

Japan's Final Opportunity

Peter Gill, '40

As Japan becomes more deeply involved in a military entanglement with China she is urged on by what might be called a "triple demon," namely—the terrible pressure within, the rapid unification of China and the indifferent policies of Britain and Russia with respect to the Far East. Of these three factors perhaps the first is the most potent.

Almost crushed between the forces of low wages and rising maintenance costs, terrified millions must be quickly relieved. This condition has been brought about by the monopoly of industrial production, trade, banking and transportation held by a few incredibly rich families. This little company of nobles has been controlling the government and, therefore, ruling Japan for some time.

But the condition of affairs has changed. To-day Japan is faced with higher trade barriers abroad, and confronted with rising prices that affect the Japanese manufacturer, who depends principally on foreign raw materials for production. As a result retail prices have gone up at home and with them the cost of living. At the same time, working hours have been lengthened due to greater industrial production,—especially in the war-industries—and industrial wages have been steadily declining.

Wages in Japan are governed by those paid in agricultural pursuits. Industrialists are thus confronted with a new difficulty: if they should raise them, unskilled labor would pour into the cities causing an overflow. In order to pacify the peasant the government recently has decreased his taxes and increased those of civil officials. But higher taxes on the industrial bosses do not ameliorate the position of the working class.

In this state of high tension a third party has arisen between Capital and Labor—the Army. The army, used during a few years as an instrument of industrial imperialism, has become an independent body, challenging tycoons and politicians.

Accustomed only to the small holdings of peasantry, these soldiers were overwhelmed by the enormous wealth of the capitalists and cast longing eyes upon these golden

hoards. Their revolt was a simple and natural consequence. It was bound to collapse at the beginning because no great social force was behind it. But the event was only a forerunner of the present struggle.

The army's only desire is to hold sway. Its only justification for military rule is military glory. There must be victories if the army is to keep its power. But these victories are a new source of revenue to the industrialists for it is they who control the production of armaments.

Affairs continued to grow worse. The common people were incited to organize. Industry was faced with shrinking foreign markets and higher costs of production at home. Moreover, a rapidly increasing population had to be fed. Industrial plants could not produce the goods required. Gold reserves were being steadily drained. Bonds were issued, but the people could not buy them. Japan was on the verge of collapse. What was she to do?

Across a narrow sea lay North China, a country rich in salt, iron and cotton, well organized, thickly settled with a population that could produce raw materials and absorb Japan's commodities. Here was relief for the alarming labor situation. So without even a formal declaration of war, the Army marched into the area south of the Great Wall. Quick action was imperative, due to China's rapid unification under Generalissimo Chiang Kai-shek, the most noted figure in the Far East to-day.

Again, Britain was rapidly progressing with her defence scheme from Singapore to Hong Kong. Millions of pounds have been spent on fortifications. A powerful British fleet is soon to appear in Eastern waters to protect and maintain her interests there. Not only has Japan to contend with British dreadnaughts but also with Soviet battleships, built in the United States and a match for even the pride of the Japanese fleet.

This, then, was the psychological moment—the final opportunity had come. Facing disaster, or the trenches, the Japanese nation chose the latter, giving the Army full sway to blast away at one of mankind's mellowest, most mature, and most beautiful of civilizations.



"There can be no harmony in our being except our happiness coincides with our duty."—*Whewell*.