

# Fleeting Embers: “Anti Radical” Groups in Post-May Thirtieth Shanghai

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## Introduction

The first foreigners that would eventually settle in the city of Shanghai arrived in 1843, shortly after Britain's victory in the First Opium War designated the city a treaty port in the Treaty of Nanjing.<sup>1</sup> Over the next century the settlers would consolidate their hold in the city. The British and American concessions would merge and form the International Settlement, governed by the Shanghai Municipal Council (SMC) which was voted in by a landowning electorate. Over time, portions of the city would be granted to the foreign settlers either by aggressive expansion or exploiting turmoil in China.<sup>2</sup> As the result of simmering tensions between Shanghai's Chinese and foreign communities, the anti-foreign May Thirtieth Movement, began on May 30th, 1925, when the British-dominated Shanghai Municipal Police (SMP) shot and killed several Chinese protesters on Nanjing Road, over what was initially an anti-Japanese protest.<sup>3</sup>

The subsequent movement was massive, eventually spreading to numerous other cities in China as well as requiring the cooperation of the Chinese and foreign governments to solve the issue.<sup>4</sup> A massive strike was organized by the communist run Shanghai General Labor Union (GLU)—part of the wider (and also communist run) National General Labor Union—which had over a hundred unions under its leadership.<sup>5</sup> The union did however face opposition from conservatives (and the Guomindang, despite their alliance with the Communist Party), their

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<sup>1</sup> Marie-Claire Bergere, *Shanghai: China's Gateway to Modernity*, trans. Janet Lloyd (Stanford University Press, 2009), 11.

<sup>2</sup> Bergere, *Shanghai: China's Gateway to Modernity*, 32; Robert Bickers, "Shanghailanders: The Formation and Identity of the British Settler Community in Shanghai 1843-1937," *Past and Present* no. 159 (May 1998): 165-166, 168-169; Isabella Jackson, "Expansion and Defence in the International Settlement at Shanghai," in *Britain and China, 1840-1970: Empire, Finance, and War*, edited by Robert Bickers, Jonathan Howlett, (Routledge, 2016), 188, 192-197.

<sup>3</sup> Bergere, *Shanghai: China's Gateway to Modernity*, 187

<sup>4</sup> *Ibid*, 187-188.

<sup>5</sup> Elizabeth J. Perry, "Heyday of Radicalism, 1919-1927," in *Shanghai on Strike: The Politics of Chinese Labor*, (Stanford University Press, 1993), 80-82.

Shanghai gangster affiliates, and even disgruntled workers.<sup>6</sup> Even so, with the Federation of Workers, Merchants, and Students at the wheel, formed from the GLU and other groups on June 4th, the strikers (and ultimately the Chinese elite in Shanghai, though not without its representative Shanghai General Chamber of Commerce facing the ire of the workers) received concessions that August in the form of Chinese representation on the SMC and the return of the Mixed Court—which tried Chinese residents in the Settlement—to Chinese control. The initial catalyst for the May Thirtieth Movement, the shooting on Nanjing Road, would not be settled until a few weeks later.<sup>7</sup>

The May Thirtieth Movement has been discussed from numerous angles by scholars. For this project, the most relevant scholarship focuses on responses to the foreign expatriate community of Shanghai, both by Chinese and foreign settlers. In Robert Bickers' work on the British settlers—colloquially referred to as “Shanghaianders”—the author noted that the settlers “defended their position with bluster and violence” in their response to the initial shooting.<sup>8</sup> Shanghaianders generally held an antagonism to “Chineseness,” everything from food, culture, politics, and more, in a racialized “Othering” galvanized by the settlers' general isolation from the Chinese in the city.<sup>9</sup> Pushback to their position in the May Thirtieth's Incident's fallout led the Shanghaianders to try in vain to save their image in Shanghai and beyond, heavily damaged in the summer of 1925, to little sympathy as the British government became increasingly frustrated in dealing with the Shanghaianders.<sup>10</sup> This point is generally affirmed by Harumo Goto-Shibata and Nicholas Clifford, who add that the council ignored the crisis—that it was only

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<sup>6</sup> Ibid, 76-77, 79-83.

<sup>7</sup> Ibid, 83; Bergere, *Shanghai: China's Gateway to Modernity*, 188-189; Nicholas R. Clifford, *Spoilt Children of Empire: Westerners in Shanghai and the Chinese Revolution of the 1920s* (Hanover, Middlebury College Press, 1991), 110, 115-118.

<sup>8</sup> Bickers, “Shanghaianders,” 161-162.

<sup>9</sup> Bickers, “Shanghaianders,” 184-185, 187.

<sup>10</sup> Bickers, “Shanghaianders,” 204-205; Robert Bickers, *Britain in China: Community, Culture, and Colonialism 1900-1949* (Manchester UK, Manchester University Press, 1999), 130.

subject to its electorate—to the detriment of diplomatic powers trying to solve the crisis at hand.<sup>11</sup>

The events of summer 1925 led the Chinese people to voice their anger at the settlers. Harumi and Clifford have discussed this anger. Harumi showed that the perception of overwhelming British influence in Shanghai as a point of reference for the British Empire's meddling in China, and like Bickers, the racism expressed by the British were both highlights for the shift from anti-Japanese to anti-British during the May Thirtieth Incident.<sup>12</sup> Clifford likewise discussed the overall Chinese response, spreading cartoons, articles, and other publications that condemned Britain for the massacre. They also called up boycotts, and the Guomindang highlighted the Christian identity of the British to invoke a reason to shame the British.<sup>13</sup>

Radical activity continued beyond the May Thirtieth Movement, in both 1926 and 1927. The Northern Expedition, undertaken by GMD leader Chiang Kai-shek (who espoused anti-foreign sentiments himself<sup>14</sup>), was a military operation to defeat the warlords who were controlling the provinces of “central and northern China” and to subsequently place them under national control.<sup>15</sup> Chiang's decision to turn towards Shanghai in January 1927 coincided with the “Three Armed Uprisings” by labor activists and the communists in the city, culminating in the third (and successful) uprising in March 1927. This uprising led to the communists and strikers seizing control of Shanghai and the defeat of local warlord Sun Chuanfang.<sup>16</sup> The

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<sup>11</sup> Harumi Goto-Shibata, *Japan and Britain in Shanghai, 1925-1931* (New York, St. Martin's Press, 1995), 20-21; Nicholas R. Clifford, *Spoilt Children of Empire: Westerners in Shanghai and the Chinese Revolution of the 1920s* (Hanover, Middlebury College Press, 1991), 120-121.

<sup>12</sup> Harumi, *Japan and Britain*, 16-17.

<sup>13</sup> Clifford, *Spoiled Children of Empire*, 109.

<sup>14</sup> Clifford, *Spoiled Children of Empire*, 164-165.

<sup>15</sup> Bergere, *Shanghai: China's Gateway to Modernity*, 190.

<sup>16</sup> *Ibid*, 190-191; Perry, *Shanghai on Strike*, 84-87.

following April saw the purge of communists and the massacre of civilians in Shanghai in a coup undertaken by Chiang.<sup>17</sup>

While this is good background information, the subsequent Northern Expedition and its aftermath is where the groups in this study—the Constitutional Defence League, the Shanghai Publicity Bureau, and the Shanghai Fascisti—all came into the scene. All three were run by settlers and are mentioned by Bickers and Clifford, albeit briefly. Clifford argued that the CDL, an anticommunist propaganda organization, was short lived and likely did little to influence Chinese opinion, yet is nevertheless an example of settlers trying to influence their home governments.<sup>18</sup> He argued similarly about the Fascisti, who were snubbed by the SMC, yet noted their toleration for violence should they have to use it to defend their way of life.<sup>19</sup> Bickers agreed,<sup>20</sup> adding that they were willing to defend the International Settlement militarily.<sup>21</sup> For the SPB, Bickers noted that Rodney Gilbert of the bureau discussed reforming the CDL into a pro-Shanghai-lander organization, an idea that its secretary R. Huntley Davidson proliferated abroad to little fanfare and even derision.<sup>22</sup>

While I agree with both Bickers and Clifford's conclusions regarding these respective groups—their appeals fell on uncaring ears, they were rather short lived experiments, etc.—neither scholar goes too in-depth into the inner workings of the groups nor what they specifically disseminated as their messages. Further, while I agree with Bickers on his conclusion that Shanghai-landers created groups such as these (specifically the Fascisti) in moments of crisis due to their unique status in the British Empire,<sup>23</sup> I think that a closer look at each specific group

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<sup>17</sup> Bergere, *Shanghai: China's Gateway to Modernity*, 197-198.

<sup>18</sup> Clifford, *Spoiled Children of Empire*, 167-168.

<sup>19</sup> Clifford, *Spoiled Children of Empire*, 261-262.

<sup>20</sup> Bickers, *Britain in China*, 149-150.

<sup>21</sup> Bickers, "Shanghai-landers," 197-198.

<sup>22</sup> Bickers, *Britain in China*, 146-147.

<sup>23</sup> Bickers, "Shanghai-landers," 210: "In moments of violent crisis, such as in summer 1925 [the Shanghai-landers] retreated into violent defensiveness." "...this was a settler community, squatting on

is worth noting, as while there were overlaps between them they certainly had differences in rhetoric and even methods. Further still, both scholars do indeed discuss how these groups' messages were praised and criticized, both in and outside Shanghai,<sup>24</sup> but likewise there is not much specifically discussed on how these messages were received, like whether or not they inspired reactionary views of their own.

As discussed below, each group had different ideas about combatting supposed threats to their way of life, and at least internally the groups were mightily confident in their prospects. Some of them also, to some degree, had their rhetoric spread beyond Shanghai, of which that rhetoric represented a potent emotion among all three groups: fear. Each one had a fear of the change that the latter half of the 1920s brought to Shanghai. Much of that fear is tied to radicalism—communism, anti-foreign sentiment, etc—as all three sought to curb said radicalism, because, in their view, it seriously undermined their position in Shanghai. They all seem indicative of being what I will refer to as a “fleeting ember”—they were the “old ways” of Shanghai and sought seriously to protect those ways.

## *The Constitutional Defence League*

### **The Foundations and Ideas of the League**

L.M. ff. Beytagh, the chairman of the Constitutional Defence League, at a meeting of the organization in early July 1926, addressing an audience of several hundred, enthusiastic people at the Carlton Theatre in Shanghai, had this to say about detractors who claimed communism was not a serious threat to China:

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rented land, and it had much more in common with other settler societies in the British empire than has previously been allowed, including the knack of causing a great deal of trouble.”

<sup>24</sup> Clifford, *Spoiled Children of Empire*, 168, 261-262; Bickers, *Britain in China*, 146-147.

