

FACING LABOR ISSUES IN CHINA

Gokhale Institute of Politics
and Economics, Poona 4.



BY

LOWE CHUAN-HUA

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CHINA INSTITUTE OF PACIFIC RELATIONS
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With Introductions by

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and

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CHINA INSTITUTE OF PACIFIC RELATIONS
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21738

Since the completion of the Northern Expedition in the summer of 1928, the National Government of China has been concentrating its attention on the work of national reconstruction with a view to improving the livelihood of the people. The Kuomintang has long held the belief that in order to develop China into a strong and progressive nation, the needs of the masses must be given the foremost consideration and the standards of the workers be greatly improved. In carrying out this gigantic task, the National Government of China has repeatedly searched for co-operation from Europe and America, particularly from the League of Nations. The National Government as well as the people of China have been especially gratified with the assistance they have hitherto received from the various technical bodies of the League. It is the hope and conviction of many Chinese leaders that in rebuilding their national life on a modern foundation, not only their own people but also those of the West, whose economic welfare has become increasingly dependent upon the tranquility and prosperity of the Far East, will be benefitted.

Unfortunately, the Japanese invasion which began in Mukden on September 18, 1931, has tremendously upset the reconstructive efforts of the different branches of the National Government of China, and has indeed brought about a number of factors which render rehabilitation on a national scale almost impossible in the immediate future. The repercussions of Japan's undeclared warfare are manifest not only in the Three Eastern Provinces (Manchuria), but also in many other sections of China. Various systems of financial administration have been impaired; strategic lines of communication and transportation have been forcibly taken away from Chinese hands. The future of China's foreign trade has been seriously affected. In short, the onward march of the Chinese people towards economic regeneration has now been set back for at least two decades. Unless this senseless aggression on the part of a small group of irresponsible militarists is brought under control by the collective will of the civilized world, no rapid economic development can take place in this country. If the nations of the world are to escape from their present depression and chaos, they must immediately try to reshape their relationships, political as well as economic, on a basis of *reason and order*. The responsibility for achieving such a system of international relations, which will automatically ensure world peace and prosperity, rests not so much on China as on the entire family of nations.

China is now undergoing an unprecedented transformation. Few nations, if any, have had to experience several revolutions—political,

China can hardly be modernized overnight. Patience and sympathetic understanding of her problems are needed more than ever before. But when given the proper opportunity, the Chinese people, who have an extraordinary power of recuperation, will undoubtedly be able to get out of their present abyss and eventually gain their rightful place in the family of nations.

With the growth of modern industries, the labor situation in China is bound to have many radical changes. As a matter of fact, labor unions, strikes, industrial disputes, wages, unemployment and similar questions have already become acute issues in Chinese society. If China's industries are to grow and prosper, these problems must be faced with courage and intelligence. Mr. Lowe is to be congratulated for having given the English-speaking people such a comprehensive and illuminating study of China's labor issues as narrated in his present volume. Well written and authoritative, his book should be read by everyone interested in the development of China.

A handwritten signature in black ink, reading "Kung P. Chen." The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style with a large initial 'K' and a prominent 'P'.

Nanking, June 19, 1933.

faces facts courageously and is refreshingly constructive. He aptly states that, before any remedial measures can be made effective, China must attain some semblance of political stability and unification. He rightly lays particular stress upon the importance of his country's agricultural regeneration as the first essential to better economic conditions. In this connection he wisely advocates a national drive for rural betterment, including the conservation and expansion of the domestic industries of the village—the basic unit in the social life of China.

Our author points out that it is distinctly to the advantage of the nations of the West to co-operate with China in any efforts which its people may make to profit by the pioneering experiences which the economic and industrial history of the Occident may have to offer. China's transition will be far slower of realization if its people are obliged to trudge along making similar mistakes and delays in achieving a new economic balance to those that have characterized the industrial progress of Western nations. On the other hand, China should adapt rather than adopt the ideas and methods of more advanced economic societies. Thus, while the hours of labor and the conditions under which Chinese laborers are obliged to work in many of its industrial plants are sadly in need of reformation, it is neither to the advantage of the employee nor the employer that efforts be made precipitately to hurdle all of the intermediate steps in attempting to put Chinese laborers on a par with those of the West.

