders requiring labor which amply convey the frustrations which resulted when the pool, Wace's "floating resource," was called upon as demands arose. Often, for example, the pressing urgency of a task was past by the time, say, a train unloading a company of coolies had been marched from the nearest pool base camp to supplement a "nucleus" task force already engaged on the work.¹⁹⁷ Later, when it was conclusively proven that selected Chinese could constitute a more permanent force with a management rationale of its own, be entirely responsible for laying sections of railroad track, salvaging war material, and show qualities of sustained effort, the cherished image of Wace's in regard to a modified floating labor pool was abandoned. But by that time the active war was over. Not until too late did Wace really appreciate that the coolies could form skilled and semi-skilled companies, leave the pool, and make valid contributions to the war effort apart from the

¹⁹⁶After the war the columns of the New Statesman ridiculed Wace's aspirations; "The higher labour authorities were like children with a new toy . . . forms and returns multiplied as they played with their vast resources." See "The Art of Wangling," The New Statesman, p. 585.

¹⁹⁷For an instance, see P.R.O./W.O. 95/3985, War Diary of Col. A. K. Seccombe, Director of Supplies, Lines of Communication, B.E.F., France, August 25, 1917.

unified group he was endeavoring to control.

Wace might have appreciated this earlier had his relations with Colonel Fairfax, the Chinese Labour Corps commander, not blinded him to certain realities concerning the coolies; Wace, with an insistent and arbitrary manner, clashed with his outspoken subordinate, Fairfax, and thus lost the confidence and support of his most important subordinate. But their points of view on the handling of Chinese labor were really too disparate to have been compatible in any case.

Symbolic of the animus which grew up between the two men over the question of the coolies is a pressing memorandum to the War Office, drawn up independently by Fairfax, in which he begs for the creation of an inspectorate to look into the question of poor communication between his Chinese Labour Corps company commanders and their superiors at the Labour Directorate. Poor deployment of coolies, the grave lack of training and selection which had allowed "a proportion of professional criminal riff-raff, agitators, and undesirables"¹⁹⁸ to join the Corps, and the sometimes inexplicable directions of Wace's directives all provided ammunition for Fairfax's

¹⁹⁸P.R.O./W.O. 106/33, C.L.C. History, Memorandum from Col. Fairfax, H.Q., C.L.C., France, to Col. Weatherall, War Office, London, December 28, 1917.

charges. He was production oriented himself, and found the complicated directions of the Labour Directorate irksome.¹⁹⁹ Wace's fondness for graphs and performance estimates annoyed and confused Labour Corps' personnel, urged Fairfax. The war was not an exercise in scientific labor management, but a life and death struggle in which the coolies must be exploited regardless of such methods.

What Fairfax wanted was the autonomy from which to direct his coolies as he thought fit. Being considered an adjunct of a vast and, to him, promiscuously available labor pool, was not conducive to his sense of professional entitlement. The acrimony between Wace and Fairfax undoubtedly prevented the former from paying enough attention to the skilled and semi-skilled roles the coolies might play. His defensiveness about abandoning some of his pool concepts might well have been lessened save for the mutual jealousy between the two.

This situation was particularly unfortunate for the status of the coolies, for while the two men most concerned with their deployment fought over methods of management and policy, many of their potentials remained untapped. The Chinese Labour Corps contained men whose skills were crucially necessary to the Allied war effort, and others whose aptitude for learning specialized tasks

¹⁹⁹Ibid.

was quite phenomenal.

Fortunately for Britain, Chinese originally imported as part of the "Raw" product could be found before the war ended in foundry shops, building, driving, and repairing tanks and motor cars behind the lines, and engaged on a multitude of other semi-skilled, skilled, or even quasi-professional tasks. Racial prejudice and professional jealousy between military men had almost prevented this important contribution from taking effect.²⁰⁰ When their full value was belatedly realized, there arose a constant combing out effort in the Chinese companies to determine which of the coolies could be considered proficient enough for transfer to a specialized unit.²⁰¹

In January of 1918 the first really serious use of skilled and semi-skilled members of the Chinese Labour Corps began. In June of that year a monthly return was instituted by the Labour Directorate for the purpose of seeing that such men were at last properly employed where they could do most good, and not wasted on purely menial or manual jobs. At one time in 1918 there were twenty-one

²⁰⁰However, some attempts were made to categorize some shipments of coolies upon arrival in France. These attempts did not prove successful and were superficial.

²⁰¹P.R.O./W.O. 32/5091, Maintenance of Battalions in France, 1916-1917, Memorandum from Office of Adjutant General, G.H.Q., B.E.F., France, to Chief of Imperial General Staff, London, October 29, 1917. (Note is made of the danger of reducing Corps strength under such circumstances.)

recognized skilled or semi-skilled coolie companies, over ten thousand men, and above and beyond this figure "numerous other Companies have at sometime or other been employed on essentially skilled work."²⁰² The notion of the utter predomination of ignorance in the Corps' Chinese personnel must under these circumstances be abandoned.

A few specific examples will emphasize this contention. At number five Area Motor Transport Central Workshops Chinese taken from manual labor companies were by early 1918 running their own truck repair shop, smith's shop, molding bay, paint shop and motorcycle repair works. In November of the same year Company 147 might have been found in the great siege park at Douai working in the highly skilled artillery maintenance facility. Many "coolie" fitters had their own shops, and Chinese Labour Corps' Companies 51, 69, 90, and 173 exclusively serviced the tanks at the big Tank Corps Depot at Aubry-les-Hesdin.

For a few British officers there was even the sight, which they found greatly humiliating, of Chinese almost entirely maintaining the important railroad lines between Calais, Zenehem, Dieppe, Boulogne, Audrieux, Dannes, Abbeville, Saigneville, Abancourt, and Soquence, leaving

²⁰²P.R.O./W.O. 107/37, Labour Report, p. 47. (No. 8 Co., C.L.C. was employed in the Light Railway Workshop near Abbeville as early as January 8, 1918.)

all "but a minimum of skilled British personnel" in the vicinity.²⁰³

These and other specialist companies, made up of the metamorphosed "Raw Importation," generally remained within the Chinese Labour Corps itself, but some were contracted out to branches of the service desiring particular help. Under such circumstances the companies endured a rather ambiguous identity. Should they adhere to the nuclei of skilled white workers retained by most independent directorates, like the Directorate of Transportation? Or should they still be regarded as components, albeit anomalous, of the Labour Directorate's vast pool of "unskilled" labor?

Sharp rivalry grew up between Wace's organization and some of the commands who claimed exclusive use of skilled and semi-skilled Chinese. Wace particularly resented this competitive angle. It frustrated his basic rationale of imposing standard procedures on the distribution of all Chinese workers. Even when he came to admit the necessity of using such men where they could be most effective, and pulling them from his pool, he still expressed reservations. One of his reservations was based on a very practical foundation. Chinese Labour Corps commanders, as he found out, resented the manpower

²⁰³Ibid.

strengths that they lost as a result of the search for technical and other skills among their men. They were further disaffected when the coolies they did retain acted in an unskilled or supportive capacity for specialist units to which former colleagues and Chinese personnel had recently been seconded. Their already tenuous professional prestige was at stake.

But the greatest damage done by the competitive angle noted above was the impact it had upon the sensible employment of the skilled and semi-skilled Chinese once their talents were put to use. If there had long been a refusal on the parts of influential staff officers and senior unit commanders to recognize the full extent and potential of this material, the initial mistake could at least have been partially rectified by a greater willingness to work together with all interested branches of the service to procure a fair share of the energies and potentials released. This did not happen. In the official sources which remain, a number of instances may be found of the poor organization and utilization to which such a situation inevitably led. For instance, in early 1918 the deputy director of transport in one important sector in France remarked in his war diary that,

A difficulty has arisen as regards the relationship of the 114th Chinese Labour Company to the 5th Heavy Repair Shop. According to the Director of Transport's arrangement with

the Director of Labour /Wace⁷, this company is a technical company . . . but the Base Commandant Dunkirk does not take this view; he considers that the company can be employed anywhere in the Area at his discretion.²⁰⁴

As a matter of fact, this particular company was designated "semi-skilled," and the upshot of the quarrel concerning its designation was the waste of much valuable time and effort which resulted in the unit being split so that a mere fifteen men could be employed in the repair shop, while the remainder returned to the labor pool.²⁰⁵

This example shows how potentially disruptive of organization was the personal attitude of a commander to whose command a Chinese labor company might be temporarily attached. If he so chose he could ignore the recommendations of the coolies' own commander, or the advice of the Labour Directorate. He could even change the reasons for his original requisition of labor from the pool, and sometimes for frivolous reasons, rather than to cope with the demands of war.²⁰⁶ This anomaly affected manual workers

²⁰⁴p.R.O./W.O. 95/3992, War Diary of Deputy Director of Transport, Northern Sector, B.E.F., France, February 15, 1918.

²⁰⁵Ibid., February 18, 1918.

²⁰⁶The columns of The New Statesman suggested that it had not been unusual "to hear of an instance where 150 coolies were kept in camp for a fortnight, levelling out ground for a tennis court . . ." See "The Art of Wangling," The New Statesman, p. 586. (The paper was not alone in recording these instances.)

and those Chinese accomplishing more demanding tasks.

According to Colonel Wace, who found this state of affairs the ultimate evidence of stupidity and unscientific labor management, the situation was due entirely to the ambiguous phrasing of the Quartermaster-General's memorandum of January 5, 1917, under which the Labour Directorate had been formally constituted. This directive placed the burden of distribution and control during working hours on the "Employer" or unit for which labor was working.²⁰⁷ With each employing commander disposing of his labor resources as he thought fit during the eight or, as in the case of the Chinese, ten hours during which they were within his compass, the poor utilization of the overall pool could only be worsened considerably.²⁰⁸

It has been suggested how Wace aimed at moving from the invidious position of labor exchange to that of professional contractor. But it would be too simplistic to agree with him that the root of his inability to accomplish this lay in ambiguities perpetrated by the Quartermaster-General. Certainly Wace's duties and obligations could and should have been spelled out more clearly, but such a move would by no means have eliminated the rival-

²⁰⁷P.R.O./W.O. 107/37, Labour Report, p. 7.

²⁰⁸Nine hours was the working day for Blacks.

ries, jealousies, and insubordinations which frustrated his policies of labor control. In vain he reprimanded officers in branches of the service which he served, ordering them to refrain from questioning the Directorate's allotment, administration, and treatment of its labor pool.²⁰⁹ In vain, too, did Wace attempt to explain clearly the obligations he felt each commander using the pool should abide by. "No movements of labour," he wrote in one of his toughest directives, "will be made by 'Employers' without reference to the Labour Group Headquarters of the Area concerned."²¹⁰

Finally, in what amounted to self-preservative retaliation, the Labour Directorate tried to select only loyal commanders for its labor companies, insisting that they adhere as closely as possible to the orders and ideology of the Directorate while trying not to clash too seriously with the officers of commands that they were assigned to assist. This call for allegiance resulted in an untenable situation being made even worse for the Chinese, because the calibre of officer in charge of them was such as to be unequal in most instances to the performance of so delicate a feat. Such officers

²⁰⁹For an example, see P.R.O./W.O. 95/3985, War Diary of Assistant Director of Supplies, B.E.F., Abbeville, June 18, 1917.

²¹⁰P.R.O./W.O. 107/37, Labour Report, p. 10.

tended to follow Fairfax's production oriented mentality, fall in with the demands of many of the commanders whom they served, and ignore Wace's "scientific" methods for deployment and distribution of labor.

Colonel Wace had optimistically laid it down as essential to his concept of labor management that all company commanders,

be selected and trained in the principles /sic/ of labour administration and in the economical employment of labour. They must know the capacity of the labour at their disposal and the practical application of labour to work /sic/²¹¹

This was too sophisticated a goal so far as most of the Chinese Labour Corps' commanders at company level were concerned. Many of the subalterns in charge of coolies had never seen a Chinese before, and had not the slightest understanding of his make-up.²¹² Neither had they any appreciation of Wace's intellectual estimation of correct labor management. Not surprisingly under this dual disability they were easily intimidated by senior officers to whose commands they found their coolie companies temporarily attached.

This sustained atmosphere of crisis, in which it has been demonstrated that the Chinese played a large

²¹¹Ibid., p. 196.

²¹²H. Boswell-Lancaster, "Our Chinese Allies of 1914-1918," Our Empire, Vol. XV (August, 1939), p. 40.

part, helped to bring about the creation of an entirely new establishment in February, 1918. It was dubbed Labour Control. Colonel Wace remained to head it. It had broader reaching powers than the Labour Directorate which it replaced, and was designed to coordinate the efforts of all activities of labor employers in the armies in France. The foundation of Labour Control was brought about not so much as a result of criticisms regarding the efficient employment of labor resources in the pool, although these figured very prominently in the decision, but rather as a result of serious concerns about weaknesses in discipline and executive material in the body of the old Labour Directorate, its Area Headquarters, and units under its control.

Here the Chinese Labour Corps played a major role in bringing about the reorganization. The men who officered its companies, although often personally above reproach, failed to make good military material because too often they had been chosen on account of their civil background in China, or because of some other civilian capacity which it was thought by the War Office might be helpful in the direction of the coolies.²¹³ These men

²¹³The War Office admitted that Chinese companies were "too newly organised and many of their Officers had had very little military experience." See P.R.O./W.O. 107/37, Labour Report, p. 13.

pleased neither Wace nor the professional officers to whom their coolie companies were seconded. And so, just as the pending arrival of the Chinese in France in the first place had prompted the setting up of the Labour Directorate in January, 1917, so their continued presence in Europe now helped to force a major re-assessment of labor management and direction resulting in the appearance of Labour Control.

The general ineffectiveness of the Chinese Labour Corps' officers was heightened by the very existence of their unhappy role as middlemen between "employers" and the Labour Directorate. They were now to be helped to overcome this invidious position. The new Labour Control was to provide company commanders of coolies and other natives with a genuine and substantial support in the form of ranking colonels, Commandants of Labour, as they were to be known, instead of the former assistant directors of labor and their deputy assistant directors.

This reform was important, for it considerably raised the morale of the Chinese Labour Corps' company commanders, who now felt that at least there were officers at Labour Control who would not only listen to them, but also had the power of rank to exert should it become necessary to rebuke or caution officers by whom the Chinese were utilized. But this reform also emphasized what had

probably been the major weakness of the old Labour Directorate; namely, its tentative command structure. The assistant directors of labor and their deputies had been engaged in January of 1917 merely to "advise and assist,"²¹⁴ rather than actually to direct the allotment and deployment of labor resources. This ephemeral brief had proven fatal when it came to dealings with sometimes obstreperous commanders of units using labor from the Labour Directorate's pool. It had been generally recognized by staff officers of other branches that the directors of labor in the field had no serious executive role, and consequently need not be listened to with much seriousness. This state of affairs alone would have prevented many of Wace's policies from being implemented.

Another notable limitation on the effectiveness of the Labour Directorate which also adversely affected the Chinese had been the assumption that it would carry out work ordinarily done by the Adjutant-General's office. Questions of discipline and organization which had nothing to do with the disposition of labor had to be dealt with by Wace and his subordinates. Time was wasted here which might otherwise have been occupied in improving the distribution of labor personnel. As the Labour Directorate

²¹⁴P.R.O./W.O. 32/1656, Position of Proposed Labour Directorate, Memorandum of September 9, 1916.

had been formed under the auspices of the Quartermaster-General it had no business doing the work of the Adjutant-General's office, too. The reorganization of early 1918 acknowledged this. Administrative tasks of the fundamental sort were placed under the Adjutant-General, while Wace and his men now won greater latitude for the implementation of their own policies, although still nominally under the Quartermaster-General. At the same time, however, liaison machinery was constructed to enable Labour Control to maintain close contact with the Adjutant-General's staff.

Once the Labour Control began to function in the spring of 1918 a choice lay more clearly between a greater move toward coherent centralized control of all labor resources, both skilled and unskilled, and the continued assertions of independence by local commanders in the field which had proved so damaging to the Labour Directorate and the Chinese throughout 1917. It was inevitable that much of the old parochialism should remain, especially as the Corps of Royal Engineers and other Branches of the service still managed under various evasions to retain some vestiges of their old independence in the distribution of labor.²¹⁵ But elements of Wace's vision lay within his reach for the first time. In order to adver-

²¹⁵The Corps of Royal Engineers in the Great War (London: n.p., 1919), p. 39.

tise its resolve that centralized direction should be the norm, the Labour Control command, personified by Wace, declared,

Formations to which earmarked Labour is allotted are responsible for its inspection and for reporting any readjustment that may become necessary . . . or any wastage of this Labour, and /they/ will make suggestions for its more economical use.²¹⁶

That the creation of the Labour Control did much to improve the utilization of the Chinese is indisputable. Questions of priority in their use seem for the first time to have been dealt with rationally and expeditiously, and although their company commanders were subjected to greater pressures in regard to efficient management and discipline, they in turn now had more substantial backing from the new Labour Commandants. The war diaries reflect the impact this arrangement had upon the efficient deployment of native labor.

The only fresh phenomenon which seriously jeopardized the Corps' improved status was the eventual return of the war to a mobile pattern with the consequent eventual abandonment of fixed defensive positions to which this led. And yet the department of the service which gave Labour Control most trouble in relation to the Chinese at this juncture was not one of the branches involved

²¹⁶p.R.O./W.O. 107/37, Labour Report, Charter of the New Labour Control, para. 16, "Distribution of Labour."

in the physical forward movement of the armies but, as the appropriate documents testify, the Docks Directorate, which controlled the Channel ports. Even here, according to their own officers, the Chinese performed quite well. The damage was done not so much by their incapacity as by the continued inept assignment of their tasks.²¹⁷ For this the requisitions of the Docks Directorate and its commanders must assume responsibility.

The source of this incompetence appears to have lain in lack of desire for any genuine communication with Labour Control or its commandants. The outcome of a series of crises which dogged the pattern of Chinese employment in the docks was a committee of inquiry, chaired by Major-General R. Ford, Deputy Quartermaster-General at B.E.F. Headquarters in France. The committee's report urged greater cooperation between the Docks Directorate and Labour Control, and insisted that the former observe the conditions under which Wace operated. The committee also referred to the animosity which existed between Wace and Brigadier-General R. L. Wedgwood, Director of Docks, which had contributed to the exacerbation of the whole situation. But the committee's conclu-

²¹⁷Ibid., Memorandum of Assistant Commandant of Labour, G.H.Q., B.E.F., France, July /²⁷, 1918. (An example reads in part: "Docks Directorate assigned six Chinese to each of 14 railway trucks at 11:00 a.m. Chinese still ready by mid-day. Had not received direction an hour later," etc.)

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²¹⁷Ibid., Memorandum of Assistant Commandant of Labour, G.H.Q., B.E.F., France, July /27, 1918. (An example reads in part: "Docks Directorate assigned six Chinese to each of 14 railway trucks at 11:00 a.m. Chinese still ready by mid-day. Had not received direction an hour later," etc.)

sions were virtually redundant when issued in October, 1918, and had little impact upon the subsequent employment of the diminishing number of coolies in the Channel ports.²¹⁸

The fact is that Labour Control, although greatly superior to the Directorate of Labour as a vehicle for Wace's "scientific" methods of deployment, and able to achieve much higher levels of efficiency in its allocation of resources, failed to win the status it needed and deserved as a result of the changes of February, 1918, which brought it into existence. It is one thing to redesign and modify an establishment, quite another to have it instantly accepted as genuinely authoritative. The Control came to be seen largely as the Labour Directorate had been regarded; namely as an exchange rather than as a professional contractor. Colonel Wace regarded this as almost analogous to the worst side of the civil labor sphere, where "industry works with a reserve of Labour. As men are not wanted . . . they are thrown back on the Labour market, and it is not the business of the employer what becomes of them."²¹⁹

Wace spent much of his energy in the continuing effort to prevent this careless exploitation of his pool,

²¹⁸Ibid., Appendix 'Z.'

²¹⁹Ibid., p. 170.

and of the Chinese who formed such a large element of it, but without the success for which he personally always hoped. He wanted to train a staff that would recognize the importance of the methods and policy he used, and thus create for the first time a recognized rationale for the use of labor in the actual battlefield conditions of war. Intensity of an army's demands for labor, he always told his subordinates, was ideally determined not by the fluctuations to which civil labor is subject, but by two controlling variables which the clever military labor director appreciates and is able to manipulate; the assessment of priorities, to be determined in this case by his own office as a result of long term prognoses, and the existing military situation. For Wace, this amounted to finding a happy medium between what he regarded as the officially sanctioned mandate of the professional Labour Control establishment, and pure expediency. But when the war became dramatically mobile again in mid-1918, these two variables, which had assumed dogmatic proportions in Wace's thinking, were proven mutually irreconcilable, and the demands of war assumed paramount importance.

If Wace failed in his attempt to create a school of thinking in regard to the management of labor in war, it is still important to remember that his carefully laid down rules for the procedures of labor employment still

applied to an extent, and provided an important framework in which the Chinese continued to function instead of being grossly exploited as might well have been the case had not "employers" had to account in writing for the use made of their coolies. Wace's organization represented a form of legality against which the exigencies of war washed, but which they could not submerge.

Colonel Wace's professional interest in the Chinese was reflected in the care he took to estimate their performance and lay down norms for their use. After study, he and his junior officers introduced a broader task work schedule for the Chinese to pursue rather than the lengthy timework system²²⁰ which kept them in the field for ten hours a day, and which he rightly regarded as unsuited to those who had no practical interest in victory. Taskwork recognized that a basic incentive system could be appreciated by the coolies. If they finished a given task before the conclusion of their ten hours, a long break was to ensue before the resumption of their next task, or perhaps the remainder of their day's labor might be remitted altogether.