Communist literature continues to be disseminated in bulk all over China; Communist doctrines continue to be preached as freely as ever in certain schools and universities and appropriations of money from Russia to foster the doctrines are on a larger scale than ever, this having been necessitated by the efforts of the Constitutional Defence League, which they openly admit is their greatest enemy in this part of the world.<sup>25</sup>

The rest of the meeting's opening, as reported in the *North China Herald*, is full of politically galvanizing rhetoric of communist aggression, subversion, and other types of danger. The chairman runs wild in his claims that communists are active in China and the colonized areas of southeast Asia, such as French Indochina. All of it, supposedly, is tied back to the Soviet Union, whose overall efforts to strengthen communist influence in the East, through its own propaganda, spells doom for the rest of the "civilized" world. Only something as brazen and motivated as the CDL could properly and effectively counter the efforts of communists the world over.<sup>26</sup>

To what extent the CDL claimed to do this is laid out rather generally in the same meeting by the chairman. Beytagh stated that the CDL was, and still adamantly pursued, attacking communism through an extensive, even international network of those supportive to its ideals. Allegedly, the CDL had contacts as far away as New York and Europe, and as close by as the rest of China, Japan, and other British colonial possessions in the East. It opened its arms to Chinese, foreigners, laborers (though it did express difficulties in settling labor disputes), and employers alike to broaden its appeal and efforts. Supposedly, their internal literature was in high demand. It relished in the supposed appeal it was receiving from the public, and in the condemnation it received from enemies, as both equally validated the organization.<sup>27</sup> In sum the CDL viewed itself as a bastion of all-encompassing anti-communism, that claimed a network of

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<sup>25</sup> "SHANGHAI NEWS: CONSTITUTIONAL DEFENCE LEAGUE Its Achievements Since Inauguration: Bolshevism a Repetition of What Was a Failure in China 5,000 Years Ago: Progress of Defensive Propaganda," *The North China Herald and Supreme Court & Consular Gazette*, July 3, 1926, 13.

<sup>26</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>27</sup> *Ibid.*

both foreigners and Chinese, worker and business owner, international and local, that sought to counter in its eyes a growing international crisis of communist subjugation.

The July meeting of the CDL serves as a microcosm of the league's ideas and motivations, grandiose and as idealistic as they may be. However, despite the league's outreach to a wide ranging membership, its leader and other prominent members' backgrounds were not indicative of being "the common man." To start, Beytagh, in addition to having an extravagant wedding years prior due to his prestige in the city, was an employee of a management company named Ilbert & Co. He particularly managed the Laou Kung Mow cotton mill, which he helped liquidate in spring 1926, a few months after the league's formation.<sup>28</sup> The chairman was not just an average employee for the company. Beytagh is listed as one of the voting ratepayers of Shanghai in both 1921 and 1926, meaning he owned at least some land within the International Settlement.<sup>29</sup>

Beytagh likewise represented his cotton mill officially within the Shanghai General Chamber of Commerce, as well as the chamber itself. The first time he did so was in early January of 1924, when Beytagh, alongside various labor representatives, listened to National Christian Council representative Adelaide Anderson (1863-1936) discuss the ruinous effects of child labor in Shanghai. During this public address, Anderson suggested a ban on children working before the age of 10 by 1928 and the appointment of a "Welfare Adviser" with a Chinese assistant to explain the details of meeting and improve worker conditions. What

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<sup>28</sup> G. R. Wingrove, "The Laou Kung Mow Cotton Spinning and Weaving Company. Limited: Annual Meeting," *The North China Herald and Supreme Court & Consular Gazette*, February 28, 1900, 368; "Wedding: Beytagh--McIlraith," *The North China Herald and Supreme Court & Consular Gazette*, April 08, 1911; "Laou Kung Mow General Meeting: All Liabilities Paid and a Return to Shareholders," *The North China Herald and Supreme Court & Consular Gazette*, April 3, 1926, 20.

<sup>29</sup> The Municipal Gazette, Friday, April 15, 1921: Report of the Annual Meeting of Ratepayers," newspaper, 15 April 1921, Foreign Office Files for China, 1919-1929, FO 671/447, The National Archives, UK (hereafter Municipal Gazette, 1921); The Municipal Gazette, Thursday, April 15, 1926: Report of the Annual Meeting of Ratepayers," newspaper, 15 April 1926, Foreign Office Files for China, 1919-1929, FO 371/11685, The National Archives, UK (hereafter Municipal Gazette, 1926).



followed was a general disregard for Anderson's proposal, as many present labor representatives—Beytagh included—casted doubt on the proposals. The general consensus among them was the fear of a lack of enforcement should a ban not be bound legally, or that factories outside the settlement or Shanghai would not have similar bans put in place. Beytagh discussed both issues and said that “[his association] have been unable” to keep children from working in their cotton mills.<sup>30</sup> Beytagh was clear: his job was simply more important.

The second time occurred during the following October, when the chamber met to discuss recent hostilities between the armies of Jiangsu and Zhejiang province. While Beytagh does not speak, the chamber's chairman, A. Brooke Smith, praised the efforts of the International Settlement and the French Concession in defending the city during the conflict. However, the most central concern of attendees at the meeting was the chamber's desire to prevent future losses in Shanghai. The chamber resolved to send several policy outlines to diplomats in Beijing, regarding Chinese unification, namely that the future central government of China would receive support, provided it respects the treaty ports and for foreign powers to put pressure on the Beijing government should it regularly violate pre existing treaty agreements, and that the powers should make this consultation known to China.<sup>31</sup>

Beytagh was not the only member of the CDL to come from an opulent background. Around the time of the CDL's foundation the *China Press* generally reported that, while the league was composed of several nationalities, it was also the product of “the work of a number of

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<sup>30</sup> “Minutes of a Joint Meeting of the Committee of the Employer's Federation, Representatives of the Millowners' Association and the National Christian Council of China, held on Tuesday, 29th January, 1924, at 4:30 p.m. in the Rooms of the Shanghai General Chamber of Commerce, No. 1 Yuen Ming Road, Shanghai,” Foreign Office Files for China, 1919-1929, FO 371/10286, The National Archives, UK (hereafter “Minutes of a Joint Meeting”).

<sup>31</sup> “Minutes of a Meeting of Representatives of National Chambers of Commerce of Shanghai, held at the room of the Shanghai General Chamber of Commerce on Thursday, October 30th, 1924, at 4:15 p.m.,” Foreign Office Files for China, 1919-1929, FO 371/10917, The National Archives, UK (hereafter “Minutes of a Meeting”).

the leading men of all nationalities in Shanghai.”<sup>32</sup> Several of its members were indeed leading men. R.N. Swann, the CDL secretary, was present at the same meetings alongside Beytagh as the secretary of the Employer’s Federation and of the SGCC.<sup>33</sup> Carl Crow, head of propaganda, was originally a propagandist for Wilsonian principles (and Woodrow Wilson himself) during WW1, who ended up shifting to American commercial interests in the wake of Wilson’s failure at Versailles and the May Fourth Movement, the latter being an anti-foreign outbreak of its own.<sup>34</sup> K. Takaiwa and Arthur de Carle Sowerby, two other members, were listed as voting ratepayers alongside Beytagh,<sup>35</sup> and Sowerby, a naturalist who traveled throughout North China before settling in Shanghai in 1922, was also the editor for the *China Journal*, which dealt with Chinese history, art, and science. However, in the words of Clifford, Sowerby was “no friend of modern Chinese culture or politics.” This is clear when Sowerby, during the May Thirtieth Incident, referred to a diplomatic initiative to inquire over the May 30th shooting (which, ultimately, is negotiated down to a simple resignation of the SMP’s commander) as an effort by diplomatic powers to forcibly control the International Settlement.<sup>36</sup>

It is clear to see that the upper ranks of the CDL were not from humble backgrounds. Among them were landowners, businessmen, and propagandists. Sowerby may not have had the same sort of background, but his comments during the fallout of the May Thirtieth Incident certainly reflected a palpable fear of change in Shanghai. Beytagh’s meetings within the SGCC

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<sup>32</sup> “Anti-Bolshevik Society Is Formed By Representatives Of Dozen Nations Here: Constitutional Defence League Organised To Combat Theories And Principles Of Third International,” *The China Press*, February 3, 1926, 1.

<sup>33</sup> Minutes of a Joint Meeting; Minutes of a Meeting; “SHANGHAI NEWS,” 13.

<sup>34</sup> Hans Schmidt, “Democracy for China: American Propaganda and the May Fourth Movement,” *Diplomatic History* 22, no. 1 (Winter 1998): 1-25; “SHANGHAI NEWS,” 13.

<sup>35</sup> Municipal Gazette, 1921; Municipal Gazette, 1926.

<sup>36</sup>For a more detailed look at Sowerby’s life as a naturalist and his time throughout China and beyond, see Keith Stevens, “Naturalist, Author, Artist, Explorer, and Editor and An Almost Forgotten President: Arthur de Carle Sowerby 1885-1954: President of the North China Branch of The Royal Asiatic Society 1935-1940,” *Journal of the Hong Kong Branch of the Royal Asiatic Society* 38, (1998-99): 122-133; Clifford, *Spoilt Children of Empire*, 69, 124-125.

likewise were in response to either a change in his business or a similar sense of danger facing Shanghai and the International Settlement. Granted, a non-insignificant number of members of the CDL's committees were of other nationalities besides American or British, and their initial composition in early 1926 likewise reflected that, including Chinese representation in both instances.<sup>37</sup> Clifford observed this fact in his overview of the league.<sup>38</sup> However, it must be stressed that the chairman, as well as his secretary and head of propaganda, were indeed foreigners and represented foreign interests. It is likely then that as chairman, given his background, Beytagh sought to combat communism as yet another radical challenge to his position, rather than leading an international crusade against a "red menace."

Even with the background of the CDL's "leading men" made apparent, the league was nonetheless adamant in its determination to fight communism. Structurally the league furcated itself, as already alluded to above, into numerous committees—labor, propaganda, publications, and a "Russian Advisory" one aimed primarily at spreading propaganda among the White Russian diaspora, etc.—which were all revealed in a two day meeting with representatives of the various outports in China in May 1926. An opening speech at said meeting by Beytagh largely foreshadowed his one in July, about the need for an organization like the CDL, and that the league primarily would focus on propaganda in its efforts at curbing the spread of communism, made effective by the unified nationalities under the league.<sup>39</sup>

The most important committee, naturally, was the propaganda committee. Carl Crow then explained the purpose and function of the committee: editors chose what to publish in the propaganda of the CDL, while publishers would spread it far and wide with, hopefully, very little

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<sup>37</sup> Minutes of a Conference of Representatives of Outports Convened by the Constitutional Defence League on 6th and 7th May 1926, Political, Economic, and Military Conditions in China: Reports and Correspondence of the U.S. Military Intelligence Division, 1918-1941, US National Archives (hereafter Minutes of a Conference), "Anti-Bolshevik Society," 1.

<sup>38</sup> Clifford, *Spoilt Children of Empire*, 167-168.