In the process of raising the economic levels of the great masses in China, vast opportunities for world trade expansion must follow. Concerted action by Western nations in an intelligently devised program for the encouragement of China's transition into a modern economic society will go a long way toward relieving the present deplorable world depression. Mr. Lowe exhibits a delightfully broad visioned attitude in decrying "Buy native goods" campaigns as leading in their final conclusions to a complete stoppage of international trade. He very frankly recommends the participation of foreign capital in his country's industrialization in the following words: "Devoid of political implications, foreign investments are more than welcome by the enlightened elements in this country and can render a timely service not only to the Chinese but also to the investing public in the West."

open door of equal opportunity, redound to the advantage of all other trading peoples. Mr. Lowe challenges the nations of the Occident wholeheartedly to co-operate in China's economic regeneration, rightly contending that the blessings accruing therefrom will be mutual. In light of the alluring opportunities presented by an actively progressive China, can Western nations afford to be indifferent to this challenge?

JULEAN ARNOLD

Shanghai, May 15, 1933.

of industrial and labor conditions in China, and in connection with his work has enjoyed the privilege of visiting practically all the important industrial and commercial centers in this country. He has also been able to inspect a great variety of industrial and labor organizations, and to meet with many government officials, industrial leaders and social workers. The considerable information and experience which he has gained should prove useful to those who are likewise engaged in trying to understand the complicated economic issues in China. The present volume, moreover, represents a humble attempt to fill a gap in that immense collection of literature in English which deals with the changes and problems of modern China, but none of which, in the author's knowledge, tries to present a comprehensive picture of the industrial and labor situation in this country.

One who has studied this field is, of course, fully aware of the difficulties of undertaking such a task and the limited facilities at one's disposal. Indeed, the presentation of such a picture as given in the following pages would not have been possible were it not for the utilization of the research work from many hands. The statistical data contained in this volume, it should be added, are intended merely for illustrative purposes, since statistical work in China is still in its infancy and its results are in numerous cases of questionable authenticity. But if the present volume should, in any small way, contribute to clarify the major industrial and labor questions in present-day China, and stimulate further and more thorough explorations on the part of those who are vitally interested in China's economic development, the author would feel amply repaid.

The preparation of this book is made possible by the interest of the National Committee of the Young Men's Christian Associations of China. To the following of his colleagues the author wishes to express his sincere appreciation for advice and criticism: Mr. Eugene E. Barnett, Mr. Daniel C. Fu, Dr. Ralph M. Hogan, Mr. S. C. Leung, Mr. Quentin Pan and Mr. Y. T. Wu.

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C. H. L.

Shanghai, May 15, 1933.

ix

Gokhale Institute of Politics
and Economics, Poona 4.

	PAGE
Introduction by CHEN KUNG-PO, Minister of Industry of the National Government of China.....	v
Introduction by JULEAN ARNOLD, American Commercial Attache in China.....	vii
AUTHOR'S PREFACE	ix
CONTENTS	xi
LIST OF TABLES.....	xv
CHAPTER	
I. THE ECONOMIC PANORAMA IN CHINA.....	I
China's Economic Crisis—Agricultural Disintegration and Its Causes—Foreign Trade Tendencies—Backwardness in Transportation and Communications—Growing Concentration of Wealth—Social Implications of the Economic Crisis—Economic Reconstruction and Its Relationships with the West.	
II. SOME PECULIAR FORMS OF CHINESE LABOR.....	19
The Recruiting System—The Labor Contractor—The Apprentice System—Ricksha Coolies—Some Much-needed Remedies.	
III. THE LABOR MOVEMENT IN CHINA.....	30
Significance of Chinese Labor Movement—Causes of Development—Decline of Guilds—Chief Stages of Labor Movement—Its Present Status and Tendencies—Government's Policy Towards Organized Labor—The Future Outlook.	
IV. STUDY OF SOME LEADING LABOR UNIONS IN CHINA.....	50
Classifications and Kinds of Labor Unions—Chinese Seamen's Union—Its Organization and Activities—Kwangtung Mechanics' Union.	
V. STUDY OF SOME LEADING LABOR UNIONS IN CHINA (<i>continued</i>).....	63
Commercial Press Employees' Union—British-American Tobacco Company Labor Union—Problems and Needs in Labor Organization.	