Sometimes the Chinese seem to have accomplished more by way of specific tasks in, say, seven hours than they had formerly done when working to the limits of the al-

²²⁰Piecework was never given to labor units on active duty.

lotted ten hour span. This looked like a triumph for the psychology of Wace's method. The application of his positive reward system was popularly employed at railheads in an attempt to eliminate the kind of wanton wastage of effort that had become commonplace in the use of the Chinese at that particular point. But here again the more progressive and modern-sounding notions of Labour Control were frustrated. Senior officers could be heard complaining that unpleasant comparisons had emerged between the amount of work accomplished by coolies under the task work regime, and the work accomplished by white labor companies under similar conditions.²²¹

Combined with this anxiety for the preservation of racial superiority one finds also that commanders of Chinese Labour Corps companies functioning exclusively on the task work schedule tended to ignore promised rewards in the form of rest periods or a shortened day, and merely stepped up the overall effort demanded of their men. Production oriented as they were, they saw no necessity for the psychological and physical rewards essential if the system were to work. Without that essential knowledge of their charges which Wace deemed essential, some Chinese Labour Corps officers believed the

²²¹See Appendix 'C' at the end of this paper for some comparisons, Supra., p. 267.

exaggerated reports that they had heard retailed at second hand concerning the coolies' legendary capacity for work. Consequently, the temptation existed to keep up the pressure, and to give the Chinese an increasing number of tasks to perform, some of them far too far forward of the positions supposedly guaranteed them in their contracts.²²² The commanders involved defended these actions by reminding Labour Control of its own fiats in relation to efficiency. On one or two occasions abuse of the taskwork system actually led to mutinies,²²³ and the whole idea as Wace envisioned it finally had to be drastically modified or abandoned altogether.

The pending arrival of the Chinese Labour Corps had helped provide for the formation of the Labour Directorate, its use and abuse in France had had an impact upon the materialization of Labour Control, and its existence had provided a paradigm over which the two basic types of labor management mentality fought. As such the Corps had a profound and continued impact upon the deployment of all labor resources by the British armies during the

²²²For an example, see P.R.O./W.O. 95/1641, War Diary of Commander, Corps of Royal Engineers, 7th Div. H.Q., B. E.F., France, October 26, 1917.

²²³For an example, see P.R.O./W.O. 95/3984, War Diary of Assistant Director of Supplies, B.E.F., Boulogne, March 11, 1918.

years 1917 and 1918. Neither Wace with his scientific methods, nor Fairfax with his production oriented outlook, won a clear victory by war's end. Neither was the experiment ever to be repeated. Although in 1923 Colonel Gibb could tell his students at the staff college most emphatically that it still lay in the future for someone to take the essential step of recognizing a "Central Labour authority responsible for arranging the supply, the terms of engagement, and the distribution or allotment of men to work,"²²⁴ he himself could not know how radically the whole concept of war would change before the next great conflict. Certainly contingents of manual laborers were needed during the second world war, but advances in strategies and weapons design, and the advent on a huge scale of motorized transport, did away with armies of labor in the field, and placed the emphasis instead on the exploitation and management of domestic labor. There never was, and there probably never will be, a need for another Chinese Labour Corps; its role was unique and now belongs to history. In the final estimate, many of Wace's methods proved correct, and have become a part of the history of civil labor management since 1918. The ideas and prejudices of his opponents began to pass from the scene just as inevitably as did the Corps itself.

²²⁴Gibb, "The Organisation of Labour in the Great War," p. 173.

CHAPTER IV
THE RESPONSE OF ORGANIZED LABOR IN BRITAIN
TO THE RAISING OF THE CHINESE LABOUR CORPS

By late 1916, British labor, through the medium of its unions, had learned to live uneasily with various plans for dilution and substitution. Shop stewards and individual workers might and did feel the acute pressures of these problems, along with the attendant fear of military conscription to which they led,²²⁵ but they had little opportunity for clear or vocal dissent. Toward the end of 1916, however, the complacency of the unions and their leaders was challenged by the specter of massive substitution through the use of Chinese and native labor.

It had leaked via the press, and been rumored consistently, that the government was embarking upon the concrete realization of plans to import coolies to Europe. Were these Orientals destined for France, as official indications seemed to suggest? If so, what part would they play there? Or were the Chinese to take a more sinister role in some scheme of direct substitution in Britain

²²⁵G.D.H. Cole and R. Postgate, The British People: 1746-1946 (New York: A. Knopf, 1961), p. 524.

itself? Under the threat of these anxieties and unresolved questions it is not surprising that for a few months the leaders of organized labor in Britain threw off their lethargy in an attempt to gauge the extent of the threat to their rank and file, and prepared once more to do battle for the rights of the working man.

Genuine fears would have been aroused much earlier had labor leaders divined more clearly the intentions of some military men in relation to the use of Chinese. As early as August, 1916, when the scheme for raising coolies was still in its infancy, a conference was held in Whitehall for the specific purpose of considering what part the projected raising of these men and other natives might play in releasing able-bodied British workers for participation in combat.²²⁶ The War Office and the Army Council acknowledged a desperate need for Chinese labor in France, but they also toyed very seriously with the idea of using additional coolies for purposes of direct substitution in Britain.

However, it was also realized in Whitehall that such a direct introduction of native labor would cause acute problems among British workers, although manpower needs had become so pressing that the confrontation of this is-

²²⁶p.R.O./W.O. 32/11345, Recruitment, Minutes of a Conference to Consider the Proposal that African Native Labour and Chinese Labour be Employed in France, August 25, 1916.

sue seemed almost preferable to the existence of military insecurity in France. One way of avoiding such a confrontation was the use of coolies in France in such a manner as to release older men currently active in white labor corps so that they could return to the domestic factories, and in turn release younger men who could be used solely for combat duties. A number of those involved in the direction of workers in France, among them Major-General Woodward, Director of Military Organisation, were willing to embrace this approach, as it provided an alternative to a direct showdown with British labor, or so they believed. "The Labour Party," noted Woodward, "won't part with more men unless they are replaced somehow."²²⁷ Apparently he felt satisfied that the party would agree to seeing men sent to the front in exchange for others returned to the hearth. But Woodward's interest was really the cabinet. "The Cabinet," he remarked, "will do nothing to raise more [fighting men] unless we can show them that we at the War Office are doing our utmost regardless [sic] to get back able men to replace younger men required for the front."²²⁸

Woodward and some of his colleagues saw the Chinese as a much needed political lever for helping to force the

²²⁷Ibid.

²²⁸Ibid.

hand of the cabinet into complying with the General Staff's urgent requests for broader conscription of domestic manpower. Mr. Asquith had remained dubious about this extension of military power, and had resisted it for so long as he as Premier was able. Now the cabinet over which he presided was less attentive to his leadership than in past years. Consequently, as Woodward knew, it was more amenable to pressures from professional military men. He cared little for the opposition of the Labour party, and not much for the concerted opposition of the workers in Britain. He believed that the cabinet could be pressured into providing for added manpower strengths once the War Office took the initiative in providing some means of releasing white labor in Britain for action in France. Woodward and his colleagues had every reason to believe that Mr. Lloyd George, as Secretary for War, approved of and supported their plans.²²⁹

In practice these plans failed to materialize. This was in part because of the delays and adversities in the production of the Chinese Labour Corps, the important role women began to play in keeping up levels of factory production, and the extension of conscription. But perhaps the most important factor which militated against the introduction of Chinese labor into Britain, and which

²²⁹Ibid.

limited their use as substitutes in France, was the unexpectedly strong, though brief, resistance of labor in Britain.

It must be recalled that throughout the early war years, and once the decision had been made to support the war effort, British labor adopted a narrow, not to say introverted, state of mind. Tamed and conditioned by the illusions of Imperial grandeur,²³⁰ it rallied to the flag just like its brother socialists: Germany. When it spared time to consider broader issues than those affecting the immediate domestic situation, it was usually to speculate vaguely on what direction labor relations might take after the conclusion of hostilities, or whether any future might exist for international socialism after the holocaust.²³¹

The voice of labor was slow to grasp the danger of the Chinese threat. Ripples of concern are evident toward the close of 1916, but do not emerge into prominence until early 1917. In November, 1916, the intellectually, Fabian oriented voice of The New Statesman,

²³⁰B. Semmel, Imperialism and Social Reform: English Social-Imperial Thought, 1895-1914 (Garden City: Doubleday, 1968), p. 226.

²³¹For typical examples, see "The Coming Slavery," The Socialist Standard, June 1, 1916, pp. 76-77, and Rosa Luxembourg, "Rebuilding the International," The Socialist Standard, September 1, 1915, p. 1.

although a defender of the socialist and labor ethos, could magisterially castigate the War Office for "a timid start" in the use of native labor in France.²³² A month or two later, with its complacency shaken, the same newspaper remarked bitterly that British labor's subscription to the war effort would undeniably falter in the face of the use or importation into Europe of colored workers, especially if that force were used in schemes of dilution or direct substitution.²³³

These inconsistencies need not cause surprise. In the individualistic world of the British left shades of opinion from vehement opposition to the introduction of the Chinese into any theater of war, to mild approval of their use on a modest scale both in Britain and in continental Europe, may be found. Basically, the left saw three possible uses for the Chinese, each affecting its own interests; dilution of workers in factories at home by the introduction of coolies, direct substitution of Chinese for workers either at home or in white labor corps abroad in order to release these men to play a part in combat strength plans, or direct competition

²³²"Man Power and Soldier Power," The New Statesman, November 11, 1916, p. 125. (The writer seems to have believed that the "constructive" use of Chinese might actually have stayed the process of dilution or substitution.)

²³³"Labour and its Voice," The New Statesman, January 27, 1917, pp. 389-391, passim.

from the Chinese in British factories given over to them specifically.

This latter state of affairs, it was finally realized, could continue after the war's end. It was The New Statesman that blamed Lloyd George, the Morning Post, and the whole Northcliffe press for encouraging the possibility of this eventuality,²³⁴ and the paper went on to hint that these same elements saw the Chinese as constituting a virtually illimitable pool upon which capitalists in Britain could draw once an armistice was concluded with the enemy. This pool, soon to be "lodged in compounds, and required to undertake the unloading of ships, and any other work . . . under the authority of the present 'governing class,'" was bound to present a huge threat to the interests of organized labor in Britain, reasoned the writer.²³⁵ And, noted the same paper later on, might not the management and direction of such indentured labor furnish the capitalist managers in Britain with the secrets of collective manipulation of labor resources which they could apply in their dealings with workers at home?²³⁶

²³⁴"The Conduct of the War," The New Statesman, December 9, 1916, p. 222.

²³⁵Ibid.

²³⁶"Capitalism after the War," The New Statesman, February 3, 1917, p. 413.

But, after all, these were speculative, even esoteric, conclusions. To see war as a sophisticated capitalist enterprise in which money is made through the exploitation not only of labor, but also of human emotional traits, is a view with which people today have become more familiar. In 1916 or 1917 it could appear to prominent and intelligent trades union men like Ben Tillett just so much needlessly arrogant chatter to discuss the potential role to be performed by Chinese as cogs in the workings of the post-war capitalist machine. The same was true of the paradox that pre-war increases in productivity had lessened the need for manual labor, while the war had brought a greater demand for manual workers than ever before. Ironically the Chinese were forced to work under the most primitive conditions long since transcended by the workers of Britain.

To men like Tillett it was essential to discover what power he and his fellow proletarians could exert to keep the immediate practical use of the Chinese within bounds acceptable to the status quo they now enjoyed and were prepared to defend. Under the circumstances of the entry of Black labor into France already, there appeared to Tillett to be every reason to act with some haste and resolve. He showed himself one of the most

resolute of labor's spokesman on the issue. Colored labor, he remarked in late 1916, arrived in Europe "even before the question was mooted in this country."²³⁷ There seemed every reason to suspect that the coolies would arrive and be assigned with similar suddenness.²³⁸

With the help and support of his fellow unionists, Tillett moved a resolution before the Council of the General Federation of Trade Unions, in which he noted that that body viewed,

with grave anxiety the proposal to import and substitute coloured labour for white labour. It will regard such an importation . . . as a contemptuous repudiation, and fears that the proposal to introduce coloured labour is but a preparatory step on the part of capital towards the exploitation of labour after the war.²³⁹

Tillett acted partly in ignorance when he delivered this resolution. In the secrecy of war, and with the censorship of Whitehall prevalent, a great deal of speculation

²³⁷Report of Special General Council Meeting, General Federation of Trade Unions, Holborn Hall, London, Wednesday, December 6, 1916 (London: Co-operative Printing Society, 1916), p. 37.

²³⁸Colonel Lawson, in his Reports, had urged that all substitution be gradual, "and spread out over a large number of units at a time, /for/ in this way, if well organized and arranged, the replacement would take place almost unnoticed." See Lawson, Reports, p. 11.

²³⁹Report of Special General Council Meeting, General Federation of Trade Unions, Holborn Hall, London, Wednesday, December 6, 1916 (London: Co-operative Printing Society, 1916), p. 37.

and rumor abounded concerning the use of native personnel by the War Office. But by December of 1916 it was becoming generally accepted in certain circles of labor and trade union leadership that Chinese were about to be collected on a larger scale than ever before envisaged, although it still was not apparent to what use the War Office contemplated putting them. Neither was it known for certain how many Black laborers or troops actually were in France, or what plans existed for their increase and future allotment. Under these conditions of uncertainty it was hard to formulate any clear policy of opposition, or to overcome the comparative indifference of those on the left who doubted that any real threat to British labor really existed.

In mid-November, members of the Parliamentary Committee of the Trades Union Congress, responding to the pressures of some anxious rank and file members, visited the War Office in an attempt to clarify policy regarding the introduction or importation of colored labor into Europe. The meeting did little to clarify the situation. The very delicate negotiations for the raising of the Chinese were in a critical stage, the extent of Lloyd George's proposed native labor establishment was still quite secret, and the War Office had no intention of arousing premature excitement over the

appearance of the Chinese. Consequently the innocuous Earl of Derby, soon to succeed Lloyd George as minister for war, soothingly assured members of the visiting delegation that any substitution schemes involving natives of whatever origin were designed merely to release ailing men from the army for work at home in England. It was, he said, "a mere exchange of men" that the government contemplated by the use of a few colored laborers.²⁴⁰

The realities were very different. But under the circumstances of this bland assurance the so-called Triple Alliance of railwaymen, miners, and transport operatives, which was to look so formidable at other times, could only refer impotently to "sinister movements"²⁴¹ to import Chinese labor. Nonetheless, the concern of the labor movement was growing day by day.

Arthur Henderson, still in his somewhat equivocal position as industrial conciliator and labor advisor to the cabinet, certainly knew more about the scheme to use the Chinese than he was prepared to admit to his col-

²⁴⁰"Minutes of an Interview with Lord Derby and General Geddes, by Members of the T.U.C. Parliamentary Committee, November 15, 1916," (London, T.U.C. Archives).

²⁴¹"Minutes of Executive Committee Meeting, Miners' Federation of Great Britain, Imperial Hotel, Russell Square, London, Wednesday, December 20, 1916," (London, T.U.C. Archives) Resolution 4, "Coloured Labour."

leagues in labor politics. He could have told them, for instance, of the Wei-hai-Wei compromise. He chose to remain silent. Neither did he pay any attention when in late November the Parliamentary Labour Party resolved to condemn plans to introduce any native labor into Great Britain.²⁴² The party, he observed, was acting on hearsay.²⁴³

Henderson was thoroughly aware of the delicacy of the situation, and closely observed the mounting concern of labor as 1916 drew to a close. When really serious fears of Chinese and native workers were voiced at the annual Labour Party conference in Manchester in January, 1917, he could no longer remain silent. But he still refrained from revealing any of his intimate knowledge of the coolie scheme. He could not understand, he defensively observed, why such rage was being generated by the question. It behoved the conference "to be a little careful about putting an irreversible veto upon a man being employed under certain conditions merely because of the colour of his skin."²⁴⁴ The red

²⁴²A week later the Parliamentary Committee of the T.U.C. supported this condemnation and conveyed its decision direct to the Colonial Secretary. See "Minutes of a Meeting of the T.U.C. Parliamentary Committee, December 6, 1916" (London, T.U.C. Archives).

²⁴³Ibid.

²⁴⁴Report of the Sixteenth Annual Conference of the Labour Party, Albert Hall, Manchester, January, 1917 (London: Co-operative Printing Society, 1917), p. 142.

herring did not work. The Conference knew very well that a real fear of alien labor was abroad, and that no references to racial prejudice could stem its tide. Ernest Bevin, at that time leader of the Dockers' union, supplied the suitable retort to Henderson, and assured him that even if fears of the use of coolies or colored laborers had been somewhat exaggerated, there still remained the legitimate anxiety that the Army and the whole Whitehall establishment were seriously playing with the notion of natives as a direct challenge to the hard won status of the British working classes.²⁴⁵ How much of this was rhetoric, how much insight on Bevin's part, can only be guessed. Certainly had he known of the potential significance of the enrollment scheme in far off Wei-hai-Wei he would have made even greater capital out of Henderson's cautions. The latter offered no rebuttal.

The pace appeared to quicken as the labor press took up the issue. The Daily Herald observed that if the reports of an Oriental labor policy were correct, it should be remembered that in the East there lay at the feet of British capitalists an inexhaustible pool of "yellow skinned labour," waiting for exploitation.²⁴⁶

²⁴⁵Ibid.

²⁴⁶"The Human Comedy: 'Uplifting the Native,'" The Herald, January 20, 1917, p. 8.

Justice, the organ of Hyndman's Marxist Social Democrats, had voiced a semi--though more general caution in the space of a few lines a month or two earlier. What, it wondered, would the effect be on the post war wage structure if a vast new pool of wage slaves were to be opened up for exploitation during the war?²⁴⁷ But, disappointingly, comments in the left wing press remain oblique or muted. There exists no outright denunciation of plans to raise Chinese labor. This was because the details of the Wei-hai-Wei scheme were never allowed to leak out. Security was at a maximum. No paper dared print more than vague innuendo based on supposition. To have done more would have been to invite a censor's clampdown. And so the potentially vital weight of the labor press was never employed. It served only to keep the issue before the eyes of its readers in the most general and tantalizing sense.

Where, then, was the real focus of labor's opposition to the Chinese labor scheme? It lay behind the scenes in the committee and conference rooms at the T. U.C. and Labour Party headquarters. It too flourished on innuendo and rumor, but it was prepared to act nonetheless. In true British tradition the leaders of organized labor resolved to work out a compromise on an

²⁴⁷Justice, November 9, 1916, p. 6.

issue about which they still knew little, but which they rightly regarded as a serious threat.

It was J. S. Middleton who led the vanguard of this compromise position that was to allow the War Office to proceed with its planned importation of Chinese in exchange for assurances that such labor would not be used in Britain itself. Middleton was secretary of the War Emergency Workers' National Committee, a joint labor organization which included representatives of the Parliamentary Committee of the T.U.C. and the Parliamentary Labour Party. Significantly enough, its chairman was Arthur Henderson. As a result of a series of meetings and conferences, of which unfortunately no record survives, Middleton wrote a strongly worded letter to Asquith before the Prime Minister quit as head of the shaky war coalition. In it Middleton spoke of his Committee's absolute resolve to uphold its mandate of protecting British workers' employment and conditions of service throughout the war, and of its decision always to resist the introduction of any native labor into the country.²⁴⁸

²⁴⁸J. S. Middleton, Secretary, W.E.W.N.C., letter to Prime Minister, London, December 2, 1916 (London, Labour Party Archives). The W.E.W.N.C. had taken a strong line on Chinese before when on August 12, 1916, it adopted a stern resolution deploring the use of Chinese labor on British ships.

The Prime Minister's reply was second hand and coldly formal. But Asquith understood from Middleton's tone the significant opposition that organized labor might mount where plans to employ the Chinese extended to Britain, or used in substitution plans in France. He must have passed this understanding on to his successor, Lloyd George. It was clear to both of them that labor now had a concrete point around which to center its opposition to the uses of colored labor. Lloyd George was quick to snap up the willingness of Middleton and his colleagues to compromise. As soon as the former assumed control of the government, the War Office and the military planners in Whitehall reluctantly abandoned all considerations of using large numbers of Chinese and other natives in Britain, professed themselves satisfied with the compromise, and resolved to proceed cautiously even with their continued plans for disposition of native labor in France.²⁴⁹

All of this was in defiance, it seemed, of Lloyd George's own plans for use of the Chinese. But the Prime Minister was never one to force an untenable issue when a workable compromise existed as an alternative. He knew that the future exigencies of the war might change

²⁴⁹P.R.O./W.O. 32/11345, Recruitment, Memorandum of Army Council, January /?/, 1917.

matters. Besides, he could make capital for himself out of publicly admitting the existence of the agreement not to use colored workers in Britain, and thus dissociate himself in the public mind with all the unsavory talk about coolies and slave labor schemes.²⁵⁰ Asquith had not been so shrewd, or perhaps he lacked the time and energy to pull off a similar coup. His name, therefore, remains closely associated with the raising and importing of the Chinese Labour Corps.

Now organized labor could rest content. If the coolies were exploited in France, no matter; it had the word of the new government that they would not be used in Britain²⁵¹ or in plans of substitution in France. The sinister threat of colored labor which had hung in the background for so long²⁵² was at last lifted.

The Germans made propaganda capital out of this supposed capitulation by the British government.²⁵³ They had no doubt that it was labor union leadership, specifically that of the triple alliance, that had caused the

²⁵⁰The London and China Telegraph, February 5, 1917, p. 99. (An advocate on behalf of the War Office of the broadest possible uses of China's manpower resources, the paper lamented the Prime Minister's decision.)

²⁵¹No document can be found to substantiate this promise.

²⁵²B. Russell, The Autobiography of Bertrand Russell: 1914-1944 (New York: Bantam Books, 1962), Vol. II, p. 404.

²⁵³Korrespondenzblatt, no. 8, January 22, 1917.

backdown, and they hoped in addition that organized British labor would continue to oppose the distribution of the Chinese in France. The Germans were frankly shocked that the Wei-hai-Wei scheme had gone ahead at all despite domestic opposition in Britain.²⁵⁴ They do not seem to have realized that once assured of avoiding the presence of coolies in Britain, or as substitutes abroad, the labor leaders had no practical, emotional, or sentimental interest to spare on the Chinese and their exploitation.