<sup>39</sup> Minutes of a Conference.

expenditure. This was not limited to Shanghai, as American, British, and even Russian publications were valid for reprint by the league. Their propaganda, according to them, was secretly directed through missionaries, in print through book distribution or posters, through film, newspapers, and even essay contests. Another committee, handling finances, would be responsible for managing monthly subscriptions to the CDL on cards, ultimately to be given to the CDL secretary by “card leaders” after funds have been deposited and the counterfoils given back to the secretary.<sup>40</sup>

Unfortunately, due to the aforementioned secrecy the true extent of CDL propaganda spread is unclear. We can, however, infer from this meeting that the CDL certainly were palpable in their fear of communism and took great lengths at combating it. This is evidenced in part by the fact that they mailed copies of “Impressions of Soviet Russia” by Charles Sarolea to 5,000 schools by the CDL’s own imprint of the “Constitutional Press,” with an additional 30,000 copies soon afterward.<sup>41</sup> Whether or not these numbers are accurate, or if the copies even reached their destination, is not necessarily important. This circulation, as well as the league’s diversified inner workings, shows an extraordinary dedication to anticommunism, surely, but knowing the background of the CDL’s leader and some of their members implies as well the fear central to their anticommunism: that of losing their way of life.

There is luckily one publication from the league that has survived its own secrecy. The *Constitutionalist*, as described by Beyagh, was a bulletin “which will keep [the outpost representatives present, and others] in touch with what [the league members] are doing here.” Further, according to the chairman, 30,000 copies of the June edition were being printed and sent to Hong Kong, to 7,000 missionaries, and an unspecified number to “every important

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<sup>40</sup> Ibid.

<sup>41</sup> Ibid.

newspaper” in America and Europe. The May edition likewise was distributed to 27,938 individuals, according to the June edition of the bulletin. One might say that this undermines the league’s adamant attachment to secrecy—the bulletin was, after all, branded with the league’s name and publication office—but this was deliberate, as Beytagh wanted as much awareness as possible of the league’s “genuine effort.”<sup>42</sup> It shows, once again, an international outreach to broaden the league’s appeal and to showcase a “genuine effort” against communism. However, given the sheer volume of distribution, it also showcases the desperation the league must have felt in not only making their case heard, but at the fear they likely felt in the midst of Shanghai’s political turmoil.

I have found three editions of the *Constitutionalist*, and each one provides insight into the ideas of the league. To start, the June 1926 edition began with a scathing editorial of Soviet Russia, referring to it generally as a dictatorship governed by the “Soviet of Moscow,” that has effectively amounted to nothing more than ruin.<sup>43</sup> However, much of the June bulletin is concerned with communist news, a little bit of everything from the incoming economic collapse of the Soviet Union due to the “breakdown of the communistic monopoly of foreign trade,” the difficulty of agricultural production in Russia, or activities undertaken by Chinese communists in May, particularly May Day. Of particular interest to French readers in the CDL was an article about communist backing of anticolonial nationalism in French North Africa and Indochina.<sup>44</sup>

Each article, however, is not presented in an objective manner, nor is much else from the bulletin. For example, the article about Soviet agricultural production listed “causes” for its

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<sup>42</sup> Ibid; “The Constitutionalist, vol. 1, no. 2,” June 1926, Political, Economic, and Military Conditions in China: Reports and Correspondence of the U.S. Military Intelligence Division, 1918-1941, US National Archives (hereafter *The Constitutionalist*, no 2.).

<sup>43</sup> *The Constitutionalist*, no. 2. Such things that Russia had destroyed were concepts like family and the middle class, and more tangible things such as food security, which ultimately led to famine.

<sup>44</sup> Ibid.

difficulty: peasant opposition in production, and the economic problems of the Soviet Union that made it “incapable of functioning.” The bulletin does not shy away from political cartoons either, depicting a communist spider with hammers and sickles for legs about to wrap a Chinese person in its web, the tagline reading “Communist Agent In Peking: Can He Escape?” A quote from another anticommunist group, the “International Entente Against the Third International,” calling for a righteous crusade against Bolshevism that will hopefully never be forgotten, is printed twice. Finally, and perhaps most strikingly, a translated leaflet from Chinese communists in Shanghai in the wake of the May Thirtieth Incident’s anniversary, about the need for a continued fight against imperialism, the institutions of both the International Settlement and the overall treaty port system, as well as the “running dog” of Japanese and British imperialism Zhang Zuolin (a warlord who had seized control of Beijing) is also present.<sup>45</sup>

While the July and November 1926 editions largely follow the same format as June’s—a tally of publications distributed and letters received from interested persons, articles of supposed Soviet ineptitude and communist activities, etc<sup>46</sup>—the latter edition has an interesting and non-insignificant focus on the Guomindang. The editorial, while acknowledging that neither Chiang Kai-shek nor Feng Yuxiang are communists, nevertheless referenced to the communist influence on the GMD, in itself a larger part of the Soviet Union’s interest in conquering the East through propaganda and expansion that undermined Western principles and civilization. Another article alluded to this when referring to local communists sending members to spread communism in lands taken by the “Southern Forces,” likely the Northern Expedition. Finally a lengthy article by a General F. A Sutton, about recent conflict in China, decried the expedition in

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<sup>45</sup> Ibid; Clifford, *Spoilt Children of Empire*, 146-147.

<sup>46</sup> “The Constitutionalist, vol. 1, no. 3,” July 1926, Political, Economic, and Military Conditions in China: Reports and Correspondence of the U.S. Military Intelligence Division, 1918-1941, US National Archives; “The Constitutionalist, vol. 1, no. 7,” November 1926, Political, Economic, and Military Conditions in China: Reports and Correspondence of the U.S. Military Intelligence Division, 1918-1941, US National Archives (hereafter The Constitutionalist, no. 7.)

its entirety, citing the “pro-Bolshevik” Canton (Guangzhou) army as a serious threat whose success could only be attributed to communist sympathies in the areas they took.<sup>47</sup> It is not surprising that, as alluded to already, this edition was published in the midst of the Northern Expedition, particularly after the invasion of nearby Jiangxi province.<sup>48</sup> Chiang’s flip flop stance towards communists was also known at the time, but so was his purge of Canton of radical elements, including communists.<sup>49</sup> It shows therefore that to the CDL, a mere association with communism was enough to be labeled as dangerous, further showing the fear within them as a group of political tensions in China.

It is clear that the CDL’s focus on anticommunism in the *Constitutionalist* was less a critique of political ideology and more of a desperate warning of things to come, and we can likely infer that it was disseminated throughout the league’s methods of outreach. For example, Russian news is presented objectively, as mentioned, but with not so subtle rhetoric of dictatorship, inherent communist ineptitude, or of a dire threat to Western nations and values. When combined in tandem with articles about China—especially the November issue—it becomes clear that their fear is being projected, as that warning is on Shanghai’s doorstep. Given the league’s background, and its rhetoric, the secretly disseminated propaganda that would have entered factories, been passed around by missionaries, been shown in films, and other means, likely epitomized the league’s fear of change in Shanghai that is inherent in its not-so-secret bulletin. While the true extent is unknown, the league’s seriousness in its goals and specified tasks in proliferating its message meant its propaganda could have likely spread among Shanghai’s prominent elites, if not further.

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<sup>47</sup> The *Constitutionalist*, no. 7.

<sup>48</sup> Clifford, *Spoilt Children of Empire*, 166.

<sup>49</sup> Clifford, *Spoilt Children of Empire*, 164-165.

## Appeal and Collapse

The league had a host of activities in 1926, as shown above. It met with representatives of various outposts, spread the *Constitutionalist*, and propagated a message of moral justice against a supposedly immoral political system. Such a system, in their eyes, required an international coalition both in and outside China, as communism was a global threat. Its rhetoric won both praise, criticism, and overall attention both in Shanghai and outside Asia. Clearly it was not an unheard-of organization. However, despite this appeal, the CDL did not last for long. As presented below, the CDL was met with a host of problems—particularly financial—that ultimately led to its dissolution in 1928.

One of the most explicit supporters of the CDL was the *North China Herald*, which also published some accounts of the aforementioned meetings. The *Herald* was a newspaper in Shanghai that was known for its controversial support of the most antagonistic parts of foreign Shanghai.<sup>50</sup> While it is important to know that the publication did not speak for the diverse nature of Shanghai's expatriates, who were comprised of numerous different nationalities, attachments toward Shanghai, and opinions towards Chinese people,<sup>51</sup> it nevertheless championed the CDL, albeit not without some slight criticism. The league's June 1926 edition of the bulletin, for example, was largely agreed upon by the *Herald*. However, it cautioned against the CDL's use of the word "propaganda" as well as its secretive nature, as Bolshevism did both already and thus an organization opposing it should not resort to similar tactics as their enemies.<sup>52</sup> The newspaper's article on the *Constitutionalist's* August edition is very short, only expressing that the edition for that month was "interesting" and that it "gives some idea" of communist activity

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<sup>50</sup> Jeffery N. Wasserstrom, "1850: the birth of a newspaper," in *Global Shanghai, 1850-2010: A History in Fragments*. Routledge, 2009, 26.

<sup>51</sup> *Ibid*, 24-25.

<sup>52</sup> "The Constitutionalist," *The North China Herald and Supreme Court & Consular Gazette*, June 12, 1926, 478.



in China.<sup>53</sup> Lastly, the *Herald's* article for the October issue was “one of the best [the *Herald*] has seen.” It even recommended the bulletin to those “who affect to defend [the CDL] and even find it a means of “clarifying” their own thoughts,” particularly in reference to an article about supposed Soviet influence over the Chinese anti-Christian movement.<sup>54</sup> The article related to June’s edition may be a slight exception to the praise, but the *Herald* certainly seemed very enthusiastic about the CDL’s rhetoric in the *Constitutionalist*, perhaps signifying the antagonistic sentiment of foreign Shanghai.

One perspective to the CDL, however, was outright hostile to it. A copy of the tenth edition of “Chinese Bulletin” was received by the Foreign Office in May 1926. The bulletin’s sixth item referred directly to the CDL and Beytagh in particular, which called him the “Mussolini of Shanghai.” It claimed the CDL was connected with a “China Committee” in Britain that spread propaganda. However, it denounced the league for its anticommunism, or what it referred to as “the struggles of the Chinese worker for better conditions.”<sup>55</sup> While this is clearly a communist source—and naturally it was opposed to the CDL—it does offer an interesting perspective into the mind of the league’s natural opposition, as well as indicate that the CDL’s appeal may have indeed spread far beyond Shanghai to Europe, as the league had claimed.

One source does indicate that the CDL’s rhetoric did indeed spread outside Shanghai. An interview with Beytagh, as well as league activities throughout 1926, by the Secretary for Chinese Affairs E. R. Hallifax (or rather, the latter’s recollection of it) was relayed through C. Clementi, the governor of Hong Kong, all the way to Lt. Col. L. C. M. Amery, a Member of

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<sup>53</sup> “Article 16- - No Title,” *The North China Herald and Supreme Court & Consular Gazette*, August 21, 1926, 355.

<sup>54</sup> “The Constitutionalist,” *The North China Herald and Supreme Court & Consular Gazette*, October 23, 1926, 155.

<sup>55</sup> Letter to Mr. Bland, 3 May 1926, Foreign Office Files for China, 1919-1929, FO 371/11669, The National Archives, UK.