VI.	THE LABOR POLICY OF THE NATIONALIST PARTY..... Kuomintang's Socio-economic Platform—Attitude of Present Authorities Towards Labor Activities—Kuomintang's Contributions to Organized Labor—Some Criticisms of Kuomintang Labor Policy.	74
VII.	LABOR LEGISLATION IN CHINA..... Labor Conditions Under the Manchu Regime—Labor Laws of the Former Peking Government—Development of Labor Legislation Under the Nationalists—Labor Laws in Hongkong—Present Status of Labor Legislation in China.	82
VIII.	ENFORCING CHINA'S LABOR LAWS..... Problem of Extraterritoriality—Need of Strong Public Opinion—Machinery for Enforcement and Inspection.	91
IX.	PROBLEMS OF WORKERS' EDUCATION..... Need of Public Education—Present Educational Conditions—Defects in China's Educational System—Workers' Education in Shanghai—Some Recent Educational Experiments—Problems of Workers' Education in China.	104
X.	PROBLEMS OF UNEMPLOYMENT AND UNDER-EMPLOYMENT..... Unemployment and Under-employment in China—Extent of Under-employment—Its Main Causes—Conditions for Solving Under-employment.	115
XI.	INDUSTRIAL WELFARE IN CHINA..... Introduction of Welfare Work into China—Welfare Provisions of the Factory Law—Welfare Programs of Labor Unions, Factories and Social Agencies—Some Successful Experiments in Industrial Welfare—Limitations and Functions of Welfare Work.	124
XII.	CHINA'S RELATIONS WITH THE INTERNATIONAL LABOR ORGANIZATION..... History and Functions of the I. L. O.—China's Participation in International Labor Conferences—Influence of I. L. O. in China—Problems of Collaboration.	136

XIII.	WILL COMMUNISM CONQUER CHINA?.....	144
	Communism a Powerful Factor in Present-day China— Early History—Period of Expansion—Period of Terror- ism—Labor Conditions Under Soviet Regimes—In- fluence of Communism Among Chinese Workers—The Challenge of Communism.	
XIV.	CONDITIONS FOR ECONOMIC RECONSTRUCTION.....	158
	Reconstruction, China's Most Urgent Task—Nation- wide Agricultural Development—Policy of Financial Retrenchment—Taxation Reforms—Better Transporta- tion and Communication Facilities—Development of Purposeful and Creative Education—Promotion of Domestic Industries—Social Planning and Organiza- tion—Foreign Support and Co-operation—Economic Internationalism.	
APPENDICES:—		
	I. FACTORY LAW	177
	II. CHRONOLOGY OF IMPORTANT LABOR EVENTS IN CHINA.....	186
	III. MATERIALS FOR THE STUDY OF LABOR PROBLEMS IN CHINA	189
	INDEX	205

LIST OF TABLES

	PAGE
1. NET IMPORTS OF RICE AND FLOUR SINCE 1920.....	2
2. EXCESS OF CHINA'S IMPORTS OVER EXPORTS 1912-1931.....	9
3. GROSS TONNAGE OF VESSELS OF THE WORLD.....	12
4. SHARES TAKEN BY EACH NATIONALITY IN CHINA'S SHIPPING TRADE	13
5. PERCENTAGE OF CONTRACT LABOR IN LEADING MINES IN CHINA	22
6. TOTAL VALUES OF MACHINERY IMPORTED INTO CHINA 1912- 1931	35
7. GROWTH OF COTTON MILLS IN CHINA.....	35
8. GROWTH OF SILK FILATURES IN SHANGHAI.....	36
9. INCREASE IN THE NUMBER OF ORGANIZED WORKERS IN CHINA	36
10. INCREASE OF CIGARETTE FACTORIES IN SHANGHAI.....	36
11. NUMBER OF COTTON MILLS IN CHINA IN 1932.....	37
12. A COMPARATIVE TABLE SHOWING THE APPLICABILITY OF THE FACTORY LAW	103
13. NUMBER OF INDUSTRIAL WORKERS IN CHINA IN 1927.....	155
14. NUMBER OF HANDICRAFT WORKERS IN CHINA.....	155
15. ANNUAL DEFICITS OF THE NATIONAL GOVERNMENT OF CHINA	162
16. MILITARY AND DEBT EXPENDITURES OF THE NATIONAL GOVERNMENT	163

INDEX

I N D E X

A

Agrarian crisis, 3, 160
Agrarian revolution, 152
Agricultural disintegration, 4, 7
Agricultural exports, 2
Agricultural imports, 3
Agricultural improvement, 159
Agricultural system, 1, 2, 8, 14, 117, 144, 155, 160
Anderson, Dame Adelaide, 94, 100
All-China Farmers' and Laborers' Federation, 31
All-China Labor Conference, 154
All-China Labor Federation, 43, 45, 46, 51, 54, 84, 118, 146, 149, 151, 152
All-China Mechanics' Guild, 57
All-China Railway Workers' Union, 151
All-China Seamen's Union, 151
All-China Soviet Congress, 153
Allowances, 16, 24, 66, 72
Apprentices, 23, 24, 25, 26, 39, 153.
Apprenticeship, 15, 23, 24, 153
Arbitration, 71, 87
Arnold, Julean, 106
Asiatic Petroleum Company, 58
Association, right of, 82, 140, 142
Auxiliary industries, 7, 120, 160