The appearance of British propaganda added weight to the verbal reassurances given Middleton and his colleagues. The Chinese, it was noted in these publications, would be used only as replacements for white personnel in France who were unfit for protracted laboring tasks anyway, and who could return to Britain, either for demobilization, or to help with the overall war effort in some less demanding capacity.²⁵⁵ There was no hint that the use of coolies in Britain had been contemplated, or that they might have freed young working men to join the colors.

²⁵⁴Ibid.

²⁵⁵Typical is The Men Who Tidy Up: By One Who has Served in a British Labour Battalion (London: T. Fisher & Unwin, 1917), p. 6. (This work was published simultaneously in America by G. H. Doren, New York.)

Had labor won a victory? Of sorts, no doubt. Sydney and Beatrice Webb, in their monumental history of trades unionism, had no doubt that the victory was sound and substantial:

It was . . . only the determined private /writer's emphasis/ resistance of the Trade Unionist leaders of the Labour Party that compelled the Government to abandon its project of introducing several hundred thousand Chinese labourers into Great Britain.²⁵⁶

They exaggerated. But there is a strong element of truth in their contention, as has been suggested above.

There were some spheres on the left which did not react well to the compromise. The Independent Labour Party, as in many other instances, objected to the conciliatory stand adopted and defended by the Parliamentary Labour Party and the union leaders. In its organ, the Labour Leader, the I.L.P. denounced action which would lead to the use of coolies even in France, and wondered how much latitude was thus being given "capitalist jingoes"²⁵⁷ to continue their exploitation of the working classes.

The moderate left, however, expressed general happiness with the situation, and resolved that it would

²⁵⁶Sydney Webb and Beatrice Webb, The History of Trade Unionism (London: private printing, 1919), p. 691. (The Webbs seem to have had in mind the activities of Middleton and the W.E.W.N.C. as a basis for their contention.)

²⁵⁷Labour Leader, January 18, 1917, p. 7.

quietly continue to watch for any violation of the status quo once the Chinese arrived in force in France. The left wing press could be relied upon, it was felt, to report any serious avoidance of the agreement to confine coolies to the continent. Given the difficulties it had experienced in getting material into print on the plans to raise the Chinese in the first place, it must remain doubtful whether the activities of the miniscule labor press would have been any more effective in a future crisis. In any case, the War Office agreed among its senior staff members in Whitehall that it would not arouse the passions of the left wing press on the Chinese issue, and resolved to keep as low a profile as possible where the topic was concerned.²⁵⁸

A sort of official imprimatur was given the decision to restrict the Chinese to the continent when, in July of 1917, the Commission of Inquiry into Industrial Unrest made public its findings.²⁵⁹ Lord Derby, and the Director of National Service, Sir A. Geddes, lost no opportunities to soothe organized labor whenever the

²⁵⁸p.R.O./W.O. 32/5091, Recruitment, Army Council to Director of National Service /Sir A. Geddes/, London, November 6, 1917. And see Ibid., War Office, London, to C.-in-C., B.E.F., France, February 15, 1917.

²⁵⁹The Times (London), July 23, 1917, p. 7. And see G. N. Barnes, Synopsis of Conclusions of the Commission of Inquiry into Industrial Unrest, Appointed June 12, 1917 (London: n.p., 1917), passim.

coolie or substitution questions looked likely to re-appear or to compromise the Commission's findings. Thus, when they contemplated the importation into Europe of an accelerated number of coolies, both men eagerly sought to assure the T.U.C. that this proposal could have no possible impact, either upon the arrangement reached at the beginning of 1917, or on the conclusions of the Commission itself.²⁶⁰

Did the Establishment and the army keep faith with working men? Evidences seem to suggest not. The Ministry of Munitions used Chinese workers in Britain in direct contravention of the agreement to confine their use to the continent. These workers were engaged by factories manufacturing munitions and related products, and it is clear the the Ministry approved, even forwarded, this procedure, although it personally kept aloof. Where these Chinese were raised is not clear, although some may have been taken from the ranks of the Chinese Labour Corps, or marked for such purposes even before they left Wei-hai-Wei. Some references to their use may be found in the Ministry of Munitions' files in the Public Record Office in London. One of the most interesting of these notes:

²⁶⁰Report of the Forty-ninth Annual T.U.C. Gathering, Palace Hotel, Blackpool, Monday, September 3, 1917 (London: Co-operative Printing Society, 1917), p. 391.

Investigations have been made by one of the secretaries of the Chinese Embassy on the employment of Chinese in Birmingham. He found that there were about 600 Chinese, of whom about 440 were employed in factories. The chief investigation officer says that there is very little trade union opposition to their employment, so long as they are engaged on a similar footing to that of British labour. There is . . . strong opposition to their employment on other work such as in gas works.²⁶¹

Apparently, the local trades union men had no objection to the use of coolies so long as their presence was confined to certain industries, and so long as they received the benefits to which the British working man had become accustomed. If this is true, it would seem to be an interesting departure from the kind of aggressive and chauvinistic response usually looked for under such circumstances. Perhaps labor leaders exaggerated the opposition of the rank and file members to the use of native labor in British industry. What is more likely, however, is that the Chinese were used judiciously, and in selected areas, so as not to arouse the suspicions and emotions of the militants among the British labor establishment. The numbers of Chinese so used will probably never be known.

Some individual army commanders in France certainly used their Chinese to force the pace of substitution. One of the most bizarre cases on record instances the actions

²⁶¹P.R.O./M.U. /Ministry of Munitions/ 2/28, Munitions, "Chinese Labour," Report for the week ending November 10, 1917, p. 15.

of a military "employer" of coolies in France who had succeeded in retaining them in a semi-skilled capacity, using them in a factory hut with a movable partition at one end. As the coolies became more skilled at their tasks of servicing and repairing machinery, the partition, behind which white workers lay, was moved down the hut, as the whites were literally squeezed out to be seconded to active units in the field.²⁶² There is no case on record more blatant than this. Similar attempts, if and when made, usually involved very small numbers of skilled or semi-skilled men rather than the vast numbers the military planners in Whitehall had once so ambitiously contemplated.

Whitehall and the army kept faith with the British working man only insofar as they continued to pay open lip service to the agreement of early 1917, and kept use of the coolies in substitution plans to a carefully calculated minimum. The Times was close to the truth when after the war it suggested,

The coming of the Chinese Labour Corps to France relieved our men from an enormous amount of heavy . . . work, and so helped to release a much larger proportion than otherwise would have been possible for combatant duties.²⁶³

²⁶²P.R.O./W.O. 106/33, C.L.C. History, H.R. Wakefield, "Chinese Labour in France," pp. 11-12. (This is a manuscript, apparently written for private circulation.)

²⁶³"The C.L.C.: With the Coolie from China to France," The Times (London), April 23, 1919, p. 5.

Such a statement could not have slipped past Whitehall a year earlier. It amounted to an admission that the Chinese had been used to release men for combat; a move Middleton and his colleagues had been sure they had prevented.

Whitehall prided itself on understanding the ethos of the working classes. It believed it knew what dogmas and shibboleths to avoid compromising. It was correct in believing that the working man and his leaders would care little for the use of coolies in France so long as the illusion of complete separateness from events in Britain were maintained. Had it not been proven on earlier occasions that when it came to the question of using natives, men in British labor circles rarely looked beyond such cherished ideas as the exploitation notion, or tried "to come to terms with the real difficulties involved in the government of subject races."²⁶⁴ Their outlook was parochial. Avoid the risk of confronting them directly, and no emotional heat would be generated. Subjected to a belief in imperial splendor and racial superiority, no solid British working man was going to object to the use of native workers in France provided, and only provided, that he was quite satisfied that they posed no threat to his livelihood at home, or

²⁶⁴Porter, Critics of Empire, p. 134.

rendered him more liable to conscription. Talk of the brotherhood of the proletariat would pale into insignificance once this fact were assured, and British working men could be relied upon to exact their pound of flesh from the coolies when placed over them as N.C.O.'s in the field.

For a while, in late 1916, some members of the Establishment seemed to have forgotten all of this; under the imagined exigencies of war, they had forged ahead with plans to import vast numbers of Chinese without first giving organized labor a few nebulous guarantees. It must be remembered, though, that the men who forgot were not true members of the aristocratic Establishment, which prided itself so on knowing the mind of the common man, but a clique of professional soldiers like Robertson and Woodward led by the bourgeois, Lloyd George. Ever adroit, the latter had quickly modified his tactics and won sympathetic approval from working men for admitting the existence of a compromise aimed at keeping Chinese from British shores. Having won this approval, the Prime Minister could secretly continue to sanction the use of coolies in whatever manner he thought feasible. The illusion of non-involvement was maintained.

The ethos of imperialism was still strong enough to call working men back to their duty. Not until after

the conflict, with grave doubts as to how it had been managed by their social superiors,²⁶⁵ were the worst aspects of militarism and imperialism equated on a broader scale than ever before. The protests of the British left in general against the use of Chinese labor had been the protests of self-interest. One looks in vain for any radical expressions, editorial, sentimental, or intellectual, apropos the coolies' welfare, the morality of their use, or the conditions under which they worked after arrival in the spring of 1917.

References to the role of Chinese workers actually became patronizing, amused, or even sycophantic, once the pressure was off British labor.²⁶⁶ So soon as it knew of the government's willingness to compromise, the mercurial columns of the New Statesman, abandoning their transiently critical line on the proposed employment of Chinese by the British, remarked that the coolies employed by the French, while admittedly poorly paid, were after all allowed food, lodging, and clothing "free of charge."²⁶⁷

²⁶⁵A.P. Thornton, The Imperial Idea and its Enemies: A Study in British Power (Garden City: Doubleday, 1968), p. 345 (quoting Grigg, The Faith of an Englishman, p. 291).

²⁶⁶For example, see The Labour Leader, July 12, 1917, p. 3.

²⁶⁷"Chinese Labour in France," The New Statesman, January 13, 1917, p. 343. (The article, signed "A Chinese Correspondent," ended, "we are glad to be of use to the Allies.")

Vague fears of the part Chinese workers might have played remained a muted theme in trades union gatherings for some years. It is amusing to trace some of the resolutions to which they led.²⁶⁸ No one will know now whether British labor would ever violently have opposed the introduction of the Chinese into Britain, or their open use as substitutes in France. As the emergencies of war lessened, the question faded from men's minds. Once again the states had avoided confronting British labor on a major issue, and both sides were content with the compromise effected.

²⁶⁸ See, for example. Report of Proceedings of the Fifty-first Annual Trades Union Congress, St. Andrew's Hall, Glasgow, September, 1919 (London: Co-operative Printing Society, 1919), p. 373.

CHAPTER V
THE CHINESE AT WORK: 1917-1918

In a very real sense, the Chinese Labour Corps is still alive today. Both in China and Great Britain, and probably elsewhere, there are men living who played a role in it. But when one arrives at the point of discussing exactly how the Chinese were employed in France, under what terms, and under what physical conditions, these living links form a tantalizing yet predictably disappointing thread.

The disappointment stems from uncertain and selective reminiscences about those days, and the voicing of opinions which are too biased or of too prejudicial a nature to incorporate in a survey of this nature. For obvious reasons it proved quite impossible to communicate personally with any Chinese who formed the body of the Corps, although it is understood that some literate Chinese who acted as interpreters²⁶⁹ are still living. It was possible to correspond with individuals in Britain

²⁶⁹Two interpreters were to be assigned to thirty coolies. In practice this number was never approximated. See P.R.O./W.O. 32/5094, Substitution.

who acted as officers and N.C.O.'s in the Corps.²⁷⁰ Opinions offered by these men, many of whom are of advanced age, differed sharply as to the overall usefulness and efficiency of the Chinese. One former N.C.O. blamed the "poor performance" of the Corps' companies on the quality of the officers who held command. There is truth in this belief. There remained elements of a patronizing affection for the "Chinks," and a general feeling that among the native labor contingents employed by the British in the first war they were the best, and might have attained better results saving only adequate direction.

The net results of these communications with the former white members of the Chinese Labour Corps, which were too few and sketchy to record formally, offered a feeling of the emotive nature that the one time existence of the Chinese in France still provokes among its former white personnel. There seems to be a prevalent fear that some journalist will employ the information garnered from personal interviews to present to the public a sensationalist account of how an ethnic minority was cruelly exploited by colonialists and militarists in the Great War.

²⁷⁰These men were reached primarily with the aid of a notice in The Journal of the Royal British Legion for the months of August and September, 1972.

These fears are not so remote, for this situation has already transpired in the course of recent months.²⁷¹ It has helped to harden the opinion of survivors against communicating anything that may be used against them, so to speak, or stand as an indictment of their actions and the motives of the government which they served.

Of course there were strong elements of exploitation in the use of the Corps. One academic writer has called its use a purely business enterprise, adopted for profit and reasons of economic expediency.²⁷² But in exploring this and other aspects of the Chinese Labour Corps it is prudent to avoid altogether any reliance upon the living element that survives and rely instead upon the recently revealed archival sources. This contention is particularly authentic in terms of any discussion of the actual terms of work which governed the coolies' use in France.

The question of the contract under which they worked is a vexed one. It contained a number of ambiguities. One of these revolved around what form of discipline would apply to the coolies at work. Sir Edward Grey had an impact here. His sometimes "puzzled recitude," as it

²⁷¹J. Hamilton-Paterson, "Chinese Dig Britain's Trenches," Sunday Times Magazine (London), April 30, 1972, p. 45.

²⁷²J. Blick, "The Chinese Labour Corps in World War I," p. 112.

has been rather unkindly called,²⁷³ surfaced when he learned that the War Office and the military members of the Army Council assumed that the Chinese would be subject to the full rigors of military discipline, and that further they expressly doubted the need to explain this belief explicitly in the contract which the coolies were to sign or affirm in Wei-hai-Wei.

In fairness, and before elaborating on Grey's attitude, it should be noted that the Army Council discussed the issue of military discipline in detail when deciding on a tentative format for the entire contract. The Foreign Office learned of this when it received a communication from the Army Council explaining its consensus on the matter.²⁷⁴ There had, in fact, been genuine concern on the part of some Council members that the Chinese would be ignorant of the fact that they would be subject to military discipline. But the remainder of the Council feared that if the contract were too explicit on the point the Chinese government, and the Germans in China, would receive an apparent confirmation of their fear that in fact the coolies were destined for some form of combat service.

²⁷³A.J.P. Taylor, English History, 1914-1945 (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1965), p. 459.

²⁷⁴P.R.O./W.O. 32/11345, Recruitment, Secretary of Army Council to Under Secretary, Foreign Office, London, November 23, 1916.

In these circumstances, the entire Council had decided to agree to the suggestion that the coolies be shipped to France "on the same lines as was done in the case of the importation of Chinese into South Africa."²⁷⁵ Such an arrangement, it was felt, would maintain the civil appearance of the scheme, while the contract could be vaguely enough worded to cover the situation,²⁷⁶ provide "proof" of British goodwill, and yet still allow military discipline to apply. The thin line between legality, or the appearance of it, and exigency is quite plain.

Outside the Council there were those in the Army who expressed themselves with less delicacy. Among them was Major-General Woodward, who from his Whitehall office,

²⁷⁵Ibid. (The Army Council had had before it copies of the old South African contract, and were aware of the contents of the current French one, too. The text of the South African "Labour Ordinance" bears some strong resemblances to the British contract of 1916, especially on matters of transport, hygiene, and segregation, but it was a more complicated document, and was not intended to be literally read or signed by the coolies, who merely affirmed that they accepted its contents. Britain departed from precedent in insisting upon military discipline, while both the South African and French documents specified provisions of their respective civil codes as governing agents for Chinese behavior. See Chinese Labour Ordinance, as amended in committee, and submitted to the Legislative Council of the Transvaal by the Attorney-General (London: New Reform Club, n.d.))

²⁷⁶The Council took the French example. Their contract was "usefully vague on purpose" on the issue of discipline. See P.R.O./W.O. 106/33, C.L.C. History, Robertson, Peking, to D.M.I., London, October 30, 1916.

insisted that the coolies could not be expected to work adequately under military conditions unless subject to military law.²⁷⁷ Whether the laborers were actually told of this intention in the simple contract it was intended they should receive was to him a consideration of secondary importance. As it was presumed that the majority of the Chinese were illiterate anyway such niceties were surely pro forma, and merely wasted valuable time and effort. "Camps like those in South Africa would have to be built in France," observed Woodward, and the strictest regime maintained within their confines.²⁷⁸ This was adapting with a vengeance the standards of the governing race to those it ruled. Alston in Peking had already omitted from his copy of the draft contract "all mention of the coolies being under the Army Act for Discipline."²⁷⁹

Some of Grey's senior staff knew and approved of this deceptive practice²⁸⁰ when, on November 25, 1916,

²⁷⁷P.R.O./W.O. 32/11345, Recruitment, minute sheets 5 and 6, November /?/, 1916.

²⁷⁸Ibid., Conference on Coloured Labour, November /?/, 1916.

²⁷⁹P.R.O./W.O. 106/33, C.L.C. History, Alston, Peking, to D.M.I., London, November 24, 1916.

²⁸⁰P.R.O./W.O. 32/11345, Recruitment, Under Secretary, Foreign Office, to Jordan, Peking, November 14, 1916. (Here it was noted that omission of all references to discipline would have a "salutary effect" in calming the excitable coolies.)

the Foreign Secretary intervened in the situation by addressing a signed memorandum directly to the Army Council. In it he made his stand on the matter of discipline absolutely plain, and called for an end to procrastination and deceit.²⁸¹ It appears, however, that Grey acted less from humanitarian motives than from a reluctance "to be charged with a breach of faith, should it not be made clear to the coolies before leaving China that they will be subject to Military Discipline on arrival in France."²⁸²

Grey acted with consistent adherence to his fears of a revival of the outcry of 1903 and 1904, and also on the advice of a still more tangible source, that of Mr. Gregory, his legal advisor, who told him categorically that it would be "breaking faith with the Chinese"²⁸³ if they were shipped to France in utter ignorance of their status. Grey knew that the French themselves were eager to see all British colored labor placed under the military code, but he resisted these pressures for he rightly suspected that the rigor of army government in time of war was likely to be more severe than any direction ex-

²⁸¹Ibid., Grey to Secretary of Army Council, London, November 25, 1916.

²⁸²Ibid., copy of Foreign Office minute sheet, November 23, 1916.

²⁸³Ibid.

perienced by the coolies on the Rand ten years before.

Grey's intervention was futile. The contract eventually submitted for the coolies' acceptance in Weihai-Wei remained ambiguous on the question of discipline. Arthur Balfour, who succeeded Grey as Foreign Secretary in December of 1916, proved less willing to make stands on the coolie issue. As the supporter of the South African scheme he had less to lose from invidious comparisons than Grey. He had little practical, and no moral, interest in the fact that the coolies failed to understand the seriousness of the liability under which they enrolled. It was not until they finally reached French soil that they had explained to them the extent to which military discipline would rule their actions.²⁸⁴

The contract they carried with them suggested that they were not to be employed under fire. It is fairly clear that this principle was adhered to whenever possible. But exceptions were bound to arise. It is possible to reconstruct to some degree the dimensions of this problem through a survey of the war diaries of units using

²⁸⁴Ten Chinese laborers were shot under the provisions of British military law between June, 1917, and June, 1918, while three others won reprieves. This was much fewer than in other colored contingents. There are no reliable figures available for their convictions on non-capital crimes. See Statistics of the Military Effort of the British Empire during the Great War, 1914-1921 (London: H.M.S.O., 1922), p. 649.

using Chinese labor. This approach is limited by the fact that some diaries are too perfunctory to be of use, while in mid-1917 the 4th Army and some other branches of the service, ordered the cessation of all diary keeping at the company level, and decreed instead that only group headquarters maintain records.²⁸⁵ In this way much interesting detail about the Chinese Labour Corps and its exposure to enemy action has been lost.

Suggestive of the slender demarcation between legality and expediency that existed on this as on other heads is the conscience searching among officers who attempted to decide whether air attack could be construed as "coming under fire" in the accepted sense of the phrase. It was inevitable that, as the war progressed, the Chinese in their camps should run the risk of serial bombardment, and this circumstance was one of the first to involve what working construction could be placed upon the coolies' contract. But quite apart from the legal issue involved, the bombs had a decided impact upon the morale of the Chinese,²⁸⁶ and on a number of occasions left them restless and unmanageable.²⁸⁷

²⁸⁵See P.R.O./W.O. 95/429, Order of Assistant Adjutant General, 4th Army H.Q., B.E.F., France, May 9, 1917.

²⁸⁶For example, see P.R.O./W.O. 95/571, Labour Diaries, War Diary of 57th Labour Group H.Q., B.E.F., France, July 12, 1917.

²⁸⁷For example, see P.R.O./W.O. 95/4173, War Diary of Lines of Communication, I Labour Group H.Q., B.E.F., France, September 2, 1917.

Sometimes after a bombing raid the coolies managed to break camp and flood the French countryside until rounded up and identified by means of their bracelet chains. Wiser officers seem to have ignored these desertions, preferring to let the laborers filter back once their terror subsided. The open hostility of the French peasantry could sometimes hasten their return.²⁸⁸ To his credit, Colonel Fairfax, as Officer Commanding the Chinese Labour Corps, foresaw the panic that would occur if the coolies were kept within the confines of tightly guarded and walled compounds, and then subjected either to aerial attack or long range shellfire. He suggested that the Corps' company commanders turn a blind eye to absenteeism from such camps, although he preferred to advocate instead the kind of mobility for the coolies that would avoid the necessity of having to shut them up in fixed compounds which could easily be determined and fixed as targets for German guns.²⁸⁹ Such was the fear of the Chinese, and the rigid belief in segregation, that this wise policy was not implemented. A great deal of confusion resulted on occasions when coolies were de-

²⁸⁸Ibid. But the French were not adverse to selling garlic and other items to coolies on the march. See S.H. Cox, London S.E. 27, letter to the writer, October 26, 1972.