Parliament, in early 1927. The interview is an overview of the league—from its constitution, goals, committees, etc—but it reveals both the spread of the CDL as well as its difficulties the previous year. The CDL's labor committee, for example, had spent less time appealing to Chinese labor and more time eliminating means of contact that did not work, though there were hopeful inroads; the league had, for example, made contact with the Employer's Federation, representing numerous foreign employers. Chinese governors and military leaders expressed their endorsement of the league and allowed their propaganda to be distributed in the areas they controlled. League correspondents were, allegedly, in every province in China, numbering 402.<sup>56</sup> While there is no verifiable way of affirming Hallifax's interview, it does indicate that the league had reached Britain indeed, specifically one of its houses of government.

Most apparent, however, was the CDL's funding problems, of which they were very limited and relied almost exclusively on the *Constitutionalist* to raise awareness of itself and therefore receive funding. In fact, only 10% of the CDL's mailing list had even bothered to send payment. Some prospective supporters additionally withheld payment as they doubted the league's abilities. Nevertheless, Hallifax ended his letter by stating that an organization like the CDL was needed in the dire straits China was in.<sup>57</sup> Clearly, despite the league's shortcomings, Hallifax's letter shows, at least superficially, that they were making some strides during 1926. It was prominent enough indeed to reach an MP in London, although Hallifax himself stated in his cover that the HK government could not support them on an official basis.<sup>58</sup> Nevertheless, even if the league's numbers or Hallifax's account are not pinpoint accurate, the league was certainly causing a stir big enough to catch the attention of those outside Shanghai and even China itself.

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<sup>56</sup> C. Clementi to Lieutenant Colonel L.C.M.S. Amery, M.P., copy of interview between E.R. Hallifax and L. M. ff. Beytagh, 18 February 1927, Foreign Office Files for China, 1919-1929, FO 371/12430, The National Archives, UK

<sup>57</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>58</sup> *Ibid.*

However, as mentioned above, the league faced a funding problem, which ultimately spelled doom for it. The CDL appeared rarely between 1927 and mid-1928, only appearing four times in the press and only once did an article refer specifically to its distributed materials.<sup>59</sup> By July 1928, the league rapidly began to come under fire. A. E. N. Howard, a former member, wrote directly to CDL secretary R. N. Swann, as he viewed it as the best way to get a direct address into the league's current issues. He asked if the CDL was still capable of performing its duties of conductive anticommunism, if subscriptions of funds are still being collected, and he asked interestingly, stating that Swann had alleged it to him, what amount of overdraft did the league owe to a certain bank. He refused to allow the CDL to die out without explanation, as requested by others and of his volition, as he considered the collapse of the league to be harmful to Shanghai and beneficial to the "enemies of China and of mankind generally."<sup>60</sup>

A statement by Swann was printed two days later on July 21, where he said that a report on the matter would be made shortly.<sup>61</sup> That same day, however, another article in the *North China Herald* stated that CDL money, for their propaganda, was marked secretly with the league's general committee having passed resolutions that "accounts must never be published." The article also affirmed the CDL's overdrafts, debts, and lack of funds. Naturally the *Herald* concluded too that some members felt that their money went "in other directions," that the money was used for purposes they were not aware of. Ironically, despite the wide appeal it professed, the *Herald* reported too that the general committee stated that the only criticism they would listen to would be from their supporters and no one else. With all this in mind, the *Herald*

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<sup>59</sup> Rodney Gilbert, "Correspondence: The Need of Making Facts Known," *The North China Herald and Supreme Court & Consular Gazette*, April 16, 1927, 114; A. E. N. Howard, "The Glorification of Infamy," *The North China Herald and Supreme Court & Consular Gazette*, November 12, 1927, 288; "Duplicity," *The China Press*, February 1, 1928, 13; Japonicus, "Correspondence: Shanghai as Neutral Territory," *The China Press*, May 11, 1928, 4.

<sup>60</sup>A. E. N. Howard, "Letter to the Editor 1- - No Title," *The China Press*, July 19, 1928, 4.

<sup>61</sup> R. N. Swann, "Correspondence," *The China Press*, July 21, 1928, 4.

advised the CDL to dissolve itself as the pressure mounted and people began to pull out even further, especially when many felt the CDL had “fulfilled its purpose.”<sup>62</sup> It seemed that the CDL was plagued by a host of problems, contrasting its rather explosive start, and its members were becoming increasingly disillusioned by its secrecy and its decline.

Beytagh’s report, however, mentioned only the funding problems. In publishing of the report (dated February 10 of that year) by the *Herald*, Beytagh expressed that, while the league had made significant strides in anticommunism—even crediting themselves for recent anticommunist events in China—the financial stability of the league was not good, caused by the over expenditure of the propaganda efforts, aided by the backing of big firms that had not even given financial support yet. Other financial troubles, such as personal business expenditures, naturally led to a decrease in CDL funding. The chairman then stated that, like always, a statement of accounts, for “bona fide” league members, would be available at “confidential perusal” at Secretary Swann’s office. The article then ended with an addendum by the CDL’s general committee that, in tandem with the problems listed and with no real improvement in support, the league dissolved itself declaring its objective completed.<sup>63</sup>

In the following months however this report did not seem to placate the former members of the CDL. An anonymous former executive member named “Amicos” published in the *Herald* demanded a statement of accounts, inferring that he was denied access to the ones the CDL stubbornly limited to only “bona fide” members. He also wanted, alongside other “co-nationalists,” an “explanation for [the CDL’s] failure other than that already given to the

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<sup>62</sup> “Affairs of the Constitutional Defence League: Comment on What It Is Doing and Whether It Is to Go on Functioning: The Case for Winding Up,” *The North China Herald and Supreme Court & Consular Gazette*, July 21, 1928, 104.

<sup>63</sup> “The Affairs Of The Constitutional Defence League: The Chairman's Report and a Statement Made by the Committee: The Work Done Reviewed,” *The North China Herald and Supreme Court & Consular Gazette*, August 4, 1928, 200.

public.” He also seemed shaken, stating that because of the league’s failure and his own feelings of accountability that he, alongside others, could not “approach our fellow countrymen unless” they could properly remedy the issue.<sup>64</sup> Howard referred to this person, that a statement of accounts should be made public. He alleged that when he received his own statement, Swann asked him not to disclose it publicly. He alleged as well that another executive member was refused access to the statements. Howard, not wishing to let another CDL harm foreign interests, formed his own group, the “Anti Communist Entente of Shanghai.”<sup>65</sup> Clearly, the CDL was under fire for not concluding its affairs in a satisfactory manner, especially since not every member could see where their money even went and what it was used for. Some felt so strongly about its failure that they considered taking matters into their own hands, or were ashamed to even look their countrymen in the face.

A copy from the *Izvestia* that circulated in the Shanghai Municipal Police about Shanghai anticommunism provides a hint into where the CDL’s money actually went. Funds were being pulled, because many league supporters felt that communism was growing stronger, and when the league collapsed and a statement of accounts was forced out of them—in part due to former members accusing each other of wasting funds, inactivity, etc.—it revealed once again the funds labeled as “secret” or otherwise. However, speculation is that the funds were used for paying “big salaries, banquets” and even salaciously for women, and that bringing this to light would shame the supposed exemplars of anticommunism.<sup>66</sup> This not only reaffirms the claims of

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<sup>64</sup> Amicos, “Constitutional Defence League,” *The North China Herald and Supreme Court & Consular Gazette*, October 13, 1928, 68.

<sup>65</sup>A. E. N. Howard, “Letter to the Editor 1- - No Title,” *The North China Herald and Supreme Court & Consular Gazette*, October 13, 1928, 68.

<sup>66</sup> “Copy of *Izvestia*, Moscow, November 15th, 1928,” copies forwarded to American and British consulates, Col. G.H.R. Halland OBE, Cap. J.P. Shelley, and Lt. Carlson, Policing the Shanghai International Settlement, 1894-1945, US National Archives

secrecy in the accounts but provides a pathway that such funding took. It is only, of course, one possible avenue, but it would certainly make sense for the CDL, backed up by big firms and prominent members of Shanghai, to not want this information to see the light of day. It would discredit their anticommunism and would result in losing more support, in turn causing the CDL's upper echelon to lose their funding in carnal desires.

The Constitutional Defence League certainly presented itself as a bastion of anticommunism. It boasted of its successes, even brazenly, and relished in the praise of its supporters and condemnation of its enemies. It professed a encompassing, non-divisive form of anticommunism, bolstered by a network of supporters near and far and facilitated in a structure to combat a gigantic "evil." Nevertheless, it represented and was led by foreign interests, despite having Chinese members, and a non-insignificant amount of its rhetoric revolved around Shanghai and the dynamically changing environment that existed after the May Thirtieth Incident. Its much publicized start, reaching all the way to a home government, would sputter out rapidly and the league would inevitably collapse as supporters viewed its methods ineffective. The league, grandiose and idealistic, could not account for a lack of interest in itself nor for a disgruntled membership who likely grew frustrated with its secrets when it expected concrete results and truthful accounts of its expenditure.

### ***The Shanghai Publicity Bureau***

#### **Professing Shanghai**

The Shanghai Publicity Bureau had its first major appearance in the *North China Herald* in June 1927. The bureau, ordained in its creation by the Shanghai Municipal Council, was

“financed by certain commercial and industrial interests of Shanghai.”<sup>67</sup> Unlike the CDL, which focused primarily on international anticommunism, the bureau focused most prevalently on the interests of Shanghai, particularly in the avenue of improving Chinese-foreign relations (that would positively improve Shanghai in general), explaining how the actual SMC works, and challenging erroneous “propaganda.”<sup>68</sup> At least at the beginning the bureau was indeed committed to bridging a gap between Chinese and foreigners. That same month the organization sent to the Chinese press a statement to facilitate the promotion of “Sino-Foreign cooperation and goodwill.” It stated that Shanghai had become a city of prosperity for foreigners and Chinese alike, that both desired security and effective government, and that any ill will between them had been the result of “unscrupulous Communistic propaganda rather than to any genuine and vital differences of opinion.” It cited the city of Hankou as an “object lesson” to avoid, which had recently been seized by revolutionaries and the British concession within it relinquished to the Chinese government.<sup>69</sup>

As mentioned above, the bureau was formed under the auspices of the SMC. According to a copy of a memorandum by SPB secretary R. Huntley Davidson, the origins of the bureau began in early 1927 when the SMC expressed interest in disseminating propaganda among Chinese laborers through council treasurer E. F. Goodale. Though complicated by the Northern Expedition and the inadequate Chinese response, the effort ultimately prevailed and resulted in the bureau, funded by commercial interests, being formed that June. Initial Chinese board membership and support fell away once the perception of the bureau being an “arm” of the SMC

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<sup>67</sup> “Shanghai Publicity Bureau,” *The North China Herald and Supreme Court & Consular Gazette*, June 11, 1927, 473.