B

Baku, 146
Banditry, 3, 8, 144, 156, 167
Bank of China, 10, 14
Benefits, 71
Bei Chung-hsi, 46
Birth control, 123, 131
Birth registration, 99
Bonus, 66
Borodin, Michael, 33, 34, 46, 148, 149
Boycotts, 39, 43, 54
British-American Tobacco Company, 33, 65, 71, 133
B. A. T. Labor Union, 66, 67, 69, 70, 126
Browder, Earl, 34, 45
Buck, J. Lossing, 4, 5
Bureau of Civil Affairs, 99
Bureau of Education, 108
Bureau of Public Safety, 118

Bureau of Reconstruction, 99
Bureau of Rolled-Tobacco Tax, 67
Bureau of Social Affairs, 16, 71, 95, 96, 99, 108, 109, 118, 124, 134
Bureau of Statistics, 17

C

Canton, 8, 32, 33, 39, 44, 47, 57, 59, 150
Canton Electric Power Company, 59
Canton-Hankow Railway, 31, 59
Canton-Hongkong Strike, 43, 44
Canton-Kowloon Railway, 59
Canton Labor Representatives' Association, 60
Canton-Samshui Railway, 59
Capitalism, 1, 14, 33
Central Executive Committee (of Kuomintang), 54, 148, 149
Central Factory Inspection Commission, 99
Central Overseas Affairs Commission, 118
Central Political Council, 54, 61, 119, 134
Chang Kia-ngau, 10, 14
Chang Tseng-tze, 6
Chang Tso-lin, 85
Chang Tsung-chang, 121
Chen Chiung-ming, 58
Chengchow, 40.
Chen, K. P. 139
Chen Ta, 40, 98, 101
Chen Tu-hsiu, 31, 145, 148
Chiang Kai-shih, 87
Chiang Li-fu, 140
Child labor, 17, 124, 134
China, area of, 5
China Merchants Steamship Company, 117
China Institute of Scientific Management, 97
China International Famine Relief Commission, 6, 161
Chinkiang, 27
Chinese language, 111, 112.
Chinese overseas, 9, 115
Chinese Overseas Union, 32
Chinese peasantry, 156
Chinese Postal Service, 133
Chinese Returned Laborers' Association, 32

- Chinese Revolution, 30, 52, 82
 Chinese Revolutionary Party, 52
 Chinese Seamen's Associated Union, 55, 56, 150
 Chinese Seamen's Union, 40, 42, 44, 46, 51, 53, 54, 55, 56, 127, 142, 150
 Chow-ping, 109, 110, 111
 Christian missionaries, 128, 129
 Chu Hsao-hsing, 138.
 Chung Hwa Book Company, 33
 Chung-san, 59.
 Civil war, 3
 Class-struggle, 39, 147, 172
 Clinic, Birth control, 131
 Collective bargaining, 15, 39, 79
 Commercial Press, Ltd., 33, 133
 Commercial Press Employees' Union, 63, 64, 65, 126, 140
 Communications, 11, 13, 109, 166, 167
 Communism, 31, 34, 120, 121, 144, 145, 147, 148, 151, 155
 Communist coup d'etat, 150
 Communist Party, 32, 34, 44, 72, 75, 144, 146, 148, 149, 151, 153, 154, 155, 157, 161
 Communist propaganda, 30, 70, 144, 146, 147
 Communists, 41, 46, 47, 48, 51, 54, 57, 60, 118, 150, 156, 157
 Community work, 130, 132
 Company unions, 51, 55
 Compradore, 66
 Compensation, 125
 Condliffe, J. B., 122
 Confucius, 146
 Contract labor, 19, 20, 22
 Contractor's system, 153
 Conventions, 91, 137, 140, 141
 Coolies, 11, 23, 27, 31
 Cooperative movement, 161
 Cost of living, 61
 Cotton, 117
 Credit societies, 161
 Cultivable land, 5
 Cultivated land, 5
 Currency, 13, 14
 Customs duty, 121
 Customs Administration, 2, 8, 10
- D**
- Dangerous thoughts, 151
 Daud, 139
 Denmark, 112
 Dialects, 111
- Directorate of Accounts, Budgets and Statistics, 163
 Disputes, 43, 44, 69, 71, 73, 99
 Domestic industries, 169
 Doriot, Jacques, 34, 45
 Draft conventions, 137
 Dutch East Indies, 118
- E**
- Economic crisis, 1, 2, 8
 Economic internationalism, 18, 173
 Economic reconstruction, 159, 165, 167
 Education, 17, 130
 Educational movement, 168
 Eight-hour-day, 101
 Emergency Law, 151
 Engels, 31
 England, 112
 Exports, 2, 9, 10
 Extraterritoriality, 90, 91, 96, 139
- F**
- Factory Accidents Ordinance, 88
 Factory council, 98
 Factory hygiene, 134
 Factory inspection, 92
 Factory Inspection Law, 79, 88, 89
 Factory inspectors, 89, 95, 99
 Factory Law, 26, 48, 76, 79, 88, 89, 91, 93, 95, 96, 97, 98, 101, 102, 125, 126
 Factory legislation (also see labor legislation), 38
 Factory Regulations, 85
 Factory system, 124
 Family budget, 5
 Family incomes and expenditures, 6, 7.
 Family system, 1, 6, 16, 39
 Famines, 3, 117, 155, 167
 Farmers, 3, 5, 6, 30, 105
 Fatsan, 59
 Female labor, 16, 17, 98, 134, 141
 Floods, 3
 Foreign concessions, 91, 141
 Foreign trade, 8, 9, 10, 170
 Franco-Chinese College, 145
 France, 32
 Fushun, 22, 132