²⁸⁹P.R.O./W.O. 106/33, C.L.C. History, Minutes of a Conference at G.H.Q., B.E.F., France, to Consider Questions in Connexion with the Employment of Chinese Labour, December 29, 1916.

liberately allowed to escape from their camps to avoid death from enemy attack.²⁹⁰ Commanders who refused to practice the charity of allowing the Orientals to escape were obliged to strengthen the garrison guard surrounding the perimeters of their camps,²⁹¹ and to issue strict orders concerning the maintenance of order. Sometimes full scale movements and relocations of coolie camps took place. But it was generally only after the Chinese had been subject to close or direct shelling or bombing for more than a few days that such action took place.²⁹²

Those laborers who managed to desert under fire, and who failed to return after a reasonable period of time, were designated "missing in action," and conveniently struck off their company's muster.²⁹³ It is impossible to tell how many were lost in this way, and

²⁹⁰See P.R.O./W.O. 95/4173, War Diary of Lines of Communication, I Labour Group H.Q., B.E.F., France, September 7 and 12, 1917, and P.R.O./W.O. 95/4173, War Diary of Lines of Communication, II Labour Group H.Q., B.E.F., France, February, 1917, to September, 1917, passim.

²⁹¹P.R.O./W.O. 95/4174, War Diary of Lines of Communication, 906 and 907 Companies, Area Employment Labour Corps Garrison Guard, September, 1917, to August, 1918, passim.

²⁹²P.R.O./W.O. 95/267, War Diary of 23rd Labour Group H.Q., B.E.F., France, June, 1917, passim.

²⁹³P.R.O./W.O. 95/4173, War Diary of Lines of Communication, I Labour Group H.Q., B.E.F., France, September 12, 1917.

whether they did in fact ultimately succumb to the effects of enemy action. The shelters provided in some compounds proved quite inadequate,²⁹⁴ and the provision of machine guns to fend off enemy aircraft only added to the coolies' dismay, and actually seemed to attract the unwelcome attentions of belligerent aircraft.²⁹⁵ No wonder many Chinese felt it better to take to the open country.

Frightened Chinese had one point in their favor if they remained. Most commanders liked to avoid their exposure to even random shellfire on the job, not necessarily from humanitarian or legal reasons, but because sometime bombardment, or even on occasions, sustained barrage, lowered the efficiency of the units so exposed.²⁹⁶ Undoubtedly there were some Chinese Labour Corps commanders who felt reasonably sure that their men could function if pushed further forward than was generally deemed allowable by the Labour Directorate or its successor, Labour Control. But there was always the risk of loss of effort if work were interrupted by German fire. Wrote

²⁹⁴P.R.O./W.O. 95/ 3984, War Diary of Assistant Director of Supplies, B.E.F., Boulogne, November 21, 1917.

²⁹⁵P.R.O./W.O. 95/571, War Diaries, 5th Army Group H.Q., B.E.F., France, October, 1917, passim.

²⁹⁶The Corps of Royal Engineers particularly warned against the temptation to push coolies too far forward. See P.R.O./W.O. 95/1641, War Diary of Commander, Royal Engineers 7th Division H.Q., B.E.F., France, October 26, 1917.

one officer in his war diary,

59th Chinese Labour Corps /company7 was shelled while at work in R.E. Dump . . . Coolies scattered and could not be induced to return to work . . . it was decided not to employ them in areas at all likely to be subjected to shell fire.²⁹⁷

And so the Chinese in this particular company won a reprieve in the interests of efficiency and output.

The official history of the great war is matter of fact on the topic in one of its few references to colored labor in general. It suggests that the confinement of natives to fixed base camps would in most cases have prevented their use to any great extent in forward zones, even if their morale under fire had been predictable.²⁹⁸ No mention is made of the legal restraints in use under fire which appeared in most of the contracts issued to colored laborers of all origins.

But there can be little doubt that the Chinese contract did provide a significant check on the activities of commanders who otherwise would have had no hesitation in employing the Chinese under fire, despite the risk of lowered output. After one Chinese company was literally shelled from its place of work, the senior officer in

²⁹⁷P.R.O./W.O. 95/571, War Diary of 57th Labour Group H.Q., B.E.F., France, September 1, 1917.

²⁹⁸C. Falls, History of the Great War based on Official Documents: Military Operations, France and Belgium, 1917 (London: Macmillan, 1940), p. 17.

charge of the dispositions of labor in that district wrote petulantly,

considerable difficulties have arisen in the free use of Chinese Labour as according to their contract they are not to be exposed to shellfire or in any places that are liable to be shelld.²⁹⁹

This officer knew as well as did most others that it was impossible to find any place adjacent to the lines where it was absolutely safe for the Chinese to work. But there were places of comparative safety which seemed to guarantee the promise made in the contract. Colonel Wace's immediate organization always did its own best to ensure that the Chinese were kept within these bounds. The Colonel and his top aides were only too well aware of the effect of shells upon the Orientals, and had no wish to exacerbate the tensions this effect produced.³⁰⁰ But they could not censor the moves nor examine the integrity of every "employer" to whom they seconded coolies from their pool.³⁰¹

²⁹⁹P.R.O./W.O. 95/571, War Diary of 57th Labour Group H.Q., B.E.F., France, August 28, 1917.

³⁰⁰P.R.O./W.O. 106/33, C.L.C. History, Memorandum from Col. Fairfax to Directorate of Labour, December 25, 1917.

³⁰¹For additional information on the effects of shelling on labor companies, see P.R.O./W.O. 95/358, War Diary of 37th Labour Group H.Q., B.E.F., France, July, 1917, to October, 1917, passim, and P.R.O./W.O. 32/5188, Construction of Light Railways for the B.E.F. in France: Provision of Materiel and Personnel, Preliminary Statement, in which this problem is anticipated.

Reported cases of the death or wounding of Chinese as a direct result of enemy action are few,³⁰² and one must clearly differentiate as to the actual use of the men under fire, which was comparatively often, and the number of casualties sustained as a result. It was sometimes possible for a commander using his coolies too far forward to avoid the fatal consequences of a bombardment by constantly moving his men, or by allowing them to scatter whenever fire grew too intense.

As a rule, it was white labor companies that filled the hiatus caused by the withdrawal of Chinese from zones too far forward. This fact naturally caused some resentment among the British workers, who paradoxically blamed the Chinese more than other natives because, with the exception of colonial troops, the coolies were always used further toward the front than any other native labor contingents. Being so far forward, the coolies were also subject to gas attacks. But with the blanket compass of these episodes it is hard to see how the Chinese could have been much better shielded against the impact.³⁰³ Nonetheless, the precautions taken on their behalf annoy-

³⁰²For an unusually detailed mention of the death and wounding of Chinese, see P.R.O./W.O. 95/571, War Diary of 18th Labour Group H.Q., B.E.F., France, September 1, 1917.

³⁰³P.R.O./W.O. 95/4173, War Diary of Lines of Communication, I Labour Group H.Q., B.E.F., France, September 12, 1917.

ed the personnel of white labor companies, too. Why, they wanted to know, should such lengths be gone to to protect the "Chinks?"³⁰⁴

The War Office in London held an additional perspective on the exposure of coolies to enemy action. True, it had composed the ambiguous phrasing of the contract with its provocative "etc." after the enumeration of "safe" places in which the coolies were to work, and it was also well aware of the pressure of battlefield exigencies, and the effect these were likely to have on commanders forced perhaps in the heat of the moment to consider the nebulous wording under which their men were working. But quite apart from these considerations Whitehall had a more important reason to view with concern the death or disablement of Chinese. Would their demise as a direct and provable result of enemy action obligate them to pay widows' benefits or dependency pay?

Although the contract did state sums that the army was prepared to pay to dependents under such circumstances, it was by no means certain whether or not the nebulous wording of the contract sufficiently freed the British government from any residual obligations. What if some Chinese widow were to claim the full benefits due to her

³⁰⁴P.R.O./W.O. 95/358, War Diary of 35th Labour Group H.Q., B.E.F., France, September 25, 1917.

as the survivor of a regularly enlisted British soldier? Would the contract shield the government from having to construe the question legally? Although the question of this situation arising seemed extremely remote, the fact remains that the War Office was quite aware of the embarrassment that would arise were it actually to occur, perhaps as the result of German intrigue. For this reason if for no other London preferred that as few Chinese as possible die from other than natural causes. Those executed for "military" crimes forfeited their rights to dependents' benefits anyway.

A set of instructions drawn up under the aegis of the Labour Directorate in August, 1917, laid down in clear and simplified language the canons for application in cases of death of Chinese workers. It agreed that those killed as a result of immediate enemy actions were entitled to posthumous compensation for their families in amounts not exceeding one hundred Mexican dollars,³⁰⁵ but it also demanded that the strictest attention be paid to this entire angle. Detailed hospital reports and post mortems were to be studied to make sure that no cases of natural death were mistakenly reported, or even deliberately misinterpreted, as being due to enemy action, for

³⁰⁵The reasons for the importance of this currency to the Chinese economy of the day are explained in W. L. Schurz, The Manila Galleon (New York: Dutton, 1939), p. 63 and passim.

in the former case no compensation was due families, and no detailed disclosure of circumstances was necessary.³⁰⁶

The main Chinese base camp near Abbeville held a one thousand five hundred bed hospital. It was deemed the most suitable venue for determining such cases,³⁰⁷ as fatal injuries and deaths in the field itself were likely to be subject to unsatisfactory ex post facto analyses, sometimes by the coolies themselves, who were quick to blame their white overseers for any fatalities in the ranks.³⁰⁸ By December, 1917, after the Chinese had been active in increasing numbers in France for over seven months, their senior commander, Colonel Fairfax, himself admitted that over sixty of them had been killed as a result of German fire, and that over one hundred had been wounded.³⁰⁹ The figures were probably conservative.

Apart from the War Office, the military members of the Army Council seem to have been maintaining a close

³⁰⁶P.R.O./W.O. 106/33, C.L.C. History, Labour Directorate Memorandum, August, 1917. (The memorandum also suggested how other potentially ambiguous phrases in the contract might be used to evade or avoid responsibilities.)

³⁰⁷P.R.O./W.O. 161/2, Provision of Hospitals, "Coloured Labour," p. 15.

³⁰⁸G.S.O., G.H.Q. (Montreuil-sur-Mer), p. 157.

³⁰⁹P.R.O./W.O. 106/33, C.L.C. History, Fairfax, C.L. C.H.Q., B.E.F., France, to Colonel Weatherall, War Office, London, December 25, 1917.

watch on the effects of enemy action on the Chinese. They particularly disliked the influence upon the German propaganda mills, which quickly made lurid use of any hints of death or injury in the ranks of the Chinese Labour Corps. Those members of the Council who hoped one day to see Chinese troops fighting in France also watched the reactions of the coolies with interest. They were soon disappointed at the way in which the better class Chinese reacted under direct fire or aerial bombardment, and used this disappointment later as a partial reason for refusing Chinese interpreters officer status in the Corps, even though it was agreed that the interpreters still be treated with more respect than the mere laborers.³¹⁰

There is no doubt that these better educated men suffered death and injury along with their less sophisticated brothers.³¹¹ In October, 1917, when the value of skilled and semi-skilled Chinese had become more readily apparent, the Foreign Office took an interest in the question of exposure to enemy action. Realizing that such men could be of inestimable value in the war effort,

³¹⁰Ibid., Army Council to Under Secretary of State, Foreign Office, London, December 7, 1917. (The Council also feared what effect the elevation of Chinese personnel would have upon white officers and N.C.O.'s.)

³¹¹J. Webster, "With the Chinese in France," Year Book of the National Council of Y.M.C.A.'s for 1921, Report of the War Emergency Work of the Association from 1914 to 1920 (London: Y.M.C.A., 1921), p. 33.

it recommended Sir John Jordan in Peking further their enrollment, but with an element of candor that had not been present in the past negotiations. Perhaps a private understanding could be made and about four hundred men "who would undertake to serve without restriction as to their employment in dangerous areas . . . exposed to shellfire."³¹²

This emendation in the contract conditions was to be strictly viva voce, and was to carry with it the additional suggestion from London that men so engaged should in the first instance be hired as "ordinary coolies"³¹³ so as to avoid any speculation as to their use. Apparently this recommendation for greater candor, albeit qualified, resulted in pressures generated in France. There the more vocal and literate members of the Chinese Labour Corps, some of whom found themselves working at skilled tasks in dangerous areas, had banded together to voice their resentment at the added dangers. This element of political and social organization alarmed Whitehall. Were the mere coolies on the verge of bargaining collectively for better conditions? Some had actually used their subjection to fire as a means of demanding

³¹²P.R.O./W.O. 106/35, Employment, Foreign Office, London, to Sir John Jordan, Peking, October 22, 1917.

³¹³Ibid.

more pay.³¹⁴

And so it was that the Foreign Office joined its Army Council and War Office colleagues in agreeing on the need to restrict deaths and injuries in the Corps, or at least to prevent news of them leaking out. Although it also agreed in private that it was quite ludicrous to describe as non-dangerous the places in which the majority of Chinese worked,³¹⁵ the Foreign Office urged Jordan to see that efforts to impugn British integrity on this score be ended at all costs, and subversive broadsheets collected and destroyed without delay.³¹⁶

The Foreign Office was worried, too, about keeping Chinese diplomats in London satisfied with the status of their nationals in France.³¹⁷ For this reason if for no

³¹⁴G.S.O., G.H.Q. (Montreuil-sur-Mer), p. 156. (The Directorate of Labour also recognized this state of affairs and reminded its Chinese Labour Corps officers that the coolie in general was "a rigid adherent to his Contract, though agreeable to modifications . . . if advantageous to him." See P.R.O./W.O. 107/37, Labour Report, Appendix to Notes for Officers of Labour Companies: Chinese Labour, October, 1917, p. 4.

³¹⁵P.R.O./W.O. 106/33, C.L.C. History, Foreign Office, London, to Jordan, Peking, December 7, 1917.

³¹⁶T. J. Bourne resented this aspersion on his security arrangements. See Ibid., Bourne, Wei-hai-Wei, to War Office, London, December 14, 1917.

³¹⁷H. G. MacNair, "The Chinese as Contract Labourers," China Weekly Review, Vol. XXV, June 2, 1923.

other it discouraged the gratuitous exposure of the coolies to the effects of enemy action. It also made quite sure that the army adequately censored all their letters home so that no mention of actual conditions could emerge. It might appear from all this that the coolies were preserved from greater risk purely in order to avoid embarrassment in London.

And yet self interest was not the only force at work. There existed elements of moral concern, too. For example, in the early months of 1918, when the collapse of Russia necessitated the urgent deepening and strengthening of the lines of defense, Field Marshall Haig expressed the greatest anxiety about how this task was to be accomplished. He told the war cabinet that his "whole difficulty"³¹⁸ was one of labor. Now, if ever, would have been the time for the army establishment to throw its integrity to the wind and to employ the Chinese and other natives in a massive effort to strengthen the crucial defense network against any projected German thrust. Exigency of war could have been claimed in defense. And yet this did not occur.

When General Jan C. Smuts, as an advisor to, and member of, Lloyd George's war cabinet visited France to

³¹⁸p.R.O./W.O. 158/45, Minutes of War Cabinet Meetings, 1917-1918, Downing St., January 7, 1918.

assess the problem presented by Haig's need, he commented in a memorandum to his colleagues in London that although the need for additional labor was indeed as pressing and vast as the commander in chief maintained, the possibility of using Chinese or colored labor "to any considerable extent"³¹⁹ was out of the question owing to the risk such contingents might run of coming under direct and sustained enemy fire. It is true that large numbers³²⁰ of Chinese were immediately seconded to defensive works as a result of Haig's plea, but their tasks consisted for the most part in construction of secondary rings of defense like those surrounding General Headquarters, or 2nd Army Corps Headquarters.

Records do exist of some Chinese Labour Corps companies working on lines which were, according to the map coordinates of the sectors involved, classified as fire zones. But one need not deduce from this information that they were actually on hand when shells fell, or that they experienced casual ties. One thing is certain. Without the coolies' help in digging, trenching, and

³¹⁹Ibid., Memorandum of a Visit to the Western Front by General Smuts, January 27, 1918.

³²⁰By April, 1918, the following Chinese Labour Corps companies were working on defensive lines for G.H.Q. and the 2nd Army: 41st, 54th, 57th, 56th, 92nd, 8th, 73rd, 172nd, 66th, 167th, 179th, 58th, 181st, and 180th. With officers this totaled about 7,000 men. Most of the companies were seconded direct from Labour Control's pool. See P.R.O./W.O. 95/292, War Diaries of 2nd Army H.Q., B.E.F., France, entry of Assistant Director of Labour, April 13, 1918.

mining, these crucial defenses might never have been completed in time.

During³²¹ and after the war there appeared a quantity of mistaken and conjectural material concerning the Chinese under fire. Journalists employed superlatives too freely, and spoke, as did the columns of The Times in April, 1919, of "a fair number of Chinese killed and wounded by enemy action."³²² What did "a fair number" mean? It was easy to extrapolate from such generalizations and to think in terms of hundreds killed and thousands wounded. But the existing documentary evidence on this very important point, although admittedly only partial, seems to confirm that while different and even sinister intent may sometimes have been present, the coolies of the Chinese Labour Corps were as a rule kept as far from enemy action as was reasonably practicable under the stresses generated by war, and that they sustained fewer casualties than might have been expected.

³²¹In December, 1917, The Times rather injudiciously spoke of C.L.C. units coming under fire. This reference was in one of a series of three articles sanctioned by the War Office itself. See "An Army of Labour in France," The Times (London), December 26, 1917, p. 8. (In the last article, the newspaper reversed itself, and stressed that only British labor ever came under fire. See The Times (London), December 28, 1917, p. 7.)

³²²"The C.L.C.: With the Coolie from China to France," The Times (London), April 23, 1919, p. 8.

Naturally, many Chinese died from common causes while in Europe. The turn from violent to natural death still involves questions of the conditions under which the coolies worked, however. Could the incidence of fatalities have been lessened? Was there an element of indifference to their needs? There is no doubt that the Flanders winter, despite the hardier constitutions of these Chinese from the North, had a profound effect upon their health to an extent which their employers had not calculated. The laborers never got used to the damp of the climate in winter, despite The Times' officially phrased insistencies to the contrary.³²³ Pthises and other respiratory diseases unknown to them at home appeared and flourished in their ranks.

The truth is that in addition to the unpleasantness of the climate and the generally poor provision for their subjection to it, many of the workers who arrived from Wei-hai-Wei were too ill or weak to cope with the climatic change in the first place, and should never have been allowed to leave China. The medical examinations they underwent in Wei-hai-Wei before embarkation were far too perfunctory, and unhappily were governed by economic

³²³"Workers from Distant Shores," The Times (London), December 27, 1917. (The newspaper remarked reassuringly that the Chinese were "not likely to suffer much from the mild rigours of the French winter.")

considerations, too. T. J. Bourne, who was rejecting many of the incoming coolies on the grounds of indifferent or poor health, found to his honest dismay that the original contractors, once having supplied the men at a set figure, were totally unwilling to take them back at cost to themselves. Constantly urged by the War Office in London to economize, Bourne was reluctant to foot the bill for returning coolies. His operating budget was slender at the best of times. To his credit, Bourne often did clothe, feed, and return numbers of men whom he considered completely unacceptable. But many others slipped through. All Bourne could do was beg the War Office to allow the supply of some unusually expensive raincoats³²⁴ for each man to help mitigate the damaging effects which he quite early foresaw would be the probable result of the laborers' first winter in the mud.

Unfortunately the War Office, with bland unimaginativeness, had decreed that the same medical procedures be laid down for the selection of the coolies in 1916 and 1917 as had been employed a decade earlier in the immigration to South Africa where the possibility of latent respiratory ailments or weaknesses had been of minor

³²⁴P.R.O./W.O. 106/33, C.L.C. History, Robertson, Peking, to D.M.I., London, October 24, 1916.

significance.³²⁵ The same thinking applied to the shipping of the Chinese, which was carried out under conditions calculated to compound any incipient medical problems. The only consolation in all this is that of the natives employed by the British army during the war, the Chinese probably fared better than most in that they were to some degree physiologically fitted for the encounter.³²⁶

One of the most unpleasant medical problems which the Chinese brought with them to Europe was the comparatively innocuous yet potentially damaging eye disease known as infectious trachoma. This condition, which could and should have been noted among greater numbers of men before they left China, seemed to worsen considerably in France. In each Chinese Labour Corps company of about four hundred and ninety Chinese, it became common to find as many as fifty men who suffered.³²⁷ The War Office was obliged to request a senior medical officer and eye surgeon serving in France, Colonel Lister, to assess the pro-

³²⁵P.R.O./W.O. 106/35, Employment, "Proposed Employment of Chinese as Fighting Troops," Memorandum of Military Intelligence, February 24, 1917.

³²⁶An official report on imported Indian workers found many "too degenerate" even to form the nuclei of labor corps. See P.R.O./W.O. 32/5110, Arrangements for Indian Sick and Wounded.

³²⁷P.R.O./W.O. 95/4174, Labour Corps Diaries, 1917, Diary of 4th Labour Company, C.L.C., May 10, 1917. And see P.R.O./W.O. 95/571, War Diaries of 5th Army Labour Group H.Q., B.E.F., France, 1917, passim.

portions of the problem and to make recommendations accordingly. The Colonel's findings revealed the serious and ubiquitous nature of the illness, and incidentally pointed up the extent of such kindred diseases as conjunctivitis.³²⁸

These findings were a blow both to the War Office and to Colonel Wace's Labour Directorate. Already disturbed over the allotment of all his reserves, Wace now had to see the Chinese form an additional problem, for it became necessary to divide the coolies into "clean" and "dirty" companies according to the levels of infection. This action, he remarked with asperity, "complicated the task of distribution."³²⁹ Indeed, the whole question of the ill health of Chinese personnel can be seen as a significant element in the Chinese Labour Corps' failure to achieve the optimum levels of efficiency laid down for it by its white directors.

Quite apart from the physical and hereditary deficiencies listed above, the Chinese in France were also exposed to the consequences associated with inadequate diet. It is proper to point out that the War Office devoted a great deal of discussion to the question of feed-

³²⁸P.R.O./W.O. 107/37, Labour Report, p. 47.