<sup>68</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>69</sup> “STATEMENT ISSUED DEFINING AIMS OF PUBLICITY BUREAU: Sino-Foreign Good Will And Co-Operation Is Object Sought,” *The China Press*, June 23, 1927, 1; Clifford, *Spoilt Children of Empire*, 178-179.

was made apparent—particularly after the bureau prepared to release an statement on the SMC’s view on an increase in rates that the Chinese disagreed with—though one member did return after the bureau separated from the SMC, albeit some connection still remained in the form of a “close sub-rosa liaison.”<sup>70</sup>

The bureau’s two board of directors did reflect some business interests or came from backgrounds not unlike that of the CDL. For example, in addition to SMC treasurer Goodale, J. R. Jones was a member of the CDL and had left politics to go to Shanghai in 1924, joining a firm called Teesdale, Newman and McDonald.<sup>71</sup> A. D. Bell was a director of Shanghai Gas Co. Ltd.<sup>72</sup> Following the restructuring of the bureau in December 1927 that would cleave the organization “definitely and completely from any suggestion of Council control,” Bell and Goodale resigned, and a new board of directors and secretary would take their place. The eleven members, two of whom were Japanese and Chinese, the latter only joining after said separation from the SMC, represented either banks, investment companies, cotton mills, news agencies, or other companies. Secretary Davidson in particular represented Gibb Livingston & Co. Ltd.<sup>73</sup> Like the CDL, the bureau’s leaders reflected some key interests in business affairs.

SPB outreach was done through two methods. Once again according to Davidson’s memorandum, one way, “Chinese Publicity,” involved distribution of bureau materials through the Chinese, particularly among, in the secretary’s view, the “more educated classes.” The other way was “Publicity Abroad,” which involved sending to interested persons outside Asia the

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<sup>70</sup> Mr. Garstin to Mr. Mounsey, “Shanghai Publicity Bureau: General Statement of Origin and Aims of Bureau,” copy of memorandum from R. Huntley Davidson, Foreign Office Files for China, 1919-1980, FO 371/13239, The National Archives, UK (hereafter SPB: General Statement).

<sup>71</sup> Ibid; “Anti-Communists Meet: CONSTITUTIONAL DEFENCE LEAGUE HOLDS MEETING,” *The China Press*, March 13, 1926, 1; “J. R. Jones Joins Secretariat Of Shanghai Council: New Office Holder Has Notable Career As A Scholar,” *The China Press*, April 29, 1928, 1.

<sup>72</sup> SPB: General Statement; “The Shanghai Gas Company, LD.,” *The North China Herald and Supreme Court & Consular Gazette*, March 26, 1927, 500.

<sup>73</sup> SPB: General Statement.



bureau's *News Bulletin*, which sought to inform those ignorant about China's (and Shanghai's) problems, as well as news and history, so they could get a more "reliable" source of information about the two. Portions of the *News Bulletin* were also sent to Chinese readers, particularly about the growth of the International Settlement. Distribution was done through leading Chinese educational institutions, the Chinese Chambers of Commerce, or literally by hand in the Settlement. Abroad, the publication was directed toward professors, newspaper editors, leading publishers and businesses, and even every member of the House of Commons and 200 members of the House of Lords. Quite remarkable was all of this was entirely free. Davidson hoped that these efforts would not be in vain, not wanting the bureau to have a monumental start and then dying out rapidly.<sup>74</sup> The SPB certainly was ambitious in its efforts at outreach, not wanting to leave any rumors or misinformation about Shanghai or China itself left unchallenged, once again showcasing that same sense of fear.

The chief source on the bureau's internal messaging comes from none other than its *News Bulletin*. Davidson conveniently summarized both the published and soon-to-be published bulletins. While the first was chiefly about communism, particularly from the Chinese perspective, the second through the fourth editions were related to specific matters pertinent to the foreign presence in China—problems with the SMC, Hankou, the Shanghai Provisional Court, etc.<sup>75</sup> Davidson however, in another letter to the British legate at Beijing, stressed that *News Bulletin* would be for private individuals only and not subject to print in the press, as the publication was only for those "good enough to accept [the *News Bulletin*]." "No apology" for the *Bulletin*'s length would be given either as it was "an attempt to provide a survey of events from time to time which it is hoped will prove of more value and interest to students of Far

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<sup>74</sup> Ibid.

<sup>75</sup> Ibid.

Eastern affairs than merely a sketchy summary in ‘tabloid form.’”<sup>76</sup> Bizarrely the bureau was both trying to promote Shanghai’s image, as well as improve it, and yet at the same time wanted to keep its message (or rather, its “factual presentation”) away from those it considered to be “undeserving” of its efforts. An organization that wanted to profess what it is and what it represents—considering the length of its publication—surely had much to gain in casting a wide net, especially in light of foreign Shanghai’s image at the time.<sup>77</sup>

Nevertheless, the *News Bulletin* provides us a look into the SPB’s innards, to see what they considered to be a worthy representation of Shanghai and China. The first edition from June 1928 indeed discussed communism from a Chinese perspective. It began with some hopeful developments in the quelling of communism in Nationalist China, as well as in the foreign concessions, but nevertheless it reaffirmed the existence of communism in China’s interior and the danger it held, and whether or not China, “still at the crossroads,” would choose the violence of communism or the “moderate evolutionary political precepts of Europe and America.”<sup>78</sup> The rest of the June bulletin’s communist news is presented in a rather frightening manner. The overall depiction of the communists in the bulletin, for example, are as looters, arsonists, propagandists, or otherwise violent murderers. Particular attention was given to Canton, Jiangsu, Hunan (where the bulletin seemingly criticizes the suppression of communists or supposed ones, as it was rather random, violent, and even targeted children), and Guangdong, with the aforementioned violence prevalent throughout. The bulletin then ended with news about the Guomindang. Generally it was about leader Chiang Kai-shek or the Guomindang’s collective

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<sup>76</sup> Sir M. Lampson to Lord Cushendun, copy of letter from R. Huntley Davidson to H. H. Fox Esq., 28 Dec, 1928, Foreign Office Files for China, 1919-1980, FO 371/13239, The National Archives, UK.

<sup>77</sup> Bickers, *Shanghaianders*, 204-205.

<sup>78</sup> Miss M.C. Cleeve (Royal Institute of International Affairs) to Mr. Pratt, copy of “News Bulletin, no. 1, June 1928,” 27 Nov 1928, Foreign Office Files for China, 1919-1980, FO 371/13239, The National Archives, UK.

perspectives against communism, such as their undermining of the Guomindang, odds with the Soviet government and severing ties with it, and the suppression of communists due to the perception of communist danger to China. The final bit of news is about the Nanjing government's proclamation of punishments for "counter-revolutionaries," including death and imprisonment for being a counter-revolutionary or conspiring with one, with limits on age and severity of the crime.<sup>79</sup>

Undoubtedly the communist "news" is to strike fear into the would-be reader of the *News Bulletin*. It paints the communists as akin to brutal monsters, a very stark "Othering" of the bureau's political enemies. The portion about the Guomindang—despite the bulletin's fears that the Nationalists were executing noncommunists<sup>80</sup>—was likely printed to show the reader that communism was still a grave threat and that at least some Chinese officials were committed to stopping it. Indeed, the opening to the translated Guomindang articles said something akin to that.<sup>81</sup> Ironically as well, despite the obviously terrifying communist depictions, there is no such equivalent for the Nanjing government's punishments for communists.<sup>82</sup> Both portions however are what the bureau found particularly important to showcase, that of the danger that China and Shanghai itself was facing, even with its obvious political favoritism.

The August 1928 edition of *News Bulletin* dealt primarily with the International Settlement in several aspects: its growth and history, Chinese SMC representation, work, makeup, and duties undertaken by the SMP (including "special vigilance" on "Dangerous Holidays," much of which are anniversaries of specific events, such as the May 30th shooting, Lenin's death, and Labor Day), and the Public Health Department. The last section, however,

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<sup>79</sup> Ibid.

<sup>80</sup> Ibid.

<sup>81</sup> Ibid: "The following comments by responsible Chinese with regard to Communist activities in Chinese are here reproduced to show how serious this problem continues to be."

<sup>82</sup> Ibid.

dealt with six months of developments in Hankou since its relinquishment to Chinese control, roughly over the supposed ineptitude of its governance. A closer read reveals some internal thoughts of the bureau, particularly when referring to Chinese affairs. The Hankou article, for example, does not shy away from openly deriding Chinese governance of the city's settlement. In the article on the Settlement's history, Chinese nationalistic fervor following WW1 is ascribed to being influenced by "Bolshevistic propaganda," the May 30th shooting "appeared to the Chinese as unjustifiable," and that, once again, the British relinquishment of Hankou was a "warning as to what might take place in the International Settlement."<sup>83</sup>

The third *News Bulletin*, from February 1929, dealt with the Mixed Court and its rendition (and the criticisms thereof—namely its deteriorating effectiveness and danger it presented to the Chinese—reprinted from various sources), as well as the legal squabbles between judge Luo Xingyuan from the successor of the Mixed Court, the Shanghai Provisional Court, and the Jiangsu Provincial Government who sought to replace him. His eventual replacement is decried in a reprinted article from the *North China Daily News*, claiming that the Provisional Court "must be administrated in absolute compliance with the dictates of the Kuomintang, which sufficiently shows how very far Chinese politicians are from being able to understand true justice." Indeed, this is followed by various reprints from newspapers over allegations of the Provisional Court's politically charged stance in favor of the Guomindang. The bulletin also reprinted *North China* articles that "prove" that Luo's dismissal was over his refusal to collect estate values from a late Sheng Gongbao. One other matter related to the Provisional Court included another reprinted article from *North China* over the Jiangsu Provincial Government's aim to significantly weaken the Court's powers, to place case processing onto the

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<sup>83</sup> R. Huntley Davidson to Sir Victor Wellesley, copy of "News Bulletin no. 2, August 1928," 18 September, 1928, Foreign Office Files for China, 1919-1980, FO 371/13239, The National Archives, UK.

SMP, and effectively remove the Court's jurisdiction constituted "a direct blow at the foundations of foreign jurisdiction in Shanghai."<sup>84</sup>

Finally, the fourth edition of *News Bulletin*, dated June 1929, once again dealt with the former British concession at Hankou, particularly over the removal of its director Dr. L. N. Zhang who was graciously supported by the SPB. Additionally, the bulletin reprinted articles and reports over the Wuhan Municipal Council's eclipse of ex-German and Russian concessions in Hankou into the broader provincial government, and the worries that the British concession would be taken over in a similar manner (which would violate the Chen-O'Malley Agreement, signed at Hankou in February 1927 amidst escalation during the Northern Expedition<sup>85</sup>). Most pressing is a reprint of a statement from the British Chamber of Commerce in that city, accusing the Wuhan council of unlawful breach of the treaty port system—such as placing Chinese taxation on foreign residents—and their appeal to the British government as a result of said violations. This was followed by articles about a ratepayer meeting in the city concerning rental levies to the municipal government (which was subsequently canceled by Chinese authorities), and a *North China* article reiterating the claims that Hubei province as a result of their seizure have usurped the authority of the Nanjing government. Burgeoning that sentiment, the bulletin then ends with a general overview of taxation for both Chinese and foreigners—and the limited provinces that the Nanjing government is able to tax due to "militarists"—and a reprint from the "British Chamber of Commerce Journal" about "illegal taxes" from various provinces, which generally are about taxes on goods that the Journal found particularly distasteful and capable of harming trade.<sup>86</sup>

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<sup>84</sup> Shanghai Publicity Bureau, copy of "News Bulletin no. 3, February 1929," 21 March, 1929, Foreign Office Files for China, 1919-1980, FO 371/13942, The National Archives, UK.