G

Gangs, 72
 George, Henry 6
 Goethe, 31
 Grey unions, 51
 Gratuities, 72
 Guilds, 24, 37, 51, 57, 59, 63

H

Hanchung, 7, 8
 Handicraft industries, 1, 15, 23, 30,
 115, 120, 121, 169
 Handicraft workers, 116
 Hankow, 8, 118, 134
 Hankow-Szechuen Railway, 31
 Health, Workers' 130, 131, 134
 Ho, Franklin, 5
 Honam, 57, 61
 Hongkong, 53, 54, 56, 88
 Hongkong strikes, 33, 40, 43, 44, 84
 Hongs, 27, 29, 37
 Hopel, 161
 Hospice, 128
 Hospital for workers, 134
 Hostel, 131
 Housing, 20, 128, 131, 132, 134
 Hsiang Chung-fah, 149
 Hsiao Chi-yung, 140
 Hsieh Tung-fah, 140
 Hsu, Leonard, 116
 Hugo, Victor, 31
 Hu Han-min, 2
 Hupeh General Labor Union, 45, 46
 Hu Shih, 31, 104

I

Illegal Strikes and Lockouts Ordinance, 88, 89
 Imperialism, 33, 151
 Illiteracy, 17, 167
 Indemnities, 9, 164, 166
 Industrial Center, 131
 Industrial disputes, 43, 44, 69, 71, 73,
 99
 Industrialism, 1, 14
 Industrial Employment of Children Ordinance, 88
 Industrialization, 15
 Industrial legislation (also see labor legislation), 99
 Industrial efficiency, 97
 Industrial Revolution, 15, 19

Industrial union, 70, 71
 Industrial welfare, 124, 134, 135
 Interest rates, 4, 134
 International Chamber of Commerce, 116
 Internationalism, 18, 173
 International Labor Conference, 38,
 48, 56, 65, 80, 83, 91, 137, 138, 139,
 140, 141
 International Labor Conventions, 91
 International Labor Office, 55, 56,
 94, 100, 101, 137, 138, 140, 142
 International Labor Organization,
 48, 136, 138, 140, 143
 International Settlement (of Shang-
 hai), 66, 91, 92, 93

J

Japanese bombardment, 63, 65
 Japanese invasion, 131
 Joffe, M. 32, 147
 Johnston, 39

K

Kailan Mining Administration, 22,
 128, 132
 Kann, E., 14
 Karakhan, 145
 Kiang Kang-hu, 31
 Kiangmen, 59
 Kiangsu, 50, 120
 Kiangsu Provincial Government, 109.
 Kropotkin, 31
 Kulp, D. H., 130
 Kuomintang, 32, 34, 45, 51, 54, 58,
 60, 65, 70, 72, 83, 86, 108, 134,
 144, 145, 147, 148, 149, 150, 151,
 156, 161
 Kuomintang principles, 111
 Kuomintang Central Land Commit-
 tee, 30
 Kwangtung, 41, 42, 44, 45, 46, 47, 48,
 50, 60, 74, 75, 76, 78
 Kwangtung Bureau of Agriculture
 and Industry, 62
 Kwangtung Mechanic's Maintenance
 Society, 59
 Kwangtung Mechanic's Union, 37, 39,
 57, 61, 62, 126
 Kwangtung Provincial Labor Federa-
 tion, 34, 149
 Kwangtung Provincial Peasants'
 Federation, 46