³²⁹Ibid., p. 48.

ing the imported workers.³³⁰ Back in 1916 when the whole scheme was being planned the aim had been to provide the minimum food levels compatible with the maintenance of health. Exotic foods or their preparation were ruled out as too expensive, and dietary supplements were thought unnecessary. But the coolies were expected to work at heavy tasks under harsh and alien conditions along with the accompaniment of a damp climate. Weaknesses showed up quickly. Some men were to strike or mutiny because they regarded their food as stinted or badly prepared. Others were found to be "emaciated"³³¹ by a visiting Royal Army Medical Corps investigator. As a result, the rice ration for the entire Chinese Labour Corps was increased by half a pound during 1917. But a lively controversy ensued as to the standards and quality of food supplied the Chinese, and reports of the men being physically unable to carry out their tasks, presumably because of under nourishment, can be found recorded.

Colonel Fairfax, as senior officer commanding the Chinese Labour Corps, at one point had to intervene on

³³⁰The basic ration was fixed at $1\frac{1}{2}$ lbs. of rice, $\frac{1}{2}$ lb. of dried meat or fish, $\frac{1}{2}$ lb. of vegetables, $\frac{1}{2}$ oz. of tea, and $\frac{1}{2}$ oz. of oil. This, it was concluded, was the mean average available to coolies in China. See P.R.O./W.O. 32/11345, Recruitment, "Directions for the Employment of Chinese Labour," October 27, 1916.

³³¹P.R.O./W.O. 95/4174, Labour Corps Diaries, 1917, Diary of 4th Labour Company, C.L.C., Calais, May 28 and 29, 1917.

the issue of the coolies' diet and its adequacy. He was forced to circulate a sharply worded directive among his company commanders in the field in which he outlined the officially specified food quotas, and warned "it is the duty of all officers to accept this scale and not to criticise it, or solicit criticism from the Chinese, which only causes unrest."³³² Privately, Fairfax suspected that the food might indeed be inadequate for hard workers in unusual surroundings and uncongenial weather.

Conditions in the hospitals to which ailing Chinese were sent were reasonably good, but here again one finds that during the first year of operation these facilities left a good deal to be desired, especially by way of construction. The tents used initially were eventually replaced by wooden barracks similar in overall design to those built for white personnel, but designed to hold a far larger number of men within the same space. Plans for a hospital capacity of one thousand beds had been tentatively suggested as early as August, 1916, when the plan to import the Chinese was still in its preliminary stages.³³³ However, by early 1918, there was a ten thousand bed capacity for the Chinese. This figure represent-

³³²P.R.O./W.O. 106/33, C.L.C. History, Order of Col. Fairfax to C.L.C. Officers, August /?/, 1917.

³³³P.R.O./W.O. 32/11345, Recruitment, minute sheet, August, 1917.

ed approximately ten percent of the Chinese Labour Corps at that time. And yet the capacity was still insufficient and had to be supplemented.³³⁴ This alone suggests the dimensions of the problem of keeping the Chinese healthy in an alien environment.

A notable feature which distinguished the Chinese hospitals from others which housed whites was the barbed wire fence, eight feet high, which surrounded each perimeter. These fences were patrolled and guarded. They served the double function of preventing Chinese escapes and limiting fraternization between coolies and inquisitive outsiders. The same atmosphere of rigid security, censorship, and suspicion pervaded the hospitals as it did the camps where the Orientals usually lay. One reason for the lack of contemporary journalistic documentation about the conditions under which the Chinese worked or lived stems from the fact that, unless officially sanctioned, visits to camps or hospitals were totally impossible. Chinese Labour Corps officers were warned that "entry of all strangers to the camps . . . should be strictly forbidden."³³⁵ Far from wanting to expose the

³³⁴P.R.O./W.O. 161/2, The Historical Narrative of the Works Directorate, p. 22, "Hospitals for Coloured Labour."

³³⁵P.R.O./W.O. 107/37, Labour Report, Appendix to Notes for Officers of Labour Companies: "Chinese Labour," Issued by Directorate of Labour, 1917.

Chinese to the advantages of Western culture, the army establishment had every intention of keeping its Chinese in one of the tightest quarantines on record.

The points discussed above are of a general nature and cover the entire Chinese Labour Corps. But one must always recall that the nucleus of the Chinese labor establishment was the individual company, where a sole commander could ameliorate, exacerbate, or even ignore the kind of conditions that have been described. So long as the company functioned as a unit he and his white subordinates could have a profound impact upon the life of a Chinese laborer.

The white staff of each company generally comprised a captain, three or four subalterns, a sergeant major, six sergeants, and eight corporals. The five hundred or so laborers did not receive commands directly from any of these men, even when some of their white overseers did speak some Mandarin Chinese, but rather through the medium of their own "gangers." The gangers were Chinese chosen from the ranks of the coolies and given slightly more than the one franc a day³³⁶ paid the ordinary workers.

The elevation to ganger was not a popular promotion among the Chinese. It meant translating and implementing

³³⁶Amounting to approximately nine or ten pence in those days.

the orders of the white officers. The whites in turn had to be careful not to compromise the position of their gangers by allowing any of them to lose face among their compatriots, for once a ganger was humiliated in front of his countrymen his use was over since the men refused to obey his orders, and a new ganger had to be chosen. Even at this most fundamental level one may see how the development of a delicate situation could result in dangerous misunderstandings upon which the efficiency of a whole company might depend. The unenviable position of the ganger as intermediary between his compatriots and the master race which governed them emphasized the racial tensions present throughout the whole Corps.

Later in the war the Americans discovered just how delicately balanced the command structure of the average coolie company really was. The New York Times once exulted that with the arrival of American engineers and the coincidental materialization of coolies, a unique opportunity would arise for a combination "of Chinese labor and American bosses."³³⁷ Such a conjunction was bound, in the newspaper's opinion, to produce "the most satisfactory issue for getting work expeditiously done."³³⁸

³³⁷New York Times, July 21, 1917, p. 5.

³³⁸Ibid.

Although Britain had no intention of entirely relinquishing any of her Chinese workers to American control, she did allow a few of them to become attached to a corps of some ten thousand coolies placed at the disposal of the United States by the French in the closing months of the war.³³⁹ It was then that the Americans, eager to exercise their own brand of capitalist management techniques, discovered the importance of understanding the psychology and capacity of the raw material they had been loaned. They turned then to observe British methods of direction and handling of the "Raw Importation."

For most of the time the average Chinese Labour Corps company lived in a vacuum. When in base camp and forming part of the Labour Director's pool, it remained

³³⁹T. Chen, Chinese Migrations, With Special Reference to Labor Conditions (Washington: Bureau of Labor Statistics, 1923), p. 121. (There is no doubt that America canvassed the idea of forming its own Chinese labor corps. The Foreign Office in London ordered its ambassador in Washington, Sir Cecil Spring-Rice, to discourage the idea of allowing this competitive angle to develop. There was a real fear that it might open an American sphere of influence in the Far East after hostilities in Europe had concluded. "It would be as well," noted the Foreign Office dryly, "if China were left to the French and us." See P.R.O./W.O. 106/33, C.L.C. History, Foreign Office, London, to Sir C. Spring-Rice, Washington, October 1, 1917.) There were also plans to raise an extra command of 40,000 Chinese "sappers" for work "in or near" the front line, the effort to be financed with American money and agreed to by the Chinese government. See P.R.O./W.O. 106/35, Chinese Troops, "Note pour le Conseil Supérieur de Guerre, par Mission Militaire Britannique, January 15, 1918.

isolated even from other Chinese units, and was especially forbidden to see even from a distance the camps in which white laborers or troops lived.³⁴⁰ This latter insistence was for fear that the coolies would be in a position "to judge or criticise the same class or work"³⁴¹ or standard of living enjoyed by white personnel in France. The largest Chinese base camp at Noyelles-sur-Mer was a virtual ghetto through whose gates no one could pass without searching examination.

When in the field, the subordinate attachment of the Chinese Labour Corps company to the unit for which it worked ensured its continued isolation. Chinese were not allowed to mix with whites. White company officers shared this enforced isolation. Few were considered professionally acceptable in messes that they visited while on assignment in the field.

From this description it may be imagined what kind of intense and introverted psychology grew up in the individual companies which constituted the Corps. Mutual suspicions flourished. White officers began to find their Oriental charges far shrewder than they had presumed. Some feared the growth of the Tong or other se-

³⁴⁰P.R.O./W.O. 107/37, Labour Report, Appendix to Notes for Officers of Labour Companies: "Chinese Labour," Issued by Directorate of Labour, 1917.

³⁴¹Ibid.

cret societies, some of which undoubtedly flourished within the confines of Chinese companies.³⁴² Other white captains and subalterns, used perhaps to the methods of the Raj, attempted to apply colonialist techniques to the direction of the Chinese. This procedure, based on the arrogant emphasis of racial superiority, usually failed where the Chinese were concerned. They were willing to be subordinate, but not subject, and refused to respond readily to such arbitrary means of control. Besides, many of the coolies had a stubborn belief in the superiority of their own culture and proved perceptive judges of the British dilemma caused by the encounter of the two races.³⁴³

Despite all the fears and disappointment associated with the direction of the Chinese at work, the fascination for the exploitation of Chinese manpower resources continued to exert a very considerable influence on policy making in some quarters of the British military establishment. Controversy on the topic remained heated. One officer in a capacity of some importance could remark that he was unalterably opposed to the use of Chi-

³⁴²George Horn, Rainhill, Lancashire, letter to the writer, September 20, 1972.

³⁴³P.R.O./W.O. 107/37, Labour Report, Appendix to Notes for Officers of Labour Companies: "Chinese Labour," Issued by Directorate of Labour, 1917.

nese as anything but the merest coolies,³⁴⁴ another could remark that if properly officered there was no reason why Chinese of the same coolie type should not make excellent soldiers.³⁴⁵ The Foreign Office, which shared the optimistic view of the Corps' performance held by some of its colleagues in the army establishment, was on one occasion moved by an unusual exuberance to remark that the activities of the coolies in France were "an unqualified success,"³⁴⁶ although this assessment was admittedly made on the basis of the most slender information.

These conflicts of opinion over the exploitability of the Chinese received a heightening of importance when China entered the war on the Allied side. China felt that if she could now send fighting contingents to Europe, the gratitude of the Entente Powers, especially Britain, would be such as to assist her to free herself from continued German influence after the war, and to help her escape from the aggressive intentions of Japan.

Editorials appeared in leading and influential Peking newspapers close to government circles. In them was emphasized the importance of Chinese manpower. It

³⁴⁵Ibid., Memorandum on Proposed Employment of Chinese as Fighting Troops, Robertson, Peking, to M.I.2, London, 1917.

³⁴⁶P.R.O./W.O. 106/33, C.L.C. History, Foreign Office, London, to Sir C. Spring-Rice, Washington, October 1, 1917.

had already been demonstrated that Chinese could support the Allied cause as laborers. Now, as a matter of honor, the British at least ought to consider allowing Chinese troops to fight side by side with white soldiers in France and Flanders. To continue to regard China as a resource for crude labor alone was now an insupportable insult.³⁴⁷ Such was the content of the arguments heard in the Peking press.

Understandably, perhaps, this line of reasoning met with a mixed response in Whitehall. The notion of using Chinese troops to bolster Oriental prestige was not exactly what the strategists there had had in mind. The Chinese Labour Corps always occupied a very different position in their estimation. It had always been understood as an article of faith that it would melt away rapidly, with no lingering residual liabilities or re-criminations.³⁴⁸ The thought of employing Chinese troops on a parity with British, while still intriguing, seemed to entail dangerous obligations for the future of British politics and diplomacy in the Far East.

³⁴⁷The Peking Daily News, October 6, 1917, p. 1. And see L.T. Chen, "The Chinese Labour Battalions," Chinese Students' Monthly, April, 1918, p. 299, and The North China Herald, May 18, 1918, p. 5.

³⁴⁸As early as 1905 the War Office had accepted that this ad hoc quality was essential if any natives were to be employed in war. See P.R.O./W.O. 32/6805, Royal Engineers Organisation for War, Memorandum of Col. R. Kenyon, 1905.

But the Chinese government continued to stress the parallels between what the Chinese Labour Corps had done, and what China's additional and vast manpower resources might do, to turn the tide in Europe. In August, 1918, when China under President Feng Kuo-Chang rather belatedly announced its formal adherence to the Allied cause, her Prime Minister and War Minister, Tuan Chi-jui, openly declared that his nation's supply of manual labor to Europe decisively proved that her resources fitted her for the task of combat support.³⁴⁹

Diplomats and military men alike found this insistence embarrassing. They looked with relief to the coming cessation of hostilities after which they would be able to avoid considering China's offer with the seriousness that she demanded. In the meantime, it was urged that everything be done to keep the Chinese Labour Corps on its current and cheap "free contract" basis with China neutral, rather than risk her asking for retroactive changes in wages and conditions as part of a quid pro quo for entry into the war.³⁵⁰

There were men who ignored the delicate questions raised by China's status as an ally. Colonel Robertson in Peking still hoped to arrange for an increased influx

³⁴⁹The North China Herald, August [?], 1918, p. 1.

³⁵⁰P.R.O./W.O. 106/33, C.L.C. History, Alston, Peking, to D.M.I., London, August 13, 1918.

of Chinese into Europe for use both as troops and laborers. He had been planning all along for what he called "the cut and dried scheme for the role we wish China to play."³⁵¹ When it became apparent that London had no intention of widening the scope of the immigration, Robertson and those who shared his mind had to content themselves with the observation that at least the Chinese Labour Corps had, in the idiom of the day, "done its bit."

Was this "bit" formally appreciated at the war's conclusion? Its attendant rigors, some of which have been discussed in the preceding pages, were flippantly dismissed at the peace conference at Versailles. Mr. Lloyd George, whose own inspiration played such a large part in calling the Chinese Labour Corps into being, remarked acidly that with a population of four hundred millions behind her, the assistance China rendered the Allied cause had been "insignificant."³⁵² How dare the Orientals demand a memorial to their sacrifices.

³⁵¹P.R.O./W.O. 106/35, Employment, Robertson, Peking, to D.M.I., London, May 17, 1918.

³⁵²D. Lloyd George, Memories of the Peace Conference (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1939), p. 134.

CHAPTER VI
THE CHRISTIAN MISSIONARY EFFORT: ITS EFFECT UPON
THE CHINESE LABOUR CORPS: 1918-1920

In the months following their arrival in Europe, the men of the Chinese Labour Corps were increasingly subject to the influence of Christian missionary work in their ranks. This effort, which was designed to impress upon the Chinese the virtues of Western cultural and religious patterns, the need to control their sometimes volatile emotions, and the wisdom of cooperation with their white overseers, persisted until the time of the coolies' final repatriation. An examination of the dimensions of the Christian missionary impact upon the Chinese therefore forms a logical part of a continuation of the last chapter's discussion of the coolies at work, and serves to carry that discussion up to the period of their return to China.

It is difficult today to find an adequate vantage point from which to view historically the work of Christian missionaries among underprivileged or alien groups.³⁵³

³⁵³Attempts to see the Christian missionary outreach of the colonial era in an authentic perspective are becoming more frequent as passions on the issue cool, or

It is often hard not to condemn outright the imposition of the Judaic-Christian persuasion on native cultures, especially those like the Chinese which had a well developed pedigree of its own. A distaste for this "Christian pedantry"³⁵⁴ grows when it is seen in the service of national interests, automatically equating paganism with savagery and Christianity with civilization. But on the positive side one also has to accept the fact that much in the way of alleviation of poverty, misery, and discontent was accomplished by the whole missionary outreach. Besides which, the modern missionary approach has greatly changed.

These ambivalent emotions are sure to surface in a discussion of the Chinese Labour Corps. One learns, for instance, that missionaries in Shantung were used by the War Office both to assist in the enrollment of the coolies by presenting the Allied war effort to them in terms of a Christian moral conflict to which the Chinese believer should subscribe, and in the important task of damping down the passions, frustrations, and even sexual desires of the Chinese laborers once they had arrived in Europe. In Europe, too, some missionaries, either as officers in

are regarded as irrelevant. For example, see P. Barr, To China With Love (London: Secker & Warburg, 1972), passim.

³⁵⁴A. Césaire, Discourse on Colonialism, p. 11.

the Chinese Labour Corps or as private citizens attached to it, glorified war and also the heroic effort needed to pursue it.³⁵⁵

It must be noted, too, that missionary organizations involved in work for the Chinese in France looked for very concrete benefits in terms of increased contributions to their post war work in China, an increase in converts to the faith, and greater respectability as a result of the work of their members in the coolie camps in Europe. These comments apply especially to the British Baptists, whose major concern in China was the province of Shantung.

This does not mean that the rate of conversions to Christianity was high. On the contrary, groups of believers were small. But these groups, and those who adhered to them in Europe, acted as nuclei of stability and social order in the ranks of individual labor companies.³⁵⁶ By their willingness to listen to and assimilate the basic tenets of subservience demanded of them

³⁵⁵White labor corps were subjected to the same exhortations. See Memorandum from Sir George Askwith to Members of the National Council of Y.M.C.A.'s, (London: YMCA Archives), April 21, 1918, p. 5.

³⁵⁶Reverend R. M. Gibbon, Glasgow, letter to Baptist Missionary Society, London (London: B.M.S. Archives), March 14, 1918. (Gibbon provides an interesting view of the Reverend Shields, one of the most tireless and controversial Baptists in France, and his efforts to convert the Chinese to Christianity.)

by their missionary teachers, they offered a solid proof to their fellow Chinese that tractability and cooperation with the British paid clear dividends. No wonder the War Office became increasingly interested in the work of missionaries in the Corps.

The question of the use of Christian missionaries had arisen very early in the discussions of the practicality of raising Chinese workers. The War Office and its advisors regarded them as the perfect propagandists for the scheme. The Chinese attached to missionaries none of the distrust that they had on previous occasions manifested for the paid recruiters and propagandists of, say, the French and South African labor syndicates. The missionaries were free from any taint of corruption. While few in number, and the shepherds of comparatively small flocks, the Baptists in particular had won a degree of respect, and even affection, among the populace of Shantung, Shansi, and Shensi provinces that placed them in an excellent position to act as spokesmen for Whitehall's plans.³⁵⁷

In December, 1916, Colonel Robertson wrote from Peking to Captain Denny, his friend in Military Intelligence in London, reminding him of earlier correspondence

³⁵⁷Shantung, Shansi, and Shensi were the exclusive preserve of the Baptists. In Shantung, their work was highly organized and divided into four geographically contiguous associations. See "China Report, The Baptist Herald, Vol. XCVIII, May, 1916, p. 120.

on the topic of missionaries, and emphasizing the advantage which the Christian pastors in Shantung could be to the War Office in the furtherance of its desires to raise men there.³⁵⁸ Robertson was to remain an outspoken advocate of the need to enlist all missionaries in the effort to raise the coolies and to pacify their apprehensiveness. As early as July, 1916, it had been he who mentioned to Foreign Secretary Grey the tremendous work the missionaries could accomplish in relation to quietening Chinese fears concerning the proposed importation. No one in China would doubt the integrity of such assurances, and the anticipated plan could proceed with minimal opposition.³⁵⁹

All along it seemed obvious to Robertson and to his colleagues in the Peking legation that the Baptists, many of whom lived along the Shantung railway line, could provide this perfect medium for advertising the War Office's needs and the moral nature of the crusade against the Germans in Europe. Attaché Alston agreed, but recommended caution in the selection of missionaries called to aid the labor scheme.³⁶⁰ Those whose views were too liberal

³⁵⁸P.R.O./W.O. 106/33, C.L.C. History, Robertson, Peking, to D.M.I., London, December 26, 1916.

³⁵⁹P.R.O./W.O. 106/35, Employment, "Memorandum on the Employment of Chinese for War," Robertson, Peking, to D.M.I., London, July 23, 1916.

³⁶⁰P.R.O./W.O. 106/33, C.L.C. History, Alston, Peking, to D.M.I., London, January 15, 1917.

or progressive, or who entertained pacifist views, were better left alone.

And so it was that when the labor enrollment plans began to advance, and T. J. Bourne arrived in China to implement them, the missionaries deemed suitable as representatives were approached and asked to serve. One or two seemed reluctant to do so until assured by the British legation in Peking, or by Bourne in Wei-hai-Wei, that the request made of them was compatible with their calling. They received assurances that their actions would aid the Allied war effort and could only redound to the credit of themselves and the faith they served. The coolies that they helped to enroll would return to China after the war burning with a zeal to adopt the Christian doctrine, having seen it everywhere at work in Europe. With yet more Candide-like optimism, the War Office assured the ten or so missionaries initially involved that no violence would be done their Chinese flocks while serving the British. All of this was in line with the ethos that has been described in an earlier chapter, and represents the sentiments popularized by Cromer and others before the war.³⁶¹

By January of 1917 the British ambassador in Peking could inform London through one of his attachés that

³⁶¹Supra., p. 17.

"we have recently started recruiting propaganda through the medium of Local British Missionaries."³⁶² The awkward phrasing concealed the belief that much advantage was expected from this move, which it was felt was bound to lull the coolies' suspicions as to their use, and act as a valuable counterweight to the already accelerating German counter propaganda effort. Sir John Jordan advised that more generous pay scales be offered by the War Office to tempt missionaries into volunteering for service with the Chinese in the corps that was being formed by Bourne in Wei-hai-Wei.³⁶³

In London, the Baptist Missionary Society entertained some doubts as to the advisability of such wholehearted cooperation with Whitehall's efforts. The Baptists had no wish to jeopardize their relations with the Peking government by compromising it in any way. This might lead to a limiting of missionary activity in China after the war. The Christian Missionary Society and the China Inland Mission supported these reservations. Besides, there was the question of what to do with the families of missionaries who went further than mere aid

³⁶²P.R.O./W.O. 106/33, C.L.C. History, Alston, Peking, to D.M.I., London, January 8, 1917.