<sup>85</sup> Clifford, *Spoilt Children of Empire*, 180-191.

<sup>86</sup> Copy to Sir Shanghai Publicity Bureau, copy of "News Bulletin no. 4, June 1929" 23 July, 1929, Foreign Office Files for China, 1919-1980, FO 371/13942, The National Archives, UK.

Clearly the *News Bulletin* is unlike what one might expect from an organization wishing to proliferate a positive image of the city it represented. The bulletins are not particularly politically charged, at least not directly, but a careful read can provide key insights into the fear that the SPB had of developments in China. Its mere presentation of information is tantamount, as it explicitly or implicitly showcases accounts of communist brutality, supposed “ineffectiveness” of Chinese governance in the relinquished Hankou concessions, “illegal taxes,” “Dangerous Holidays,” and accusations of Guomindang political maneuvering over the Mixed Court as well as usurpation of extraterritoriality. The SPB’s *News Bulletin*, while presented as unbiased “news,” certainly did not shy away from showcasing a more ruinous look at contemporary affairs nor holding back in their animosity over it.

There is, however, an even more explicit portrayal of ruin from the perspective of Secretary R. Huntley Davidson. His “Memorandum on China” from February 1929, which found its way to the Foreign Office as well as the American consulate,<sup>87</sup> showcases Davidson’s very palpable fear towards the political atmosphere in China. The introduction expressed welcome towards Chinese nationalism, but Davidson once again expressed the need to protect British and Chinese commercial interests, as well as the rights of British residents in China. Subsequently, Davidson did not want to return to a pre-treaty port era of China, nor did he appreciate the spurning of Britain as a whole by China (influenced in part by Russia) as the former was “pro-Chinese” to serve its own commercial interests as well as China’s.<sup>88</sup> Davidson is obviously

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<sup>87</sup> R. Huntley Davidson, “Memorandum on China (February 1929),” 15 April 1929, copy of memorandum to Sir Austen Chamberlain, Foreign Office Files for China, 1919-1929, FO 371/13946, The National Archives, UK; Edwin S. Cunningham to J.V.A MacMurray, 13 June 1929, copy of “Memorandum on China,” Political, Economic, and Military Conditions in China: Reports and Correspondence of the U.S. Military Intelligence Division, 1918-1941, US National Archives (hereafter “Memorandum on China”).

<sup>88</sup> Memorandum on China.

portraying an idealist view of the relations between China and Britain, quite removed from Chinese nationalistic ideals.

Davidson also showcased a fear of a section of political developments in China. He criticized the Guomindang on numerous fronts: its lack of unity and internal infighting, its purging, killing, and overall terrorism in an effort to “purify” itself, and its inability to address the revival of communism and the CPC’s appeal to the peasantry, which he calls the “only truly oppressed class in China.” Indeed, Davidson singles out communism’s revival in China in particular as “one of the most serious factors in China.” He also lambasted the call for removal of the “so-called Unequal Treaties” by all Chinese factions, reiterating that the treaties came about as a result of foreigners trying to secure their rights in China. Lastly, he blamed Soviet Russia for trying to undermine Britain in China, showcased the financial troubles of the Nanjing government, and when introducing Shanghai’s section called Chinese anti-imperialism “a revival” of Chinese anti-foreign sentiment that was “skillfully fostered and encouraged by the Third International for its own aims.”<sup>89</sup>

Davidson’s solution to the Shanghai problem was certainly a bold one. In order to counter threats to the International Settlement—illegal food taxation, violation of SMC jurisdiction, recalcitrant Chinese institutions around Shanghai, an interfering Guomindang (including on the SMC itself), etc.—as well as general problems over defense and with Hankou ever lingering in his mind, Davidson proposed making Shanghai into the “Free Port of Shanghai.” This hypothetical Shanghai would have “equitable Chinese representation” in its council and protection from an “International Garrison” until China recognized treaty port provisions. Further, should the need arise, the whole of Shanghai would be temporarily removed *entirely from Chinese control* in order to “assist in stabilizing” the Chinese political situation and making

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<sup>89</sup> Ibid.

the return of Shanghai into something contingent upon China's responsibility of "assuming the obligations of International equality."<sup>90</sup> Boiled down, Davidson was suggesting to turn Shanghai's status into likely an even bigger political crisis, not only for the hypothetical logistics of foreign powers effectively controlling it but likely stirring up further Chinese enmity.

The Shanghai Publicity Bureau tried to present information to those that were ignorant about China, Shanghai, and the status of foreigners thereof, and selectively handed out their *News Bulletins* to those they considered worthy of being informed of the precariousness surrounding all three. While this seems to defeat the purpose of "publicity," it nevertheless does show an idea into what the bureau considered worthy of presentation. Such presentations—of communist aggression, Guomindang maneuvering or purging, and a history of the International Settlement—showcased the bureau's seriousness in "professing Shanghai" but, at the same time, inadvertently highlighted the fears that negative developments had in their minds. That fear is perhaps most evident in Davidson's memorandum which, as revealed in the next section, was met with both praise and derision in and outside of Shanghai.

### **The Bureau's Effect**

While the extent of the SPB's messaging is unclear, as well as its secretary's, both won praise and criticism from within and outside China. However, most pressing to the bureau—that of "professing Shanghai" to those ignorant about affairs in the Far East—did not have the desired effect that it wanted, as most people in the home governments did not seem to have the same sense of urgency over the political situation that Shanghai and China had. This same apathy was evident from members of the Foreign Office as well. In short, the bureau, while winning praise

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<sup>90</sup> Ibid.



from those within Shanghai itself, would ultimately fail in their long term goal of winning the minds of those they wanted most to hear their message.

One publication expressed doubt over the *News Bulletin* and the risks it undertook at proliferating its news. In an overview of the bureau's third edition of *News Bulletin*, the *China Weekly Review*, while understanding foreigner rights within China, nevertheless criticized the secretive propaganda efforts of the bureau. Likewise, since overall Chinese representation and population had been increasing in the International Settlement and other concessions, the article said that the eventual relinquishment of the Settlement would come. Thus, such secretive efforts by the bureau not only would arouse suspicion from "the average recipient [of *News Bulletin*]," but it would alienate "moderate Chinese political and commercial elements to carry out their conciliatory program in respect to legitimate foreign interests."<sup>91</sup> Clearly, the *China Weekly Review* article did not share the same sense of urgency as the bureau did, even if it did however share the same aspirations at preserving foreign interests in China.

Criticism from the various political factions in China was allegedly strong—even hostile—according to several non-Chinese sources. A copy of a letter from the British consul in Shanghai, which also made its way to the Foreign Office via the British legation in Beijing, alleged that the Guomindang was hostile to the bureau, even going as far as to ban a Chinese language publication about Settlement history from the organization in areas controlled by the Nationalists. The head of the "Kuomintang Publicity Bureau," Chen Dezheng, had issued said ban in response to the similarities in both bureaus names and thus inevitable confusion between the two (as well as the lack of address from the SPB publication) and the erroneous content found within the publication. Allegedly "strong criticism" also emanated from the Chinese press

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<sup>91</sup> "Private Confidential- - Not for the Press," *The China Weekly Review*, February 9, 1929, 440.

and the SMC chairman was “requested by certain Chinese to suppress the bureau.”<sup>92</sup> Several letters from the “Shanghai Young Communist International” were addressed to Davidson and were allegedly quite hostile. One of which was sent directly to the Chinese translator of the bureau and spouted typical communist rhetoric, referring to the translator as a “running dog of the imperialists” and demanding his immediate resignation from his position, threatening swift action if he did not. A “nutritious pill”—a live .32 caliber bullet—was enclosed within with a threat to swallow it.<sup>93</sup> The bureau’s messaging seemed to be working, as it attracted the ire of the very groups it had warned about in *News Bulletin*. While these are from the perspective of either the SPB itself or other non-Chinese sources, it does nevertheless indicate that on some level that the bureau was considered a hostile force by the emergent political forces in China.

The biggest publicity for the bureau, however, came from outside Shanghai. According to a private letter extract, R. S. Pratt informed his brother J. T. Pratt of the Foreign Office that Davidson was leaving for London in early February 1929 on an official mission, encouraged by “prominent British firms,” British and American members of the SMC, as well as the British Chamber of Commerce, though in the case of the Chamber “[Davidson] is not authorized to speak for them officially and he is not their delegate.” Funding and his salary were to be provided by Shanghai firms. Pratt, while calling Davidson “exceptionally well acquainted with Chinese affairs,” nevertheless mentioned that the Ministry and the consul general were completely in the dark about Davidson’s trip. Enclosed in the minutes was a telegram from

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<sup>92</sup> Miles Lampson to Sir Austen Chamberlain, copy of letter from C. F. Garstin to A. F. Aveling, 6th March, 1929, Foreign Office Files for China, 1919-1980, FO 371/13942, The National Archives, UK.

<sup>93</sup> Ibid; W.F. Blaker to North China Command HQ, copy of letter from R. Huntley Davidson to W.F. Blaker, original copy from Wellington S. Hsu to R. Huntley Davidson, Foreign Office Files for China, 1919-1980, FO 371/13942, The National Archives, UK.

Davidson to J. Pratt, informing him that the mission—undertaken at great risk, according to him—was purely to serve British interests “in any way I can.”<sup>94</sup>

J.T Pratt’s follow up report, which included a copy of Davidson’s memorandum and a record of conversation with him, likewise referred to the secretary as someone who was “intelligent and well-informed both as to the situation in Shanghai and the general political situation in China,” but nevertheless gave concern over the sheer improbability in transforming Shanghai into a free port. Pratt convinced Davidson to indeed inform both the Ministry and the British consul general, but peculiarly the secretary did inform the *American* consul general and a Colonel Blaker; both mediums resulted in word of Davidson’s mission reaching the US State Department and the governor of Hong Kong Cecil Clementi.<sup>95</sup> Enclosed in another report were copies of endorsement from the chairman of the British Chamber of Commerce and the SMC, confirming the words from Pratt’s brother; a copy of a telegram from the American consul general, Edwin S. Cunningham, to the State Department, and a copy of Davidson’s letter to Sir Miles Lampton at the British legation in Beijing were also present.<sup>96</sup> Slight praise aside for Davidson’s character, initial response to some in the Foreign Office was one of caution. However, there was enthusiasm among those in Shanghai, surely, and clearly Davidson was not unheard of outside the city, meaning that bureau was making headway in its message.

However, officials would be increasingly critical of Davidson’s efforts. For example, in attached minutes for copied letters from Davidson to Sir Victor Wellesey and Sir Lampson, dated

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<sup>94</sup> Foreign Office Minute from Sir J. T. Pratt, copy of letter extract dated February 8, from R. S. Pratt to J. T. Pratt, 19 March 1929, Foreign Office Files for China, 1919-1980, FO 371/13946, The National Archives, UK.