Kwangsi faction, 47
Kweichow, 58

L

- La Jeunesse, 145
Labor administration, 91
Labor bosses, 70
Labor Bureau, 80, 87
Labor contractor, 21, 22, 23, 29, 52
43, 152
Labor contract, 19, 20, 24, 55
Labor Day, 39, 74
Labor Department of the Kuomintang Central Headquarters, 149
Labor disputes, 43, 44, 69, 71, 73, 99
Labor laws, 21, 42, 79, 84
Labor legislation, 82, 83, 87, 126, 141
Labor movement, 34, 42, 44, 48, 49,
56, 72, 75, 81
Labor organizations 71
Labor Party, 31
Labor pickets, 65
Labor population, 30
Labor protection, 153
Labor Representatives' Association,
149
Labor unions, 29, 34, 37, 39, 45, 46,
50, 57, 64, 66, 72
Labor Union Law, 48, 76, 79, 87, 89,
96
Labor Union Reorganization Committee,
48, 76
Laborers, 128
Laborers' welfare, 125
Land, Cultivable, 5
Land, Cultivated, 5
Land, nationalization, 31
Land rent, 4
Land Regulations, 94
Land taxes, 121, 3, 7
Land tenure, 161
Law of Emergency, 151
Law of Collective Agreements, 79,
88, 89
Law of the Settlement of Disputes,
77, 79, 89, 96
Law relative to Chambers of Commerce, 83
Law relative to the Preservation of
Public Order, 83.
Lamson, H., D. 16
Leaf, Walter, 116
League of Nations, 136
Lee, Franklin, 28
Lee Lih-san, 42, 51, 146, 147, 149
Lee Yung-hsiang, 140
Legal protection, 25, 38, 48, 83, 84
Legislative Yuan 2, 17, 88
Lenin, 147
Likin, 7
Li Ta-chao, 145, 146
Li Yuan-hung, 41, 84, 85
Literary Renaissance, 31, 33
Liao Chung-kai, 42, 149
Liang Teh-kung, 56, 139, 140
Liu Yu-sen, 151
Liupan, 7, 8
Loan service, 134
Lockouts, 118
Long hours, 111, 121

M

- Ma Chao-chin, 87, 116
Malaya, 118
Malthusian theory, 5
Mao Tse-tung, 153
Manchu, 30, 82, 155
Manchuria, 5, 10, 22, 88
Manchurian conflict, 110, 167
Mann, Tom 34, 45
Marx, Karl 156
Marxism, 145
May Day, 39, 74
Mass education, 29
May 30th Incident (1925), 43, 54, 63,
67, 85, 145
Mechanics' strike, 39
Mediation, 71
Membership, union, 69
Mencius, 146, 158, 165
Military disbursements, 164
Minimum wage, 153
Miners, 21
Mining, 21, 22, 109
Mining population, 21
Minimum wage convention, 140
Ministry of Agriculture & Commerce,
5, 41, 80, 84, 85.
Ministry of Agriculture & Mining,
109, 119
Ministry of Communication, 80, 85,
109
Ministry of Commerce, Industry &
Labor, 78, 87, 88, 124.
Ministry of Education, 104, 168
Ministry of Finance, 67
Ministry of Foreign Affairs, 55
Ministry of Industry, 50, 80, 94, 98,
100, 108, 124
Ministry of the Interior, 53, 119
Ministry of Labor, 54
Ministry of Railways, 119

Missionaries, 128, 129
 Mission industries, 129, 130
 May Fourth, 146, 147
 Mo Yung-hsin, 58
 Model Village in Pootung, 132
 Moh, H. Y., 8
 Mongolia, 5
 Moscow, 145
 Municipal Council (Shanghai), 92, 93, 95
 Municipal Government of Greater Shanghai, 25, 67, 70, 92, 95, 132, 134

N

Nanking Government, 47
 Nanking, University of, 3, 5
 Nanyang Bros. Tobacco Co., 33
 National Association for the Advancement of Mass Education, 110
 National budget, 163
 National Christian Industries Association, 129
 National Economic Council, 171
 National Educational Conference, 104, 107
 National Famine Relief Committee, 3, 117
 National Federation of Labor, 43, 51, 79
 National Good Roads Association, 11
 National Government, 67, 118
 National Industrial Conference, 77, 124, 126
 National Labor Conference, 149
 National Labor Party, 31
 National Railway Workers' Union, 75
 National reconstruction, 160
 National rehabilitation, 159, 172
 National socialism, 172
 National Vocational Education Association, 108
 Nationalist Party, 41, 48, 58, 74, 78, 83
 Nationalist Revolution, 56, 66, 74, 130, 147, 148
 Nationalist Revolutionary Armies, 65, 67
 Native goods, 169
 Native Goods Movement, 170
 Night work for women and children, 153
 Northern Expedition, 34, 44, 149, 187,