³⁶³Ibid., Jordan, Peking, to Foreign Office and War Office, London, January 10, 1917.

in recruiting coolies, and decided to seek commissions in the Chinese Labour Corps. To ship them home would cost money, as the War Office ruefully admitted.³⁶⁴

A compromise was reached with the suggestion that Baptist missionaries in Shantung be allowed to resign temporarily from their parent Society in order to aid the enrollment drive there.³⁶⁵ But the problem persisted. In May, 1917, when efforts to raise coolies were at their peak, Alston in Peking wrote to London, observing that,

Cases occur in which Home Mission Boards refuse permission to Missionaries in China to serve with the coolies. Missionaries are forming one of the main sources of Chinese speaking officers . . . I trust Chinese Mission Boards at home . . . will be given every encouragement by War Office to release as many men out here as possible. . . .³⁶⁶

The historian of the Baptists' role in China during this period has proudly suggested the magnitude of their accomplishments for the government in relation to the raising of coolies. He declares that of an estimated seventy thousand men enrolled from Shantung province, many thousands owed their decision to serve the British

³⁶⁴Ibid., Robertson, Peking, to Denny, M.I.2, London, December 8, 1916.

³⁶⁵Ibid., Alston, Peking, to D.M.I., London, February 2, 1917.

³⁶⁶Ibid., Alston, Peking, to D.M.I., London, May 31, 1917.

to the influence of local Baptist clergy.³⁶⁷ These services were much appreciated in London. They also provided missionaries with expanded opportunities for evangelism among the coolie class.³⁶⁸

When it came to seeing some of these same missionaries in uniform, accompanying the Chinese to France, the War Office and its advisors in China confessed to something of a dilemma. Of course they desperately needed men who could speak the language, and who had a degree of rapport with the ill understood and unpredictable Chinese. But they feared also that the religious presence would constitute a threat to commanders in France, and limit the attempts of labor directors to utilize the Chinese to the maximum degree. Were ex-missionaries to take leading company command positions themselves, perhaps as a result of former military experience, the limitations might be heightened to a degree.

Accordingly, at first only thirteen former Baptist missionaries were allowed to accompany the Chinese to France as uniformed officers,³⁶⁹ although the War Office

³⁶⁷H. R. Williamson, British Baptists in China: 1845-1952 (London: Carey Kingsgate Press, 1957), p. 100.

³⁶⁸These opportunities were eagerly "'bought up,' both in France and China during and after the War." Ibid. See too Minutes of Baptist Missionary Society Executive Committee (London: B.M.S. Archives), July, 1917.

³⁶⁹Reverend A. J. Garnier, Sevenoaks, Kent, letter to the writer, September 4, 1972. (Garnier was one of the

accepted as a recommendation for commission the religious qualifications of a number of applicants for command positions in the Chinese Labour Corps. Later, after the Corps became established in France and the potential and actual value of the religious presence in the labor camps was fully realized, the War Office congratulated itself on its prescience in accepting these requests for commissions, and conveniently forgot some the the reservations that had been expressed before.³⁷⁰

A typical applicant for officer status in the Corps who, by January of 1918, could be regarded by the War Office as "very suitable indeed,"³⁷¹ was a public school educated priest of the Church of England, aged thirty, who had been conducting an active and aggressive missionary work in Vancouver, British Columbia. This individual applied direct to the War Office in London. Other prospective officers applied to the British legation in Peking, where Sir John Jordan, advised by Colonel Robertson,

thirteen chosen. And see Williamson, British Baptists in China, p. 100.)

³⁷⁰Colonel Fairfax was eventually to ask that more missionaries be used to control and officer the Chinese, although he always remained dubious about the military competence of these men. See P.R.O./W.O. 106/33, C.L.C. History, Report of Col. Fairfax to Labour Directorate, 1917.

³⁷¹Ibid., Applications for Officer Commissions in the C.L.C., Application of Mr. N. Lascelles-Ward, Vancouver, January 8, 1918. And see P.R.O./W.O. 106/29, Commissions for Chinese Labour Corps Commanders and Others, passim.

handled their requests. The two began to use the same criteria as London. Religious orthodoxy and doctrinal dependability, solid Anglo-Saxon cultural background, and desire to participate in the mission of "civilizing" and controlling the Chinese whom the applicants were being chosen to direct were the qualities most looked for.

Although many of the candidates selected as a result of this process undeniably possessed attractive and creditable personal qualities, they were frequently regarded by their service colleagues in France as rank amateurs, or worse. Their employment was a deliberate gamble. Both Peking and London came to the frank conclusion that the choosing of men on a partly religious basis was explainable in terms of their affect on the coolies, but admittedly not defensible in professional military terms.

Quite apart from its consideration of individuals, the War Office was becoming progressively more aware of the part that organizations like the Young Men's Christian Association (YMCA) could play in keeping the Chinese in France quiet, docile, and cooperative. The full impact of this realization was slow to materialize, but initial approaches to the YMCA were made as early as December, 1916, before the coolies arrived in France. These ap-

proaches were very tentative, however, and were designed only to get a hint of what recreational activities the Association might provide.³⁷²

The National Council of the YMCA maintained very close ties with the War Office. Two of its executive members, Major Barclay and Major Sir T. Sturmy-Cave, were well known and accepted in Whitehall circles.³⁷³ But it appears that the first really serious requests for YMCA help with the Chinese could have originated in General Headquarters in France.³⁷⁴ At today's juncture it may be impossible to determine with complete accuracy where the initiative lay for the Association's eventual extensive involvement with the Chinese Labour Corps. A report from the Association's War Emergency Committee that might have thrown more light upon this issue is no longer extant in the YMCA archives in London.³⁷⁵ It is safe to say, though, that the Association needed little prompting to initiate a far-reaching program of aid, comfort, and education for the Chinese in France.

³⁷²Minutes of the National Council of Y.M.C.A.'s, "Report of War Emergency Committee," London, December 16, 1916, p. 6.

³⁷³Minutes of the Proceedings of the National Council of Y.M.C.A.'s, London, July 24, 1917.

³⁷⁴Minutes of the Annual Meeting of the National Council of Y.M.C.A.'s, "Foreign Committee Reports," London, December 5, 1919, p. 9.

³⁷⁵G. Ronald Howe, National Council of YMCA's, London, letter to the writer, July 25, 1972.

Before leaving the question of how the YMCA got involved with the Chinese one should cite a source within the Association which has put a more dramatic complexion on the origins of that involvement. It is suggested that, having initially come forward of its own volition to offer the usual helpful subsidiary services, the Association found its offer declined. It is not said by whom or what. Then, the source goes on to explain, having insinuated themselves into the camps operated for the Chinese in France by means of "stealthy efforts,"³⁷⁶ helped the Chinese to settle down to their alien and forbidding environment, and assisted them also to adjust to the unusual confinement and the subjection to military discipline, the YMCA workers suddenly found "all opposition"³⁷⁷ to their semi-clandestine presence withdrawn, and the cooperation of the army with their work becoming official.

The full truth of the matter may lie in between. Probably the War Office sanctioned the presence of some YMCA workers in the first coolie camps as dispensers of sundries like soap and tobacco. This was normal procedure. It is hard to see how the Association could have

³⁷⁶Report of the War Emergency Work of the Y.M.C.A. from 1914 to 1920, "With the Chinese in France," London, 1921, p. 34.

³⁷⁷Ibid.

gained entry to the tightly guarded compounds without some official support. The "opposition" referred to above may have come from the officers and staffs of the armies in whose sectors the coolies were employed, or perhaps initially from members of Colonel Wace's organization. The YMCA and its activities were never popular with commanders in the field, and the Association has on record instances of its work being approved in London only to be obstructed and hindered in France.³⁷⁸ One may go on to opine that when the field commanders saw the positive impact of the Association's presence revealed in improved discipline and greater efficiency, "stealthy efforts" were no longer necessary, the Association's activities could expand, and cinema shows, reading lessons, Bible study seminars and tutorials, and snack bars could materialize.

The Association's workers proved most dedicated in their devotion to the Chinese Labour Corps. They remained with the Orientals, sometimes enduring discomfort and danger, until at last they assisted in the belated repatriation program, and were even on hand in China to assist in resettlement attempts.³⁷⁹

³⁷⁸See, for example, Minutes of the Annual Meeting of the National Council of Y.M.C.A.'s, London, December 16, 1916, p. 6.

³⁷⁹T. Chen, Chinese Migrations, p. 155.

There were strong elements of legitimate self interest in all of this activity. By early 1919, for example, the executive meeting of the National Council of YMCA's learned that in part as a result of the work with the Chinese "there was never a time when the Association had before it a greater opportunity of extension and consolidation of work. New fields of service were opening of tremendous importance."³⁸⁰ The principles which should govern this amplified outreach were clearly recognized by the Council's chairman, Sir George Askwith.³⁸¹ They were in mind when in 1919 the Annual Meeting of the National Council heard encouraging tidings on the results to be expected from participation in the Chinese labor scheme. The responsibility it had undertaken for the recreation, pacification, and education of the coolies was described as,

an undertaking of the greatest interest, which has contributed materially to the morale of the men. Without doubt it has had a profound effect on these men collected from Northern China, who, on returning to their native country, will face the appeal of missions from an altogether new standpoint.³⁸²

³⁸⁰Minutes of Executive Meeting of National Council of Y.M.C.A.'s, London, November 2, 1917, p. 5.

³⁸¹"Memorandum from Sir George Askwith to Members of the National Council of Y.M.C.A.'s," (London, Y.M.C.A. Archives), April 21, 1918.

³⁸²Minutes of the Annual Meeting of the National Council of Y.M.C.A.'s, "Foreign Committee Reports," London, December 5, 1919, p. 10.

There can be no doubt, then, that the YMCA did see its role among the Chinese in France as an unrivalled opportunity to extend its post war influence, but so did Baptists, Anglicans, and Presbyterians, many of whom worked in the labor camps under the general aegis of the Association.³⁸³ The Anglican Church Times was particularly vehement in defence of this missionary opportunity, and openly castigated organized British labor when it opposed the use of Chinese and other natives, as this stand was bound to make the work of "Christianizing" the heathen more difficult still.³⁸⁴ Whether all of those who worked for the YMCA in the coolie camps shared this degree of commitment to the missionary aspect of their work is a moot point.³⁸⁵ One supposes not.

Some of the Association's workers apparently regarded their actions merely as a routine means of furthering the Allied war effort by providing the coolies with a means of channeling their potentially explosive energies into more creative streams, thus avoiding disaffection, or even violent confrontation between them

³⁸³J. Shields, "With the Chinese in France," The Baptist Herald, Vol. C, June, 1918, pp. 88-89. (Shields operated a Y.M.C.A. center in a large compound housing 2,500 Chinese near Dunkirk; he reveals that most of the Christians in the camp were either Baptists or Presbyterians.)

³⁸⁴The Church Times, February 1, 1917, p. 5.

³⁸⁵E. Thompson, "The Chinese Labour Corps and the Missionary Effort," East and West, October, 1920, pp. 313-315.

and their white overseers. Colonel Wace seconded this view, but had no doubts about the value of the YMCA presence, which he came to regard as of "incalculable"³⁸⁶ value in filling the laborers' spare time with recreational and educational pursuits.

The Association wanted to open more and more centers for the Chinese, both in France and to cater for the reception of repatriated coolies.³⁸⁷ But where was the money to come from? The outreach in France alone cost substantial sums of money. The huts or canteens which provided refreshments, sundries, and literature, and which later were to serve as locations for discussion and study groups, all had to be built, maintained, and stocked by the Association. A few huts, it is true, were donated by private benefactors, but not enough to substantially defray the mounting outlay.

The Association's investment in the Chinese alone was particularly heavy by comparison with its outlay on other ventures in France. In October, 1917, for example, it spent 18,000 pounds on providing the Chinese with facilities at the major base camp at Noyelles.³⁸⁸ This

³⁸⁶P.R.O./W.O. 107/37, Labour Report, p. 54.

³⁸⁷Minutes of Half-Yearly Meeting of the National Council of Y.M.C.A.'s, "Foreign Committee Report," London, June 14, 1918, p. 4.

³⁸⁸Report of Y.M.C.A. Finance Committee, London, October 2, 1917.

included two cinemas at a cost of 1,200 pounds each.³⁸⁹ By February, 1919, the Y.M.C.A. maintained in France a staff of 1,024 men and 735 women. This represented a major increase over early 1917, when only 641 workers of both sexes were active, and was largely necessitated by the ministry to the Chinese.³⁹⁰ By July of 1918, fifty canteens of varying degrees of size and design catered to the needs of the Chinese,³⁹¹ but plans were on hand for the extension of this number to eighty, and the Baptist Missionary Society had already been approached with a view to its providing some of the staff required.³⁹²

It is not surprising that as a result of the circumstances narrated above the economics of continuing the work for the Chinese had become by 1918 a major factor in the YMCA's anxious assessment of its current fis-

³⁸⁹These and other coolie camp cinemas showed religious and propaganda films. They were sometimes run by women. The material presented relieved the boredom, and was apparently received with great enthusiasm. See "A Coolie Colony in France," The Morning Post, London, September 28, 1917, p. 3.

³⁹⁰"General Secretary's Report," (London: Y.M.C.A. Archives), para. 6, April 29, 1919.

³⁹¹Minutes of Executive Committee Meeting, National Council of Y.M.C.A.'s, "General Secretary's Report," London, July 5, 1918, p. 5.

³⁹²"Executive Committee Minutes" (London: B.M.S. Archives), March 19, 1918.

cal status. The work with the Orientals now demanded a stinting of services to other groups. The bulk of each month's supplies to France, worth about 150,000 pounds, was earmarked for the Chinese Labour Corps. In view of the War Office's obvious interest in the continuation of the Association's work, the directors of the YMCA felt free to ask for government help.

The government had already aided the Association with a loan as a result of representations to the War Office in late 1917. The work for the Chinese had formed a significant element in the Association's plea for aid at that time.³⁹³ The War Office had also provided for free shipping of supplies to France, and was collecting some of those supplies from its own contractors.³⁹⁴ All this had been appreciated. But it was not sufficient. It was time, felt the Association, to approach the government again, this time for a substantial interest free loan or grant outright.

Accordingly, it was resolved that the Minister for War, Mr. Winston Churchill, be approached. It was known that Churchill was sympathetic to the work of the Association among the Chinese, and the directors of the Associa-

³⁹³Report of Y.M.C.A. Finance Committee, London, December 4, 1917.

³⁹⁴Report of Y.M.C.A.'s Trading Committee, London, March 6, 1918.

tion were sanguine about the outcome of any meeting with him.³⁹⁵ Their optimism was justified. Churchill proved even more amenable than had been hoped. Of course the Association should receive direct subsidization to continue its work among the Chinese, even though the war was officially over. He apparently spoke of a sum in the region of 500,000 pounds, with no strings attached. The directors were elated. But this suggested sum, the result of Churchill's usual ardor, was considered too large by the War Office and the Treasury, and only half of it was immediately forthcoming,³⁹⁶ although the materialization of the remainder was not ruled out.

This was a great gain for the Association. It proved at once the importance of its work among the Chinese, and the extent of possible government support. The quarter million pounds helped sustain the work of the YMCA among the Chinese long after the organization had ceased to be of service to other branches of the army, thus enabling the Christian influence to pervade the very last days of the Corps' sojourn in Europe. The War Office

³⁹⁵Report of Y.M.C.A. Finance Committee, London, January 21, 1919. "The feeling was that in view of the services rendered by the Association, and in view of the increased importance of the work to the Army . . . the Government might reasonably be expected to assist the Association."

³⁹⁶Minutes of Half-Yearly Council Meeting of National of Y.M.C.A.'s, London, June 6, 1919, p. 8.

had every reason to be pleased with its bargain.³⁹⁷

The Association with its reward.

Quite apart from the quietening influence they exerted, or the overt proselytizing they conducted, the workers of the YMCA offered the Chinese serious opportunities for self improvement. Chinese who had been students before the war, and who had enrolled in the Corps, were offered the opportunity to do clerical tasks and administrative chores for the Association.³⁹⁸ Others were exposed to an educational program that was ambitiously broadened to cater to the fundamental needs of the coolies, was geared to improve literacy rates, and aimed to introduce them to a fundamental appreciation of Western art and literature.³⁹⁹

This latter aspect of the Association's work certainly appealed to those army officers who felt that the civilizing of the Chinese was a major goal. Surely, it was thought, "when these men go back they will want an

³⁹⁷P.R.O./W.O. 32/11345, Use of Chinese Labour, Memorandum of D.M.I., January, 1919.

³⁹⁸Minutes of the Annual Meeting of the National Council of Y.M.C.A.'s, London, December 6, 1918, p. 4.

³⁹⁹"With the Chinese Labour Corps," The Christian Missionary Society Gleaner, Vol. XLV, July, 1918, p. 104. ("There is no doubt that the native labourers in France are receiving a remarkably rapid Western education." A book, The Churches' Welcome to the Chinese Labourers at the Front, formed the basis for indoctrination.)

existence more akin to our Western ideas and ideals of life."⁴⁰⁰ The sight of King George V among them, democratically eating a cheese sandwich, was presumed to have encouraged this desire.⁴⁰¹ Having proved the coolies educable, the Association opened the door to an increasing preoccupation with the task of "civilizing" the Chinese. For example, officers of Corps companies now began to decide which of their Oriental charges offered the most in potential returns for an investment of interest and encouragement in learning.

Accordingly, three classes of coolie were recognized. There was the "pukka" coolie, or beast of burden, who was likely to remain entirely ignorant. There was the semi-skilled petty tradesman, or village artisan, who was partially or wholly literate, and who had proven in France that he could learn the intricacies of modern technology. And there was the skilled tradesman from the city, familiar with mechanical and electrical equipment and modern industrial processes.⁴⁰² To these three

⁴⁰⁰D. Klein, With the 'Chinks' in the C.L.C., p. 248.

⁴⁰¹"King's Visit to C.L.C. Units," The British Weekly, January 8, 1919, p. 4. (The coolies were very carefully schooled for the visit, and the best disciplined alone chosen.)

⁴⁰²P.R.O./W.O. 107/37, Labour Report, p. 49. (Men in this class were eventually given two dollars and fifty cents Mexican per day as against the mere coolies one. In January, 1918, the War Office urged Bourne to find more men of this sort, and asked specifically for 170 plumbers,

basic categories or classes was reluctantly added a fourth composed of heterogeneous elements from the Corps' total strength. These latter were regarded as educated already, or at least educable to the fullest benefits of Western civilization. This latter class was small and numbered perhaps five hundred men in 1918. Some found their way into officers' messes, were transformed into personal servants or staff, and remained in Europe after the repatriation of their fellows.

The importance to Britain of the whole education effort mounted by the Association became increasingly apparent to London. The benefits of civilizing the Chinese could have important political repercussions as well as merely fulfilling Britain's need to advertise its cultural supremacy. Attaché Alston in Peking had seen this as early as 1917, when he wrote direct to the then-Foreign Secretary, Arthur Balfour, as follows,

I venture to think the time has come to consider the very important political effect which the sojourn of some hundred thousand Chinese in France . . . is likely to have on British prestige in North China. There can be little doubt the effect must be highly beneficial and that the returning coolies will form a not inconsiderable body of apostles of British enlightenment. By raising the standard of village living and the knowledge of a wider life even in an infinitesimal degree we shall be rendering a great benefit

1,500 carpenters, 280 tinsmiths, 170 fitters, 1,360 firemen, 30 molders, and so forth. A sanction for special rates of pay was made in the fall of 1917.)

. . . /but/ the most important complement is the enlisting of the educated portion of the Chinese personnel who will become preachers and exponents of British fairness and efficiency.⁴⁰³

This is one of the clearest statements in the sources of what Britain aimed for in the education, "civilization," and christianizing of the Chinese. It reveals the components of that ethos to which reference has already been made in this paper, with its elements of self-interest, chauvinism, and oddly sentimental altruism.

Alston went on to encourage Balfour to institute at least one hundred scholarships for men picked from the Chinese Labour Corps so that these individuals could be thoroughly indoctrinated in the manners and ways of the West, and of Britain in particular. The Army Council, to which the matter was referred, eventually vetoed the suggestion, and the Foreign Office informed the legation in Peking that the War Office had decided that "however expedient the scheme might be from a political point of view its disadvantages and practical difficulties"⁴⁰⁴ outweighed such considerations.

But this was in 1917. The work of the Association

⁴⁰³P.R.O./W.O. 106/33, C.L.C. History, Alston, Peking, to A. J. Balfour, Foreign Office, London, August 20, 1917.

⁴⁰⁴Ibid., Foreign Office, London, to Jordan, Peking, December 11, 1917.

during the latter part of that year and into 1918 showed how unequalled was the opportunity to open Oriental eyes to the extent and value of British culture. By July, 1919, the question of opening broader educational facilities for the Chinese again came into prominence. Again, it was the political advantages to Britain and the cultural advantages to the Chinese that were stressed. This time, however, it was money that proved the greatest drawback. Earl Curzon, who was by then Foreign Secretary, gave the final word on the matter.⁴⁰⁵

The War Office, especially its military intelligence branch, remained intrigued with the idea of educating coolies to the British way of life. Once the Corps received its class distinctions it grew easier to sort out those men whom it might be worthwhile to influence and conciliate. Indeed, the intelligence establishment went so far as to suggest that these men should constitute a new and elite stratum in the Corps. The Chinese selected for entry into this class were to be fully amenable to the idea of establishing intellectual contacts with Britain, so that ultimately the Empire's in-

⁴⁰⁵"If Earl Curzon . . . considers it desirable for propaganda purposes that the scheme should be carried into effect . . . the Army Council are ready to facilitate it." Ibid., Memorandum of Army Council to Under Secretary, Foreign Office, London, July 7, 1919.

terests in the Far East would be greatly benefitted.⁴⁰⁶ Colonel Fairfax' aid had already been enlisted to ensure that such potential material for education was better treated.⁴⁰⁷

One wonders quite speculatively what impact upon the future of Sino-British relations the efforts to conciliate, educate, or propagandize the Chinese might have had had they been followed through as energetically as many Britons wished. With the turmoil which China was to endure in the decade following 1919 it is doubtful whether much in the way of tangible benefit could have been expected. The men who suggested schemes like those outlined above, while practical in many respects, indulged in colonialist daydreams quite untranslatable into substantive reality when they spoke of building up reserves of Chinese goodwill by such means.

⁴⁰⁶Ibid., Memorandum of Capt. J. H. Kisch, M.I.2c, October 19, 1917.