<sup>95</sup> Foreign Office Minute from Sir J. Pratt, record of conversation with R. Huntley Davidson and copy of Memorandum on China, 3rd April 1929, Foreign Office Files for China, 1919-1980, FO 371/13946, The National Archives, UK.

<sup>96</sup> Sir J. Pratt, correspondence on “Memorandum on China” and copies of telegrams from Edwin S. Cunningham to Dr. Stanley K. Hornbeck, BCOC chairman R. Calden Marshall to “whom it may concern,” members of the SMC to R. Huntley Davidson, and letter from R. Huntley Davidson to Sir Miles Lampson, 28 April 1929, Foreign Office Files for China, 1919-1980, FO 371/13946, The National Archives, UK.

April 27th, J. Pratt stated that the letters—which were Davidson describing his fears of foreign Shanghai being undermined and his mission to bring awareness to it—were “of very little practical value to us.” He also made reference to a previous meeting with the secretary at the Royal Institute of International Affairs, calling him “very feeble and unconvincing” in his efforts to describe the present danger toward the International Settlement. When asked by a woman at the meeting to describe the SMC’s efforts at stopping a “Social Bureau” from conjuring up labor disputes in the Settlement, Pratt stated that Davidson “hesitated, stammered, and completely broke down.”<sup>97</sup>

Another meeting between Pratt (from his perspective), Davidson, and Wellesley took place on April 19th, with Wellesley stating that China, logically, would never agree to Shanghai being turned into a free port, nor would the powers consent to enforcing it either. Davidson’s remarks that Shanghai was going to face a crisis similar to Hankou if tensions continued and the SMC was not backed up by Britain was rebuked by Wellesley, calling this a “blank cheque” that could “very well precipitate the very crisis they were anxious to avoid.” Other SMC whims to get Britain to “hold back” the Chinese had been denied by the Foreign Office “as both impracticable and dangerous” as it could anger the Chinese and tie a government to “public declarations as to what they would do in a hypothetical sets of circumstances which might never arise.” The suggestion by the council to stop giving concessions to the Chinese over their undermining of foreign control in Shanghai, despite their “liberal” aspirations, was also turned down by the Foreign Office for similar reasons as the latter point. Nevertheless, Davidson’s proposals were to “be considered with the greatest attention and sympathy.”<sup>98</sup> Clearly, despite the

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<sup>97</sup> J. Pratt, minutes attached to copied letters from R. Huntley Davidson to Sir. Victor Wellesley and Sir Miles Lampson, 22 April 1929, Foreign Office Files for China, 1919-1980, FO 371/13946, The National Archives, UK.

<sup>98</sup> Sir J. Pratt, Foreign Office Minute, record of interview between R. Huntley Davidson, Sir Victor Wellesley, and Sir J. Pratt, 20 April 1929, Foreign Office Files for China, 1919-1980, FO 371/13946, The National Archives, UK.

assurances of consideration, Davidson's concerns over Shanghai's future were not being assuaged with the same sense of urgency in the Foreign Office, for fear of upsetting China. In Pratt's case in particular, he was outright deriding Davidson's message and even aspects of his character and presentation.

Davidson's mission to explain Shanghai's problems ultimately failed, despite his best efforts. The 317th item of Lampson's "Annual Report on China" for 1929 directly refers to the secretary's mission abroad amid Shanghai's crisis in early 1929, faced with the prospect of the municipal government defending itself as well as increased Chinese representation on the SMC. Items 319 to 321 and 323 dealt with Davidson and former SMC chairman Stirling Fessenden. Davidson was told by both the Foreign Office and the US State Department to "move with the times and to make concessions *pari passu* with the progress made by the Chinese in the art of administration." Fessenden was met with a similar response by the State Department, that both he and Davidson should enquire themselves into solutions to their problems; Fessenden indeed did so, going that October to Kyoto for a conference at the Institute of Pacific Relations asking for "an independent enquiry into the administration of Shanghai and suggestions for the solution of the Shanghai problem."<sup>99</sup> Neither America or England were willing to relent to the demands of expat Shanghai and drew the line, regarding their meddling in the city's affairs, leaving the bureau to its own devices.

The Shanghai Publicity Bureau was adamant in its presentation of Shanghai, or rather what it considered to be most pressing to Shanghai and China as a whole. *News Bulletin* presented a very grim future for Shanghai, its contents about communist and GMD aggression as well as the usurpation of foreign rights and authority. Davidson's memorandum certainly

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<sup>99</sup> Sir M. Lampson, "Annual Report on China for 1929," 25 June 1930, Foreign Office Files for China, 1919-1930, FO 371/14740, The National Archives, UK.

exemplified that grimness, and even with supposed liberal leanings he demanded a pretty drastic solution for Shanghai. However, in the end, the bureau only angered the contemporary Chinese factions of the day and in turn did not garner the sympathy it wanted from foreign officials or powers, in some cases even garnering derision. In “professing Shanghai,” Davidson and the bureau, while truly representing a fear of Shanghai’s future, nevertheless fell onto deaf ears that cared rather little about their dire perspective of things to come.

## *The Shanghai Fascisti*

### **Fascism and the Shanghailanders**

The first meeting of the Shanghai Fascisti was held in the fall of 1927, exclusive to its membership. The leader of the Fascisti, Bernard Firth, said this about the name of the group:

Many of you may ask: Why the name Fascisti? Without going into any lengthy explanation, it will probably be sufficient for the moment to remind you that the Italian Fascisti saved Italy for her people from the worst menace the World has ever known—Bolshevism. The British Fascisti has only done a great deal for Great Britain and the British Empire. Surely the name and all it portrays for the maintenance of law and order is good enough for Shanghai.<sup>100</sup>

This rather alarming rhetoric permeated the rest of Firth’s speech. While admitting he had no real “cut and dried policy” to give at the time and wanting a joint Chinese-foreign future in Shanghai, Firth had no issues in making numerous wild jabs at various aspects of China and the prospects of foreign Shanghai. The leader took aim at the call for rendition of the settlements, citing that the foreigners built Shanghai into what it is and without their actions, “there would not have been anything worthwhile to hand back.” Hankou, as always, served as a reminder as to

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<sup>100</sup> “THE SHANGHAI FASCISTI ORGANIZED: A Statement of Its Aims: Vital Need for Suppression of Bolshevism and Protection of the Settlement,” *The North China Herald and Supreme Court & Consular Gazette*, October 1, 1927, 14.

why rendition was a bad idea, and that in order to prevent Shanghai's fate matching that of Hankou, it would be preferable to him to die fighting than to give in. Violence was also a mainstay, with the death penalty being suggested for Chinese officials who extracted wealth from China's lower classes and then relocated to foreign settlements. The Nationalists, who Firth said were referred to as "saviours of China," nevertheless cast doubt on their inability to fix problems since they had spent much time allegedly destroying China rather than fixing it.<sup>101</sup>

This rhetoric is largely similar in the Fascisti's call to arms in August 1927, which supposedly had inquiries from numerous nationalities, including Chinese.<sup>102</sup> The aims of the Fascisti, boiled down, were a call to action. Included with a call to keep foreign control over the Maritime Customs and opposing Chinese taxation were a series of, once again, reactionary ideals. Such items included expelling communists and "Labour agitators" from Shanghai, upholding "law and order" and "protecting all law abiding people and to punish evil doers," barring political activity and the Chinese military from the Settlements, and, most interestingly, assisting Settlement residents as long as they "are conforming to the regulations governing the Settlements."<sup>103</sup>

Clearly the Fascisti, as the name certainly implies, were a very reactionary element in Shanghai, that signified some pretty alarmist and conservative views. Some of the aims of the Fascisti are rather vague, with "evil doers" and "law abiding people" being capable of applying to anyone. This, combined with the Fascist's aim to protect only those conforming to Settlement regulations, and Firth's overall appeal to violence and disregard for China's changing political atmosphere, certainly represented foreign fear in Shanghai at its zenith.

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<sup>101</sup> Ibid.

<sup>102</sup> "MANY ANSWER FASCIST CALL FOR RECRUITS: All Nationalities Are Invited To Join Shanghai Order." *The China Press*, August 13, 1927, 1.

<sup>103</sup> "SHANGHAI FASCISTI ORGANIZED: A Call to Citizens to Join for Protection of Their Interests," *The North China Herald and Supreme Court & Consular Gazette*, August 13, 1927, 278.

Much like the CDL and SPB, the Fascisti, in addition to showcasing fear, also comprised business interests in Shanghai or were connected to the CDL. Firth, in addition to being a former member of the league, was the managing director of the Shanghai Tug and Lighter Company. H. P. King had served as a representative for Thomas Firth and Sons, the Peking Syndicate, and as the “local agent” of the Associated Brass and Copper Manufacturers of Great Britain.<sup>104</sup> W.J.N. Dyer, the “recording secretary” of the Fascisti, was a business partner of Firth in the company Wheelock and Co, a director of the Shanghai Cotton Manufacturing Co and for the Import and Export Lumber Company, and one time the vice chairman of the French Municipal Council in the French Concession.<sup>105</sup> Other members included former CDL members Arthur de C. Sowerby and A. E. N. Howard.<sup>106</sup>

Most of the members listed above have their own alarming views on both fascism and China that reflect the overall Fascisti outlook. An article by Sowerby in the *North China Herald* from May 1927, for example, lamented the supposed ignorance of Great Britain and America who had been “blinded” by propaganda (influenced in part by the Soviets) that painted China as a nation suffering from imperialism. Rather China itself, under the throes of political factions, warlordism, unfair taxation, and general instability, was the issue at hand. In order to save China plus foreign interests, and to stop communism from spreading throughout Asia, Sowerby demanded military occupation by foreign powers of the coastline, the Yangtze river, the treaty ports, and the railway lines. It was to force all warring factions to negotiate and form a peaceful government which, if it failed to materialize, would result in a full scale intervention to force

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<sup>104</sup> “SHANGHAI NEWS,” 13; Sir S. Barton to Mr. Gwatkin, 6 January 1928, Foreign Office Files for China, 1919-1929, FO 371/13223, The National Archives, UK (hereafter S. Barton to Mr. Gwatkin).

<sup>105</sup> “Shanghai Fascisti In First Open Meeting Launch Crusade Against Radical Elements In Settlement: Bernard Firth Elected Leader; Speeches Made By Captain Howard, Strother, and A. De C. Sowerby,” *The China Press*, September 30, 1927; “Mr. W. J. Norman Dyer,” *The North China Herald and Supreme Court & Consular Gazette*, September 15, 1928, 452.