O

Occupational union, 70
 Opium, 121
 Ordinances, 88, 89
 Over-population, 122
 Over-production, 123
 Over-supply of labor, 122
 Overseas workers, 118

P

Pan-Pacific Trade Union Conference, 45, 50, 146, 149, 154
 Pao Chen Cotton Mill, 98
 Paris, 32
 Peace Treaty, 140
 Peasants' movement, 76
 Peiping (Peking), 25, 28, 39, 47, 118
 Peking-Mukden Railway, 33
 Peking Union Medical College, 6
 Pensions, 125
 People's livelihood, 74, 165, 169
 Petroleum tax, 121
 Permanent workers, 71
 Picket corps, 63, 77
 Poon, C., 94, 100
 Pootung, 65, 67
 Pootung Model Village, 132
 Popoff, 32
 Population, 5, 6, 122
 Population, labor 30
 Porcelain industry, 117, 121
 Poutou, 21
 Pravda, 154
 Proletarian literature, 113, 155
 Provisional Constitution, 38, 41, 82, 84
 Provisional Criminal Code, 83, 84
 Provisional Factory Regulations, 41, 84, 138
 Provisional Government of the Soviet Republic of China, 153
 Provisional Penal Code, 38, 40
 Provisional Regulations relating to the Settlement of Disputes, 48, 87
 Peking-Hankow Railway, 40, 84
 Provisional Regulations concerning Apprentices, 25

R

Railways, 11, 167
 Rates of interest, 133, 161

- Real wages, 118
 Recommendations, 137
 Recruiting agents, 19, 20, 29, 52
 Recruiting system, 19
 Reds, 47, 51, 57, 72
 Red Army Daily, 152
 Red labor unions, 45, 148, 149, 150, 151, 154
 Red International of Labor Unions, 43, 154
 Red uprising (in Nanchang), 150
 Redistribution of land, 152, 156
 Regulations concerning the Organization of Special Trade Unions, 88
 Regulations governing Mining Enterprises, 83
 Regulations for the Application of the Labor Union Law, 79, 89
 Regulations for the Conciliation of Disputes between Capital and Labor, 87
 Regulations for the Enforcement of the Factory Law, 79, 88, 89
 Regulations for the Enforcement of Martial Law, 151
 Regulations for the Organization of Committees for Arbitration of Disputes between Employers and Employees, 87
 Regulations relating to the Organization of Labor Unions, 48, 87
 Renaissance, 31, 32, 33
 Rent, land, 4
 Revolution, Chinese 30, 52, 82
 Revolution, Soviet, 32
 Revolutionary Party, 52
 Rice allowance 2, 10, 66
 Rice-bowl-dealer, 19
 Ricksha coolies, 27, 31
 Ricksha fares, 29
 Ricksha-pulling, 27, 28, 29
 Roads, 11
 River Vessels Seamen's Union, 56
 Roman Catholic missionaries, 128
 Rosta News Agency, 33
 Rowntree, B. S., 135
 Roy, M. N., 34, 45
 Rules of Factory Supervision and Inspection, 85
 Rural education, 107, 160
 Rural population, 120
 Rural reconstruction institute, 110
- S**
- Safety, 125
 Salt tax, 121
 Sanitation, 125
 Savings, 128
 Savings scheme, 133
 Schools for workers, 70, 127, 128
 Seamen, 40, 139
 Second Revolution, 52
 Shameen, 43, 54
 Shanghai, 1, 8, 14, 15, 16, 17, 19, 20, 25, 27, 31, 32, 39, 45, 46, 61, 67, 91, 92, 93, 118
 Shanghai Commercial & Savings Bank, 161
 Shanghai Conference on People's Livelihood, 96
 Shanghai Fifth Rolled Tobacco Workers' Union, 70
 Shanghai General Labor Federation, 41, 43, 45, 46, 151
 Shanghai General Strike, 67
 Shanghai Land Regulations, 92
 Shanghai Postal Workers' Union, 79
 Shanghai Publisher's Union, 65
 Shanghai University, 145
 Shanghai, University of 16
 Shanghai Y.M.C.A. Social Center, 130
 Shanghai Y.W.C.A., 131
 Shansi, 47, 167
 Shantung, 145
 Shantung Provincial Government, 110
 Shensi, 7, 8
 Shihlung, 59
 Silk filatures, 16, 117
 Silk, raw, 2
 Silk weaving, 120
 Silver prices, 118
 Singapore, 118
 Sin Wan Pao, 4, 15
 Social revolution, 147
 Socialism, 31, 33, 172
 Socialist Party, 31
 Society for the Advancement of Morality, 67
 South Manchuria Railway, 132
 Soviet districts, 154
 Soviet regime in Changsha, 150
 Soviet Revolution, 32
 Soviet Russia, 32, 142, 145, 147, 155, 157, 171
 Sovietism, 147
 Standard of living, 5, 115, 123
 Standard Oil Company, 58
 Statistics, 116
 Strikes, 31, 32, 33, 39, 40, 41, 42, 43, 44, 52, 53, 58, 62, 63, 64, 65, 66, 72, 73, 77, 84, 99, 149, 153
 Student Movement, 39, 145, 146
 Students' unions, 33, 146
 Subsidies, 72
 Su Chao-jen, 42, 45, 51, 54, 150, 154
 Sun Chuang-fang, 45, 64, 65