⁴⁰⁷Ibid., Directive of Colonel Fairfax, August 4, 1917. (The French, by comparison with the British, early discovered the potential in their own corps of Chinese laborers. The French government even responded to pressure from Chinese intellectuals in France who urged that some technical education be offered the better class of worker so that he might be fitted to participate more fully in China's post war development pattern. See "Chinese Labour in France," The New Statesman, January 13, 1917, p. 343, and P. Wou, Les Travailleurs Chinois et la Grande Guerre (Paris: Pedone, 1938). It has not proven possible to determine whether the Catholic Church in France had the same interest in Christianizing the Chinese as their Protestant counterparts in the British Chinese Labour Corps.)

It is true that after the war a union for returned laborers was formed under Occidental tutelage in China. It was hoped to continue the indoctrination process in this way. But the union was a failure, and apparently gained fewer than sixteen hundred members at its peak.⁴⁰⁸ The suggestion that the impact of the educated repatriated Chinese contributed to the development of forms of modern political practice in China rests on a weak foundation.⁴⁰⁹

In fact, the work of the YMCA offers the only reasonably objective measure of the success of the process of education and indoctrination among the members of the Chinese Labour Corps. Its work with the second class of petty traders and artisans indicates that the literacy rate among these men improved in three years from a basic twenty per cent to just over thirty eight per cent.⁴¹⁰ This phenomenon was almost entirely due to the efforts of the YMCA workers. At least it enabled the coolies to pen in English suggestions or complaints for the petition

⁴⁰⁸Sheldon K. Tso, "The Labour Movement in China" Unpublished Ph.D. dissertation (University of Indiana, 1928), pp. 131-132.

⁴⁰⁹N. Wales, /Helen F. Snow/, The Chinese Labour Movement, p. 25. (The assertion in regard to modern ideas appears to rest solely on the propaganda article by B. Manico Gull already cited on page 70 of this paper.)

⁴¹⁰T. Chen, Chinese Migrations, p. 154.

boxes that eventually occupied the center of each of their compounds.

Just as the War Office and its advisors had suspected when originally discussing the role of the missionaries, it became almost inevitable that a few of these active Christians should make efforts to improve the lot of the coolies amongst whom they worked. It took courage to lobby for better living conditions and some protection against exploitation of the Orientals. There were missionaries who had this courage. The actions of one man will serve as an illustration.

The Reverend Seward, a member of the Christian Missionary Society, joined the educational effort of the YMCA and worked in a large coolie camp. His social conscience was aroused by the conditions in which he had to instruct his Chinese pupils. Only three stools were to be found in the wooden huts which housed five hundred men apiece. Many coolies had to lie and sleep on the damp and muddy floors.⁴¹¹ Incidence of respiratory disease was high. How could the men be persuaded of the superiority of British culture under such circumstances?

⁴¹¹Reverend Seward, no. 78 Labour Group Tank Headquarters, B.E.F., France, letter to F. Baylis, Christian Missionary Society, London (Christian Missionary Society Archives, London), August 6, 1918. See, too, Reverend Scholes, Mesleyan Methodist Missionary Society, Chinese Y.M.C.A., le Havre, letter to Christian Missionary Society, London (Christian Missionary Society Archives, London), December 4, 1918.

Seward made strenuous representations to those in charge of the Chinese. Not surprisingly, his vocal stand failed to endear him to the coolies' immediate directors, but so valuable was Seward's work in calming the Chinese that he was listened to and, "in particular was allowed to pursue his persistent desire to improve their environment unhindered."⁴¹²

Seward was lucky. Few fared so well. Tensions between Christian missionaries and the army persisted at the local level throughout the coolies' stay in Europe. When individual missionaries or YMCA worker tried to pacify the Chinese by attempting to ameliorate their conditions, they knew that they had the tacit albeit passive support of the War Office and the Labour Directorate.⁴¹³ The major opposition to their efforts regularly came from the white company commanders, and from labor camp N.C.O.'s, who regarded the religious presence as a nuisance and a limitation. Company commanders sometimes blamed their YMCA staff for breakdowns in discipline. One instance exists of an officer who was also a former

⁴¹²F. P. James, Y.M.C.A. Headquarters, Abbeville Area, B.E.F., France, letter to F. Baylis, Christian Missionary Society, London (Christian Missionary Society Archives, London), February 4, 1919.

⁴¹³Colonel Fairfax was willing to see one or two of the best missionaries on his proposed Inspectorate. See P.R.O./W.O. 106/33, C.L.C. History, Fairfax, H.Q., C.L.C., B.E.F., France, to Weatherall, War Office, London, December 28, 1917.

missionary being forbidden by his company superior to speak to the coolies for fear that their attitude toward rigid discipline would suffer as a result of some Christian comfort.⁴¹⁴

Generally, however, the missionary presence encouraged the Chinese to put up with their lot rather than to oppose it. This was the attitude which met most favor from the army and London. As the white officers and N.C.O.'s of the Chinese Labour Corps became progressively more and more discouraged and frustrated with their lot, it was this ironic aspect of the missionary work which became most crucially important. The missionaries and YMCA workers began to form a central and stable core in each company and camp around which the Chinese naturally tended to congregate in the absence of direction from their white overseers. This situation led to increased friction between the Christian workers and the white labor commanders at company level. The same phenomenon existed in the Chinese hospitals as the months following the conclusion of the Armistice still failed to bring with them the demobilization of the Corps.⁴¹⁵

⁴¹⁴J. Shields, "With the Chinese in France," p. 89.

⁴¹⁵The Chinese hospitals were the particular concern of the Baptist Missionary Society. See "Annual Report: A Survey," The Baptist Herald, Vol. CI., May, 1919, p. 54.

This was the time when the Christian appeal to the Chinese proved most successful in terms of concrete achievements. It is not too much to suggest that the demobilization and repatriation of the Chinese would not have been accomplished without force or bloodshed but for the human touch which the various Christian denominations brought to the dismal confines of the labor camps, where the Chinese waited long months for the return home. There is no need to sentimentalize this role. It was practically conceived, and carried out in a business-like manner. But one missionary put his finger on the importance of this contribution when he observed, apropos the coolies,

I think they will remember. I am sure they appreciated. It made them feel at least that they were men and not mere quarry slaves, driven to their dungeon when the day was done . . .⁴¹⁶

The memories of the Chinese proved shorter than optimists hoped. YMCA workers and missionaries who returned to their work in China to await expectantly⁴¹⁷ the returning influx of interested and grateful men were disappointed. Reliable figures indicate that the major-

⁴¹⁶Report of the War Emergency Work of the Y.M.C.A. from 1914 to 1920, Year Book of the National Council of Y.M.C.A.'s, "With the Chinese in France," London, 1921, p.34.

⁴¹⁷Annual letter of the Reverend A. E. Seward, Teh-Yang Station, Szechwan Province, letter to Christian Missionary Society, London (Christian Missionary Society Archives, London), November 15, 1919.

ity of repatriated Chinese came again to Shantung. There, in 1918, the Baptist Missionary Society recorded the community of Christian believers as 10,718 souls. This compared with 1,586 for Shansi province, and 13,010 for Chensi province, the other two areas in which the Baptists enjoyed absolute predominance.⁴¹⁸ The Society's superintendant for the region wrote hopefully that "the demand for Chinese labour in France has had more response [here] than from any other [area]."⁴¹⁹ Surely their exposure to Christianity in Europe must have had an impact that would be reflected in China upon their return.

But the figures for the active Christian community in Shantung began to fall as the coolies returned, not rise, as had been confidently foreseen. In 1920 and 1921, the numbers dropped to 10,170 for Shantung, while in Shensi the figure of practicing Christians was 8,490.⁴²⁰ True, there was a slight initial rise in Shansi province, but only to 1,896. By 1923 and 1924, when all the coolies

⁴¹⁸126th Annual Report of the Baptist Missionary Society, London, 1918-1919, p. 21.

⁴¹⁹Ibid. (Converts to the Baptist persuasion in Shantung from 1914 through 1916 had totalled only 76, so there was room for optimism. See "China Report," The Baptist Herald, Vol. IIC., May, 1916, p. 120.

⁴²⁰129th Annual Report of the Baptist Missionary Society, London, 1920-1921, p. 123.

had returned, the number in Shantung who confessed Christianity fell dramatically to 8,078, while at the same time neighboring Shensi stood at 1,810, and Shensi at 5,790.⁴²¹

All this was a very grave disappointment to many of the pious souls who had seen their own activities in France as a groundwork for a vast new missionary action in the Far East.⁴²² No doubt natural apathy, the acceleration of civil strife in China, and the development of nationalist and xenophobic sentiments all played a part in the reasons for this disappointment. And, too, there can be no doubt that the Chinese regarded their own cultural patterns as preferable or superior to those to which they had been exposed while the property of the British in Europe.

In terms of lasting impact, then, the influence of the missionaries on the Chinese was slender. Neither had any cultural changes of lasting significance been wrought. But so far as the War Office was concerned, the calculated risk of placing missionaries and Christian workers in the Chinese labor camps had paid useful if short term dividends, and had been worth the gamble.

⁴²¹132nd Annual Report of the Baptist Missionary Society, London, 1923-1924, p. 67.

⁴²²"Report on China Missions," The Baptist Herald, Vol. CII, April, 1920, pp. 72-73.

CHAPTER VII

THE DEMOBILIZATION AND REPATRIATION OF THE CHINESE LABOUR CORPS

In March, 1918, the decision was taken to suspend further shipments of coolies to France.⁴²³ There can be no question that the scheme would have continued had it not been for the great need for transport ships to convey American troops to Europe in unprecedented numbers.⁴²⁴ Just how large the final number of Chinese brought to Europe would have been is impossible to suggest. Perhaps the figures would have approximated the two hundred thousand originally envisaged by Mr. Lloyd George.⁴²⁵

Despite the missionary influence, the coolies had been growing restive long before this date. There had been a real fear in late 1917 that many of them were on

⁴²³The order to Jordan in Peking to stop the scheme is dated from the Foreign Office, March 5, 1918. See P.R.O./F.O. 2509/33, Demobilization of Coolies.

⁴²⁴P.R.O./F.O. 371/5331, T. J. Bourne's Report on Demobilization and Repatriation of Coolies.

⁴²⁵G.S.O., S.H.Q., Montreuil-sur-Mer, p. 161.

the point of becoming unmanageable. Outbreaks of discontent and anger had become widespread. Colonel Fairfax, ordinarily quite humane, remarked to his superiors at the Labour Directorate that disturbances among the Chinese could be put down by drastic measures "like shooting those who are temporarily out of hand,"⁴²⁶ although he admitted that this procedure "might seriously endanger our prestige in China and may lead to still further unrest."⁴²⁷ However, tighter discipline was urged, and if death sentences were carried out the bodies of the condemned were to be handed to their former company companions for burial.⁴²⁸ Compound guards were strengthened. Tighter censorship was applied to mail leaving camps and compounds. Even stricter efforts were made to keep groups of Corps companies isolated from one another for fear that disaffection would spread, and an amalgamation of dissident Chinese cause a minor revolution behind the lines in France. British coolies were to stay well north of the Somme so that there could be

⁴²⁶P.R.O./W.O. 106/33, C.L.C. History, Memorandum of Col. Fairfax to Labour Directorate, December 25, 1917.

⁴²⁷Ibid.

⁴²⁸Ibid., Circular Memorandum on Discipline of Coloured Labour Units (Chinese Labour Corps), signed Lt. Gen. G. H. Fowke, Adjutant General, G.H.Q., B.E.F., France, July 3, 1917. (This memorandum was prepared in case trouble among the coolies should arise. It was put into effect by December, 1917.)

no possibility of them linking up with the French coolies in the south.

This is how matters stood in the spring of 1918 when the decision was made to discontinue shipments. One may well imagine that in certain quarters there was relief that no more coolies were to appear in France. The situation was eased considerably by the onset of the last German offensive, which lasted from March, 1918, until it trickled out in June. The sudden mobility of the war called for frequent moves by the Chinese, and they found themselves hard at work building railway spurs, repairing plant and equipment, burying the dead, and salvaging war materiel.

But then the sudden burst of frenzied activity ceased, and the coolies again became discouraged. The calibre of their officers did not help either. The High Command in France was largely to blame for this. In the past it had kept an eye on the younger officers commanding in the Chinese Labour Corps, and whenever it discerned bright and purposeful men, it had assigned them to the leadership of combat units unless they could plead some exceptional talent like a knowledge of the language and customs of Northern China. So at the time of greatest need for good leadership, the Corps was more poverty stricken than ever before in terms of professional excellence.

The officers left in charge in mid-1918 proved to have little to recommend them apart from the occasional ability to speak Mandarin Chinese. Most of them were older men, some were missionaries in uniform, and others had signed up after periods of retirement or colonial service. Even the Peking legation, which had originally helped to raise some of the men now left in command, began to have second thoughts, and itself complained of their poor quality, "both socially and racially."⁴²⁹ The men were far from "the pukka officer, the officer who is at once a fearless sahib to be obeyed and a father with a sympathetic understanding."⁴³⁰

The quality of the N.C.O.'s seems to have deteriorated, too. Colonel Fairfax had had occasion already to complain of "rough handlers" among the non-commissioned whites, some of whom had been drawn from the Royal Marines.⁴³¹ Now that the quality of man in this stratum had lessened, the discipline of the white command struc-

⁴²⁹Ibid., Robertson, Peking, to D.M.I., London, January 30, 1918. (The "racial" reference appears to have been to a Portuguese officer.)

⁴³⁰J.C., "With the Chinks in France: Stories of Loyal Helpers from the Far East," The War Illustrated, J. A. Hammerton, ed., (London: Amalgamated Press), Vol. IX, November 9, 1918, p. 205.

⁴³¹P.R.O./W.O. 106/33, C.L.C. History, Memorandum from Col. Fairfax, H.Q., C.L.C., France, to Weatherall, War Office, London, December 25, 1917.

ture was imperilled. In place of leadership and direction, some N.C.O.'s substituted a kind of rough familiarity which alarmed Whitehall. This familiarity between British personnel and Chinese was considered "too common . . . every effort should be made to put it down."⁴³² At a time when the maintenance of discipline among the common soldiers was of the first importance, the War Office had no intention of seeing the Chinese Labour Corps as a haven for potential dissidents, colored or white.

By late 1918, with the Armistice already behind them, the Chinese in France agitated to be allowed to return home as soon as possible. But their contract was flexible enough to allow the British to determine exactly when demobilization would occur. Although nominally operative for the "duration" of the war, however long, the contract contained an ambiguous termination clause which the Treasury Solicitor, when approached on its validity, had pronounced sound. This clause allowed the army to determine when the war actually "ended," and to keep the coolies for up to six months after that date.⁴³³

What legally constituted the end of the war? Was it the formal Armistice? Or was it the final establish-

⁴³²P.R.O./W.O. 107/37, Labour Report, Notes on Chinese Labour, August 2, 1918, para. 3.

⁴³³P.R.O./W.O. 106/33, C.L.C. History, A History of War Committee Report, June 5, 1919, "Formation of Labour Corps."

ment of peace by treaty? Nobody seemed willing to offer an immediate interpretation so far as the Chinese were concerned. The War Office staff on the whole seemed agreed, though, that the bulk of the coolies ought to begin their journey home at any time during the six month period which followed the signing of the Armistice by Germany early in the morning of November 11, 1918.

But it had taken nearly eighteen months to ship the Chinese to Europe in the first place. Was it logistical-ly possible, even desirable, to accomplish their return in a shorter period? The answer was no. Even despite the influence of the euphoria of victory, which promised to submerge all thought for the welfare of the Chinese anyway, the ships needed for the task of massive and simultaneous repatriation to China were just not available. The Chinese would have to wait their turn. They became the forgotten men, even though eighteen hundred of them supposedly left Europe in late December of 1918, clutching their bonuses of twenty Mexican dollars.⁴³⁴ Instances exist of entire Chinese Labour Corps companies being virtually abandoned by their "employers" and told to find their own way back to the nearest labor pool,

⁴³⁴Ibid., Extract from Sir John Jordan's Report on China, no. 31, 1919: 'X,' "Chinese Labour Corps." (An official Report on Repatriation in the same file suggests January, 1919, as the first month in which coolies began to return.)

even before the formal Armistice came into being.⁴³⁵

Clearly, the coolies had served their purpose.

The army establishment fell back upon an interpretation of the six month termination clause in an effort to disguise its dilemma over what to do with the Chinese. The solution eventually arrived at was to keep them hard at work, well disciplined, and send them back as and when any opportunity presented itself. There was no coherent scheme to ship the Chinese home. There was no T. J. Bourne in Europe to make sure that each repatriation ship got away on schedule. It was during this period of their existence in Europe that the Chinese came closest to being "slaves" in the definition of Sir Edward Grey.⁴³⁴ They were put to work salvaging war materiel for the profit of the British government and private salvage contractors. This task alternated with the grim business of re-burying the war dead in the neat rows which today dot the Flanders' countryside.

A minor controversy on the continued use of the Chinese surfaced in the London press, with one correspon-

⁴³⁵For example, the 60th Chinese Labour Corps company was left without direction at a railhead which it had been servicing, and which acted as a supply station for it. Reluctantly, the army depot at Boulogne agreed to feed the men, but refused transport arrangements. See P.R.O./W.O. 95/3984, War Diary of Assistant Director of Supplies, Lines of Communication, B.E.F., France, October 9, 1918.

⁴³⁶Supra., p. 6.

dent, coyly identifying himself only as "In the Know," vigorously defending the economic contribution that the coolies made by salvaging vast quantities of war time impediments. This contribution was supposedly worth "millions of pounds"⁴³⁷ to the national wealth. The government noted the anonymous writer, had every intention of sending the Chinese back to the East, but only when this important work was completed and boats were available for transportation.⁴³⁸ The letter appeared nearly a year after the signing of the Armistice.

Recovering some vestiges of concern for the Chinese, the New Statesman maintained that the continued presence of the Chinese in Europe was blatantly and deliberately contrived by Colonel, now Brigadier-General, Wace and his friends at Labour Control. The newspaper's lengthy indictment went on to suggest that the officers of the Corps could now be divided into two classes as a result of this fact; those who were furious at failing to win demobilization, and those who, lacking prospects for civilian employment, wanted to hang on to their berths in the Corps for as long as possible. In pursuit of something to do, the article went on, coolies had not been employed exclusively on salvage work or grave digging,

⁴³⁷The Times (London), August 11, 1919, p. 6.

⁴³⁸Ibid.

but had often been given whimsical or fatuous tasks to perform while their white directors filled in false estimates of the coolies' contribution to the nation's economy. It was not surprising if, under these circumstances, the workers became resentful and a series of incidents, some of them serious, ensued at the camps in which they were now collected.⁴³⁹ The article must have struck a raw nerve or two both in Whitehall and on the continent.

The New Statesman was certainly correct about one thing, though. The coolies were getting angrier and more unmanageable every day. In view of their earlier bouts of misbehavior, some very real fears as to their intentions arose. A Canadian woman, angry and resentful that Chinese hands should still be responsible under such circumstances for the reburial of her late officer son, wrote to The Times after a visit to Europe to suggest that the coolies were an imminent danger to the community. "Their officers are afraid of them, and, while living on the fat of the land, they do very little work."⁴⁴⁰ All the latent fears of the "Chinks," and vague dreads of a "Yellow Peril," seemed about to materialize in scared minds.

⁴³⁹"The Art of Wangling," The New Statesman, p. 586.

⁴⁴⁰The Times (London), August 5, 1919, p. 6.

Was there justification for some fear of insurrection among the coolies? Probably so, if that fear was based upon the numbers of Orientals still present within a relatively small area of North-Eastern France and of Belgium. There are no reliable figures. Comparison with archival sources reveals the official figures published in The Times to be unreliable.⁴⁴¹ A recent estimate, which it has proven impossible to authenticate, suggests that in October of 1919 some sixty-five thousand coolies still remained at work.⁴⁴² The guess is plausible. The number may have been greater. If one bears in mind the repatriation shipments that took place before October, 1919 (and, although there are no reliable sources, it is apparent that they were few), it is hard to see how more than from ten to thirteen thousand men could have been returned at the rate of a thousand or so a shipment. Perhaps as many as eighty thousand Chinese were still in Europe by the fall of 1919, although one would have to deduct from any number the usual ten percent of invalides. Certainly there was a large enough "army" of Chinese to have caused trouble had it been able to galvanize the elements of its discontent in any con-

⁴⁴¹For example, see The Times (London), October 16, 1919, p. 9, and The Times (London), October 13, 1919, p. 11.

⁴⁴²J. Hamilton-Paterson, "Chinese Dig Britain's Trenches," p. 45.

certed thrust against its white guardians.

In July, 1919, news of a threatening outbreak of rioting did filter through to the London press,⁴⁴³ although publication of any details was officially discouraged. The small print reveals that from time to time other disquieting news was heard concerning the Chinese.⁴⁴⁴ Harsh measures were taken to quell these mutinies. It was as late as February, 1920, that the last Chinaman was shot in Europe for unspecified "crimes"⁴⁴⁵ on the Somme.

The lawlessness of some of the Oriental workers obviously persisted and even grew worse during the course of their eventual voyages of repatriation. The press is generally silent on the topic. But it could not fail to report one of the worst riots among the Chinese. This took place at Victoria, British Columbia, in March, 1920. Here over eight thousand coolies lay in camp pending the arrival of transports in which to complete the tedious journey home to China. The Times noted briefly that some two thousand men succeeded in escaping into the surrounding countryside, from which only a few had been apprehended to date.⁴⁴⁶ As The Times had always

⁴⁴³The Times (London), July 21, 1919, p. 9.

⁴⁴⁴The North China Herald, November 8, 1919, p. 3.

⁴⁴⁵The Times (London), February 19, 1920, p. 13.

⁴⁴⁶The Times (London), March 13, 1920, p. 15.

been the favored recipient of news of the Chinese it is fair to assume that this brief coverage was "leaked" to avoid any sensationalization of what had become a potentially newsworthy story. The remainder of the press kept quiet. These were the grim days for the Chinese Labour Corps, the days which some pessimists had prophesied would come to pass once all shadow of discipline collapsed in the face of the loss of the rationale for the Corps' continued existence.

Back in China, however, provision had been made at Wei-hai-Wei to receive the returning coolies. A new "Victory Pier" was opened on November 18, 1918, by Commissioner Lockhart.⁴⁴⁷ Designed in part to serve as a debarkation point for the workers from France, the pier was dedicated not to their efforts, but to the martial triumphs of Britain, France, and the United States. Upon the occasion of the ceremony at the pier in Wei-hai-Wei, the Colonial Office in London telegraphed Lockhart "the Labour Force, recruited through the efforts of the staff at Wei-hei-Wei /sic, has performed services of great value."⁴⁴⁸

⁴⁴⁷"Notes on the Chinese and Wei-hai-Wei," The Empire at War, C. Lucas, ed. (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1926), Vol. V., p. 156.

⁴⁴⁸P.R.O./C.O. 521/32, Wei-hai-Wei Correspondence, Colonial Office, London, to Commissioner, Wei-hai-Wei, November 17, 1918.

In Peking, Jordan was not concerned with London's approbation. He was sharing some of the anxiety of his European superiors concerning the temper of the returning Chinese. Would they be as militant in China as they had been in Europe? Jordan advocated some form of public works project designed at once to pacify the coolies and continue their usefulness.⁴⁴⁹ There seems to have been genuine fear among whites in China that the lessons in military organization taught the coolies while in France would be applied by them upon their return.

There need have been no concern. The bulk of workers slipped back quietly enough into Shantung and Chihli provinces, although not completely into that anonymity from which they had emerged in 1916 and 1917. The workers were temporarily saved from total disappearance as a result of a vast postal network, devised while they were in Europe, to ensure that the men's nominees in China received their pay.

The inauguration of such a scheme on so large a scale had not formed a part of the original intention of the army. It transpired, however, that the Chinese were inveterate gamblers, and could rarely hold the small sums paid them while in France. They were therefore

⁴⁴⁹P.R.O./W.O. 106/33, C.L.C. History, Extract from Sir John Jordan's Report on China, no. 31, 1919: 'X,' "Chinese Labour Corps."

encouraged to nominate recipients in China to whom their pay could be sent. For those who would or could not do this, a bank was instituted in France so that Chinese could deposit their wages or savings. The British promised to distribute the accrued savings to the men once they returned to China. As fully seventy-five per cent of the Chinese elected this alternative, the army found itself faced with the task of distributing money orders over half a dozen Chinese provinces.

All of this called for the keeping of fairly accurate records of where the majority of Chinese intended to settle after their release from the British. G. S. Moss, the War Office representative who succeeded T. J. Bourne, bore the brunt of arranging and expanding this postal effort. He operated from a specially provided Emigration Agency set up in the coolie depot at Tsingtao.⁴⁵⁰

Moss faced a unique situation. On former occasions in history when Chinese coolies worked for Western powers the respective nations had had wages or bonuses paid directly through the contractors who originally hired or recruited the men. This process was never successful. Contractors proved lax in fulfilling their obligations, and as a result an atmosphere as confusing as it was deli-

⁴⁵⁰P.R.O./W.O. 083/5032, Tsingtao Barracks, "Proposed Building of New Consulate at Tsingtao," memorandum of M.I. 2c, n.d.

cate seemed to pervade most fiscal relationships with coolies. Moss refused to be daunted. He saw his challenge as an opportunity to prove to the returned laborers that British fair play and justice could work in China to get their money to them.

Moss consulted M. Picard Destelan, French director of the Chinese Postal Service. Destelan readily agreed that special money orders, advices, and address codes should be devised. He further instructed his postal commissioner in Shantung province, the Norwegian, Tollefsen, to use every means available to implement the plan in that province.⁴⁵¹ A travelling inspector was appointed from among the ranks of the helpful and ubiquitous missionary population there, and a huge chain of communications, including fifty-five extra money order offices, was set up to cater to the increased demand.

It is not possible to offer anything approximating a balance sheet as a result of a survey of the material which remains to cover the activities described above. One can only confirm that the majority of coolies enrolled in the Chinese Labour Corps did in fact originate from Shantung province, with Chihli province falling second.⁴⁵²

⁴⁵¹P.R.O./C.O. 873/578, Report of War Office Emigration Agency, Tsingtao, September, 1919.

⁴⁵²Ibid. (Actually, 67% of all coolie money orders in 1918 were paid in Chihli province, but later repatriations of former Shantung residents seem to have redressed the balance.)

Only five per cent of wages paid by post were addressed to recipients outside these two areas, and most of this residue was directed to Honan province.

As a result of this distributive system, the Chinese postal services were lastingly improved. Ironically, the British were responsible for the unexpected long term benefit of linking hitherto inaccessible villages in the remote hinterland of China with the world outside. And the promptness and relative efficiency with which the coolies' money was always delivered, first to their nominees and then to them, had a positive, if transient, impact upon the attitudes with which the British were viewed in parts of rural northern China.⁴⁵³

If the comments above seem to offer only a pedestrian and anti-climactic picture of the Chinese Labour Corps' last days, it is because the facts warrant such an interpretation. The coolies began to vanish from sight once they returned to China, and would have vanished more quickly and entirely had it not been for the postal system arranged for their benefit. The British only wanted to forget the whole scheme as quickly as possible. There can be no exotic description of these events. The Corps merely vanished from sight.

⁴⁵³J. Blick, "The Chinese Labour Corps in World War I," p. 119.

The last coolies left in Europe, apart from those who left the Corps of their own volition to seek academic or technical educations, or who merely slipped away by some clandestine means, were sixty men left behind to carve inscriptions on the tombstones of their dead fellow workers.⁴⁵⁴ Did they, one wonders, carve at all Labor Vincit Omnia, the motto of the labor establishment in which they had served for so long?

⁴⁵⁴Report of the War Emergency Work of the Y.M.C.A., "With the Chinese in France," p. 33.

CONCLUSION

An attempt has been made during the course of this examination of the Chinese Labour Corps to keep in prominence some of the personalities involved in the Corps' appearance, function, and eventual disbandment. This attempt has involved a conscious avoidance of allotting too much space to the ideological or purely abstract interpretations which may be placed upon the role of this Oriental labor establishment. It has, it is true, been suggested during the course of this paper that the use of Chinese workers by the British armies in France represented an authentic picture of the ethos of the colonialist and imperialist era as it drew to a close. This, it is felt, remains a valid contention.

Likewise, the conflict between modern management techniques, as exemplified by the progressive work of Colonel Wace and others, and primitive capitalist ideas, has also been suggested in the body of the work as a reason for the poor utilization of the Chinese as a labor resource. But again, it is hoped that this discussion of the disposition of labor and the internal economy of Chinese work units will not be viewed as unfolding within what may appear to be a rigid or dogmatic framework, for

this was not intended. The actual intention was merely to show that the Chinese Labour Corps represents in microcosm a battle between old and new ways of handling a specific and endemic problem in capitalist society itself. That problem, labor and management relations, appears here during a period of unusual stress, change, and uniqueness. The thesis is that something valid can be said here about, and understood from, the attitudes which emerged during these admittedly unusual circumstances.

The chapter in which the actual raising of the Corps is dealt with has remained almost entirely narrative in character. It was felt to be essential that the facts should speak for themselves, insofar as that ideal proved possible of approximation. Not that any exceptional degree of objectivity is claimed in the composition of this part of the work. On the contrary. A good deal of selection was required to eliminate repetitive or peripheral material, and at the same time still present a reasonably brief yet telling account of how the initiative, rationale, and responsibility for getting and using the coolies actually emerged and were distributed among the parties involved.

The emphasis laid on the roles of leading politicians like Lloyd George, Bonar Law, Sir Edward Grey, or Arthur

Balfour should not provoke a distorted view of their participation. By any calculations, their roles in the planning and raising of the Corps were minor as compared with the other tasks and decisions that confronted them in the troubled years of 1916 and 1917. Their actions represent a final stamp of approval rather than the result of much considered and well digested critical analyses of the work to be done by the Chinese. But the decay of political idealism represented, especially by the Liberals' participation in the Chinese labor scheme, forms part of an inevitable indictment for which they must assume responsibility.

Mr. Lloyd George's constant insistence upon the construction of a Chinese labor organization has been stressed because this is indeed how his role appeared in the sources consulted. As a result of his pressure, his part in the raising of the Corps is important enough to be even more worth recording and remembering.

Sir Edward Grey's reservations concerning the uses to which the Chinese were to be put have similarly been brought to the fore. They offer some estimate of the man's unusual character, but also they show how clearly aware this controversial individual was of the possible political and moral impact of the exploitation of the coolies in France.

Today care must be taken in presenting a picture of the Chinese at work. Over emphasis of their exploitation and of their subjugation to the imperialist mentality could add too damaging a contribution to the increasing amount of literature condemnatory of the period in which they flourished. The almost complete lack of sentiment shown by those who directed the Chinese, the violence with which the coolies' basic human rights and cultural patterns were attacked, and the irony of attempts to "civilize" them in the middle of one of history's most futile and inhumane conflicts, can easily form a cloudy and generalized ingredient for a blanket indictment of the men and the era involved.

Britain's role in the treatment of the Chinese is not one of which anyone can be in the least bit proud. The fact that some will say the Chinese shared the common lot must not be allowed to obscure the fact that the coolies were raised and brought to Europe to participate in a conflict that had no significance for them. They were bought and used. But there is no need to adopt a relativist approach in assessing the work of the Chinese in France, and compare the concrete conditions of their actual existence with abstract moral reservations which spring to mind so easily today. The coolies signify well within the context of their times. The secrets which

governed their use can only be understood if this is grasped. There was in the ethos of the period enough morality of a contemporary sort to prevent their white masters from treating them without some decency and concern. The behavior of individual commanders, the occasional deliberate indifference to the protection of the Chinese in the field, or the frank desire sometimes to push the men beyond reasonable physical limits, should be seen always in the light of that basic, intrinsic, and sometimes subconscious respect for justice and fair play that has so often prevented the British, both as individuals and a nation, from abandoning all integrity in their treatment of themselves and others.

This does not mean, it must be reiterated, that certain officers and men could not have been more humane in their treatment of the Chinese, nor that visions of the need to maintain Imperial splendor and racial superiority did not warp judgments. It would have been strange indeed had not elements of this now repudiated chauvinism been found during any study of this watershed period in British history.

There can be little doubt that when Lloyd George, Field Marshall Haig, and others recommended the use of Chinese and native labor in France, they did so with a sense of urgency borne of the dread fear of possible de-

feat at the hands of the German empire. This unpleasant realization would have seemed inconceivable, even incongruous, in 1913. But not in 1916. For a few crucial and chaotic months the British High Command in France and its Whitehall colleagues in London faced the cruel dividends of unpreparedness, lack of planning, and failure to provide for an adequate establishment of war. No wonder that in some quarters the Chinese were regarded as a Godsend. But it has been demonstrated how their eventual arrival in Europe was delayed and, more importantly, how once arrived, the rivalries and incompetencies which dogged their use compromised their efficiency.

Even as arguments as to the use of the Chinese Labour Corps continued to agitate senior officers in the British army's labor establishment, the very rationale for the coolies' use was fading. Americans began to provide additional manpower resources, and technology found new ways to replace the muscle of manual laborers. The concept of the role of the Chinese, as has been suggested before, was a unique and transitory one. The Chinese laborers were on the verge of redundancy and risked becoming an anachronism almost before they had been in France for the space of a year.

By early 1918 the Chinese Labour Corps presented

an embarrassing reminder of the grim anxieties that had haunted the strategists and soldiers of 1916. Only its work on the inner defenses in the spring of 1918 preserved the Corps' usefulness for a month or two more. By mid-1918, the politicians too could see the Corps as both a painful reminder and a disturbing factor in the potentially roseate path they now planned for the politics of victory.

It would be too simplistic to picture the coolies as a football, by 1918 passed unwillingly between the army, the civil service, and the government. But the general desire to dispose of them, their memory, and the record of their existence, without lasting responsibility or onus being attributed to any one sector of the Establishment, does lend some substance to this plain analogy.

If the last two hundred or so pages are looked back upon retrospectively it will, perhaps, be appreciated that the Chinese never really fitted into the military system. They were not an organic part of the service as a whole, despite constant insistence upon their amenability to military method and discipline. The Chinese remained always a part of the pool disposed of by the Labour Directorate and its successor, Labour Control. The Chinese Labour Corps was the kind of contrived creation that can very conveniently be used, exploited for a period,

and then relinquished. It is a testimony to the surprising substantiality of the Corps while it lasted that the men who filled its ranks succeeded while together in providing a microcosmic world in which the prejudices and principles of the latter period of the colonialist and imperialist ethos were mirrored.

The above suggestion may confirm the importance of even transient historical phenomena in assisting the process of assessing the temper of an era. At the same time, the complete and unlamented disappearance of the Chinese Labour Corps until today's revival of interest presents a further testimony, this time to the residual resoluteness of the Establishment which disbanded it. The processes of demobilization and repatriation may have lacked much in the way of efficient operation, but the almost complete success with which the memory, function, and rationale of the Corps were obliterated proves at once the thoroughness with which the official mind of the time repudiated episodes of which it was not proud, and the pattern of changing thinking in Whitehall and government in general, which had begun to sense instinctively the coming public repudiation of Empire and its mission, a repudiation that has formed a pattern to our own day. There is no doubt on this view that the Chinese Labour Corps was part of an epochal transition in established patterns of thought.

APPENDIXES

Appendix 'A'

DISTRIBUTION OF CHINESE LABOUR COMPANIES AT PEAK
STRENGTH, JULY 27, 1918*

Locations of Unskilled Companies
with Armies in the Field

<u>Ist Army</u>		<u>IIInd Army</u>	
Defences	6	Defences	8
Royal Engineers (Construction)	$\frac{1}{2}$	Royal Engineers (Roads).	$\frac{1}{2}$
Forests	$\frac{1}{2}$	Forests	6
Ammunition Depots, Railheads, Dumps . . .	$\frac{1}{2}$	Laundries	1
Roads	$\frac{1}{2}$	Directorate Gen. of Transportation	$1\frac{1}{2}$
Quarries	$1\frac{1}{2}$	Railways	4
Unspecified	$1\frac{1}{2}$	Unspecified	2
TOTAL:	11	TOTAL:	23
 <u>IIIrd Army</u>		 <u>IVth Army</u>	
Defences	5	Defences	11
Forests	2	Forests	2
Burials	$\frac{1}{2}$	Roads	$\frac{1}{2}$
Roads	$\frac{1}{2}$	Railways	$\frac{1}{2}$
Railways	$1\frac{1}{2}$	Quarries	2
TOTAL:	$9\frac{1}{2}$	TOTAL:	16
		Carried forward . . .	$59\frac{1}{2}$

*Total numbers in each company not specified, but approximately 490 Chinese.

Brought forward 59½

Vth Army

Defences	5
Royal Engineers (Construction)	½
Ammunition Depots	½
Roads	½
Quarries	½
TOTAL:	<u>7</u>

TOTAL: 66½

Locations of Unskilled and Semi-Skilled Chinese
Companies Allocated Lines of Communication and G.H.Q.

Royal Engineers (Construction)	16½
Workshops	2
Royal Air Force and Tank Corps	3½
Forests	2
Railways	19½
Depots on Lines of Communication	34½
Laundries	½
Directorate General of Transportation (Roads)	1
Railway Maintenance and Shops	13
Docks	27½
Miscellaneous	½
<u>TOTAL:</u>	<u>120½</u>

Locations of Skilled Companies of Chinese

Royal Engineers	3
Royal Air Force and Tank Corps	2
Lines of Communication	($\frac{1}{2}$?)
<u>TOTAL:</u>	<u>5</u>

Grand Total: . . 192

Appendix 'B'

LIST OF VESSELS CARRYING COOLIES TO FRANCE, AND
NUMBERS OF MEN REPORTED ON EACH*

Name of Vessel	Departure		Arrival		On Board	
	Port	Date	Port	Date	Officers	Chinese
"Teucer"	W-h-W	18-1-17	Havre	19-4-17	7	1,086
"Premius"	HK	20-2-17	DPort	25-4-17	7	1,184
"Antilochus"	W-h-W	7-3-17	DPort	10-6-17	5	1,104
"Hong Moh"	W-h-W	10-3-17	M	13-5-17	5	1,201
"Empress of Russia"	W-h-W	19-3-17	Lpool	14-5-17	9	2,006
"Empress of Japan"	W-h-W	2-4-17	Lpool	1-6-17	4	950
"Kaiping"	W-h-W	2-4-17	Lpool	1-6-17	5	1,950
"Agapenor"	T-tao	4-4-17	DPort	25-6-17	6	1,861
"Helenus"	W-h-W	9-4-17	DPort	25-6-17	7	1,950
"Empress of Asia"	W-h-W	16-4-17	Lpool	1-6-17	9	2,400
"Protesilaus"	KChow	17-4-17	Lpool	1-6-17	11	3,000
"Monteagle"	W-h-W	30-4-17	Lpool	30-6-17	8	1,600
"Demodocus"	T-tao	1-5-17	DPort	27-7-17	6	1,700
TOTAL:					89	21,092

*Name is of original vessel on which Chinese embarked. No mention is made of transshipment from Egypt or Canada on different ships. Date is last on which Chinese arrived in France. Abbreviations as follows: "W-h-W" = Wei-hai-Wei; "HK" = Hong Kong; "T-tao" = Tsingtao; "DPort" = Devonport; "M" = Marseilles; "Lpool" = Liverpool; and "KChow" = Kiao Chow.

Name of Vessel	Departure		Arrival		On Board	
	Port	Date	Port	Date	Officers	Chinese
Brought fwd.					89	21,092
"Empress of Russia"	W-h-W	14-5-17	Lpool	30-6-17	9	2,027
"Ixion"	T-tao	22-5-17	Lpool	30-6-17	13	3,237
"Empress of Japan"	W-h-W	28-5-17	Lpool	4-7-17	5	950
"Empress of Asia"	W-h-W	12-6-17	Lpool	28-7-17	8	2,268
"Talthybius"	T-tao	13-6-17	Lpool	22-7-17	?	3,303
"Bessie Dollar"	T-tao	21-6-17	Lpool	15-8-17	5	1,706
"Monteagle"	W-h-W	6-7-17	Lpool	15-8-17	5	1,653
"Empress of Russia"	T-tao	9-7-17	Lpool	15-8-17	9	2,297
"Empress of Japan"	T-tao	22-7-17	Lpool	1-9-17	?	937
"Coconada"	W-h-W	24-7-17	Lpool	1-9-17	9	2,337
"Harold Dollar"	W-h-W	1-8-17	Lpool	15-9-17	8	1,785
"Empress of Asia"	KChow	7-8-17	Lpool	15-9-17	?	2,256
"Empress of Russia"	W-h-W	3-9-17	Lpool	23-10-17	9	2,280
"Bessie Dollar"	T-tao	9-9-17	Lpool	23-10-17	?	1,702
"Empress of Japan"	W-h-W	16-9-17	Lpool	23-10-17	3	926
"Monteagle"	T-tao	23-9-17	Lpool	7-12-17	?	1,681
Carried Fwd.					172	52,277

Name of Vessel	Departure		Arrival		On Board	
	Port	Date	Port	Date	Officers	Chinese
Brought Fwd.					172	52,277
"Coconada"	W-h-W	23-9-17	Lpool	7-12-17	7	2,250
"Empress of Asia"	T-tao	1-10-17	Lpool	19-11-17	5	1,738
"Teesta"	W-h-W	5-10-17	Lpool	19-11-17	6	2,051
"Empress of Russia"	W-h-W	29-10-17	Lpool	7-12-17	4	2,291
"Harold Dollar"	T-tao	9-11-17	Lpool	7-1-18	6	1,760
"Empress of Japan"	T-tao	13-11-17	Lpool	24-1-18	?	924
"Empress of Asia"	W-h-W	25-11-17	Lpool	15-1-18	6	2,690
"Tyndareus"	T-tao	26-11-17	Lpool	24-1-18	?	4,167
"Monteagle"	W-h-W	3-12-17	Lpool	24-1-18	4	1,669
"Antilochus"	T-tao	6-12-17	Lpool	24-1-18	?	3,410
"Coconada"	T-tao	16-12-17	Lpool	6-2-18	?	2,244
"Protesilaus"	W-h-W	21-12-17	Lpool	10-3-18	10	3,742
"Empress of Russia"	T-tao	24-12-17	Lpool	16-1-18	?	1,503
"Empress of Japan"	W-h-W	7-1-18	Neyland	10-3-18	5	913
"Teesta"	T-tao	16-1-18	Neyland	10-3-18	?	1,960
"Empress of Asia"	T-tao	18-2-18	?	?	?	2,639
"Tyndareus"	T-tao	26-2-18	?	?	?	4,171
"Coconada"	T-tao	2-3-18	?	?	?	1,899
GRAND TOTAL:					225	94,458

Appendix 'C'

SCHEDULE OF TASKS SHOWING SUPERIORITY OF CHINESE
LABOR OVER WHITE

	Trans-Shipping to narrow gauge				Rail car to Truck				Truck to Dump			
	No. of men per truck		Tons per man hour		No. of men per car		Tons per man hour		No. of men per truck		Tons per man hour	
Category of labor*	A	B	A	B	A	B	A	B	A	B	A	B
Ammunition	2½	3	1½	1	2	2½	1½	1½	3¼	4	1	¾
General Supplies	1½	2	1½	1½	1¼	1½	1½	1½	1½	2	1½	1½
Forage	2	2½	1¼	1	1½	2	1½	1½	3¼	4	¾	¾
R.E. Stores and Timber	1½	2	1½	1½	1½	2	1½	1½	2½	3	1	¾
Ordinance Stores	1½	2	1	¾	1½	2	1	¾	1½	2	1	¾
Stone	1¼	1½	2	1½	1¼	1½	2½	1½	1½	2	1½	1¼

* 'A' = Chinese labor, 'B' = White labor. White labor in above schedule may not be of first rate quality. See P.R.O./W.O. 107/37, Labour Report.

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