- Sun Yat-sen, 31, 32, 34, 41, 42, 52, 53, 54, 58, 74, 86, 143, 147, 148, 172
 Sun Yat-sen, Madame 46, 47
 Szechuen, 167
 Soong, T. V., 171
 United States, 3, 5, 11, 115, 142
 Unions (also see labor unions and trade unions) 29, 33, 34, 37, 39, 42, 45, 46, 50, 51, 57, 64, 66, 69, 72
 Unlawful Societies Ordinance, 88

T

- Ta Kung Pao, 119
 Tai-san, 59
 Taiyuan, 167.
 Tan Ping-san, 42, 148
 Tao, L. K. 16, 17
 Taxation, 121, 165, 166
 Taxes, 3, 7, 8, 161
 Tawney, R. H., 104, 160
 Tchou, M. T., 96, 139, 140
 Tea, 2, 117, 126
 Temporary workers, 71
 Textile industry, 19, 20
 Third International, 46
 Thomas, Albert, 56, 140, 141
 Three Eastern Provinces, 1, 10, 11
 Three Principles of the People, 66
 Tientsin, 8, 89, 47, 134
 Ting-hsien, 109, 110, 111
 Tobacco and wine tax, 121
 Tongshan Miners' Union, 75
 Trade balances, 8, 9, 10
 Trade Disputes Act, 89
 Trade education, 17
 Trades, 129
 Trade unions, 22, 33, 51, 128, 153
 Trade Union Bill, 85
 Trade Union Regulations, 34, 42, 74, 79, 86
 Trade unionism, 39, 72
 Transportation, 4, 11, 13, 166, 167
 Treaty of Versailles, 136, 145
 Treaty ports, 8, 13, 14, 15, 105, 161, 162
 Trotskyist, 148, 151
 Tsao Kun, 82
 Tsingtao, 8, 19, 39
 Tuan Chi-jui, 82
 Tuchuns, 38, 66, 74, 144

U

- Under-employment, 115, 116, 121, 122, 123
 Unemployment, 29, 115, 118, 120, 121, 122, 123
 Unequal treaties, 74, 141

V

- Village schools, 110
 Vocational education, 122, 168
 Voitchinsky, 146

W

- Wages, 15, 16, 17, 20, 21, 24, 32, 62, 66, 71, 98, 111, 118, 140, 153
 White land, 121
 Women workers, 98, 134, 141
 Woo Kai-shen, 139
 Workers' education, 16, 17, 107, 108, 109, 111, 112, 113, 131
 Workers' educational institute, 109, 110
 Workers' health, 130, 131, 134
 Working conditions, 6, 72, 82, 111, 129
 Working hours, 15, 21, 25, 66, 97, 111, 130
 Working time for farmers, 6
 Working population, 154
 World War, 32, 40, 83, 110, 129, 136, 171, 173
 Wuchang, 31
 Wuhan, 17, 44, 45, 46, 47, 54, 84, 149
 Wu Pei-fu, 40, 84
 Wusih, 17, 109, 134
 Wu Kwang-sin, 8
 Wu Ting-fang, 57
 Wu Tze-hui, 3

Y

- Yangtzepoo Social Center, 130
 Yangtze river, 4
 Yang, Simon, 16, 17
 Yang Yu-jen, 140
 Yang Yung-tai, 58
 Yellow unions, 45, 51, 152
 Yen Chin-hsiang, 140
 Y. M. C. A. Social Center, 130
 Young Socialist League, 146
 Yuan Shih-kai, 31, 82
 Yunan, 58
 Y. W. C. A. Industrial Center, 130

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