<sup>106</sup> “Shanghai Fascisti in First Open Meeting,” 1.



it.<sup>107</sup> This incredibly militaristic, even dangerous approach to “fixing” China is also showcased in one of Sowerby’s suggestions for the “Future and Major Programmes” for the Fascisti, specifically that the group form a “reserve force” that would assist a hypothetical army from the home governments “in time of disturbance,”<sup>108</sup> Additionally, in Sowerby’s eyes, the word “fascisti” held the connotation of “law and order” and mutual strength against a common enemy seeking to destroy them, signified by the fascist iconography of an ax poking out from a bundle of wood, not unlike that of Firth.<sup>109</sup>

H. P. King likewise held similar views to Sowerby and Firth. Twice in the *Herald* before the Fascist’s formation in May 1927, King took aim at the Guomindang. The first article detailed a series of blunders by the Guomindang—namely about the “system of confiscation and ruination” that involved seizing and ineffectively managing a post office, government office, and railway—from a “very reliable and responsible authority.”<sup>110</sup> The second article was a criticism of Chiang Kai-shek’s “Thirty Three Objects,” in which King mocked the GMD leader’s attacks on imperialism, basically stating that China was prosperous almost solely because of foreign imperialists. He also alluded that Chiang was a communist, stating that he “wants to follow” Marxist principles such as communism and the dictatorship of the proletariat.<sup>111</sup> King also,

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<sup>107</sup> “Shanghai Fascisti in First Open Meeting,” 1; Arthur de C. Sowerby, “THE CHINA PROBLEM AND ITS SOLUTION: A Review of China's Domestic Turmoil and the Bearing of Local Chaos Upon World Peace: No Hope off Settlement in the Near Future,” *The North China Herald and Supreme Court & Consular Gazette*, May 21, 1927, 356.

<sup>108</sup> Arthur de C Sowerby, “THE SHANGHAI FASCISTI: A Hopeful Effort on the Part of the Community to Get Together: Suggested Formula for the Members,” *The North China Herald and Supreme Court & Consular Gazette*, October 8, 1927, 82.

<sup>109</sup> Arthur de C. Sowerby, “THE MEANING OF “FASCISTI”: Suitability of the Word to the Local Movement,” *The North China Herald and Supreme Court & Consular Gazette*, October 15, 1927, 130.

<sup>110</sup> H. P. King, “China Under the Nationalists,” *The North China Herald and Supreme Court & Consular Gazette*, May 14, 1927, 298.

<sup>111</sup> H. P. King, “Chiang Kai-shek’s Objects,” *The North China Herald and Supreme Court & Consular Gazette*, May 28, 1927, 380.

naturally, decried communism as ineffective and pleaded with the Chinese not to adopt it.<sup>112</sup> Like Firth and Sowerby as well, King viewed the Fascisti as by and for Shanghailanders “irrespective of nationality” that wished to, once again, assist “local administrative bodies in the maintenance of law and order in the International Settlement and French Concession.”<sup>113</sup>

The Fascisti, generally, were a sort of quasi-nationalistic organization that placed the interests of Shanghai’s foreign residents above all else, even advocating for political violence should they have to. While Firth surely endorsed Chinese membership (and, in the second meeting, expressed their presence in the crowd<sup>114</sup>), it is hard to remove the context of imperial motivations and even prejudices from the membership of the Fascisti. They are perhaps the most “fleeting ember” of them all, given their militaristic solutions to Shanghai’s problems, their condescension of political affairs, and their appeal to violence.

Much of this sentiment is reflected in the Fascisti’s second, and subsequently last meeting in January 1928. Firth praised the Guomindang for ousting Soviet officials, though he stated that “it is only a start” with much still left undone as the “spawn” of communism was still present in China. A little bit of structural organization is present in this meeting, with Firth asking the members to enroll ten others into the Fascisti. Sowerby and Dyer had executive roles as well, being secondary leader (in case Firth could not lead) and registrar respectively. C. W. Marshall and A. C. King had positions of treasurer and acting secretary as well. The Fascisti leader expressed too that funds were essential to their mission, to be given by members, so that if “[the

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<sup>112</sup> H. P. King, “Ten Years of Bolshevism,” *The North China Herald and Supreme Court & Consular Gazette*, April 23, 1927, 160.

<sup>113</sup> H. P. King, “Shanghai Fascisti,” *The North China Herald and Supreme Court & Consular Gazette*, April 23, 1927, 496.

<sup>114</sup> “Shanghai Fascisti Hear Reports At Second General Meeting And Call For Recruits Is Issued: Chairman Reviews Events Leading Up To Ousting From China Of Soviet Officialdom After Outbreaks In Canton,” *The China Press*, January 12, 1928, 4.

Fascisti] carried on its present policy of supporting law and order we shall have the whole hearted support of the community both official and unofficial.”<sup>115</sup>

The official program of the Fascisti is similar to Sowerby’s aforementioned ones, particularly the “Immediate and Minor Programme,” which Firth had endorsed two months prior. It also strongly resembled the call to action the Fascisti had sent out to the press in August 1927.<sup>116</sup> Once again it reflects the appeal to violence, with the provision of creating a “reserve force” kept. The expulsion of communists and “Labour agitators,” stopping illegal taxation “with every available means,” preserving Shanghai and the International Settlement’s political integrity, opposing “subversive political groups,” spreading the movement to other treaty ports, and keeping Shanghai free and open to trade are all kept as well.<sup>117</sup> All of this, with its vagueness in certain areas and not so subtle wording of acting by any means necessary, definitely shows that the Fascisti not only meant business, but that they also were willing to use violence to protect their interests and stop, in their view, an encroachment on their way of life. That included fascism, and an admiration of it.

The Shanghai Fascisti were, as mentioned, a quasi-nationalistic organization of business men, willing to use violence to achieve their goals if it should have gone down that path. Fascism for this organization was, expectedly, a reaction towards the perceived threat that they felt in the turmoil in China, but it also peculiarly took the form, at least on the surface, of a fascism that included Chinese members as well. Clearly, however, this organization was for the Shanghailander, as not only did its goals reflect that mindset, but King himself said so. It opposed communism and political organizations antithetical to it with scathing rhetoric.

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<sup>115</sup> Ibid.

<sup>116</sup> Bernard Firth, “Letter to the Editor 6 - - No Title,” *The North China Herald and Supreme Court & Consular Gazette*, October 15, 1927, 107; Arthur de C Sowerby, “THE SHANGHAI FASCISTI: A Hopeful Effort,” 82; “SHANGHAI FASCISTI ORGANIZED,” 278.

<sup>117</sup> “Shanghai Fascisti Hear Reports,” 4.

However, even with this radical motivation, unashamed by violence and willing to cooperate with authority, the Fascisti, though not without their praises, would in fact be spurned by authority and effectively die out unceremoniously.

### **The Souring of Shanghailanders Fascism**

The Fascisti certainly represented a very stark and radical manifestation of foreign sentiment in Shanghai. They were impassioned, among various nationalities, in their shared unity against a common enemy, that professed fascism as a means to keep “law and order,” even by violence if necessary. However, as discussed below, the Fascisti was incredibly short lived, only in existence for roughly four months. It won some praise in Shanghai, but those in the Foreign Office and even the SMC viewed it generally with concern or derision.

Like the CDL before it, the Fascisti won praise—and criticism—from the *North China Herald*. Shortly after the Fascisti’s call for recruits, an anonymous writer wrote in favor of the Fascisti’s goals, that an organization like this would naturally come about from the inaction of the home governments in stopping the Nationalists. However, the same writer took issue with the word “Fascisti” in itself, stating that it was a word which “has a precise and political meaning, which is out of place [in Shanghai],” and thus it couldn’t apply to them like the Italian fascists. He instead wanted the Fascisti to adopt more politically neutral terminology.<sup>118</sup> Others at this time wanted a meeting to be called as quickly as possible, to show that foreign Shanghai was still strong enough to counter its issues.<sup>119</sup> One suggested that the Fascisti undertake a “punitive inquiry” into those who had increased their prices “on account of the new luxury taxes,” likely

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<sup>118</sup>A. P. “Shanghai Fascisti,” *The North China Herald and Supreme Court & Consular Gazette*, August 20, 1927, 333.

<sup>119</sup> Alpha, “Shanghai Fascisti,” *The North China Herald and Supreme Court & Consular Gazette*, August 27, 1927, 372; Muscle Sweeney, “Letter to the Editor 4- - No Title,” *The North China Herald and Supreme Court & Consular Gazette*, August 27, 1927, 372.

referring to the “illegal taxes” vehemently opposed by the Fascisti. It “would be a combination of patriotism, justice, and warning” to those who had imposed such taxes.<sup>120</sup>

Around the time of the Fascisti’s first meeting in fall 1927, the press, incensed by the organization’s rhetoric, got increasingly violent. Initially, the press was generally the same as before, which was praiseworthy of the organization and its goals, they indicate a shift towards violence, with one *China Press* article referring that the Fascisti’s efforts at stopping communism “should receive” full Shanghai support, no matter how “drastic.”<sup>121</sup> One man, Henry P. Lewis, who found Sowerby’s aforementioned proposals to “not go far enough,” thought that forcing the home governments to act was a better idea. He suggested that the Fascisti should raid the Soviet consulate, and also use “ex-Army Officers of the ‘White’ variety” (probably White Russians) against communists in the city. This violent “solution” is boiled down quite nicely by his idea that “if we can do nothing legally, we should take drastic action illegally.”<sup>122</sup> Another article, from a supposed “woman member of the British Fascisti in Italy,” supported Lewis’s remarks, citing the necessity for violence:

These bandits are here to kill or starve us out one way or another by foul means, and they are doing it. Are we cowards? We are if we let them go on and do nothing. They intend to steal China afterwards, the way they did Russia, when the Nationalists (another name for Bolsheviks) have done the dirty work for them. Therefore we are justified in the necessity of self-preservation... Wipe out the Soviet Consulate and make the Fascisti force felt.<sup>123</sup>

Howard, however, offered criticism when the White Russians actually *did* raid the consulate in November, raiding a “hovel housing human swine.” He alleged that the Fascisti

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<sup>120</sup> Mokanshan, “North-China Daily News (2),” *The North China Herald and Supreme Court & Consular Gazette*, August 20, 1927, 333.

<sup>121</sup> “The Shanghai Fascisti,” *The China Press*, October 1, 1927, 12.

<sup>122</sup> Henry P. Lewis, “Work for the Fascisti,” *The North China Herald and Supreme Court & Consular Gazette*, October 15, 1927, 106.

<sup>123</sup> A Woman Member of the British Fascisti in Italy, “Senator Goff and Russia,” *The North China Herald and Supreme Court & Consular Gazette*, October 15, 1927, 106.

were nowhere to be found there after “alluding” that they should raid it at their first meeting.<sup>124</sup>

Clearly, even if Howard’s words are true, this does show that the Fascisti were stirring up a lot of antagonistic sentiment in Shanghai when contextualized with the aforementioned articles.

Cooler heads, thankfully, prevailed. Firth attended a dinner in honor of Stirling Fessenden in the fall of 1927, and pledged the support of the Fascisti to the SMC. The SMC chairman, however, rebuked any support for them. The Fascisti and others like them, who “have a mistaken idea that they might gain greater support for the cause of Shanghai by creating incidents here in the hope that such incidents might lead to more support from Home,” are not favorable in the city. The chairman also stated that “there can be no greater menace to Shanghai than the occurrence of incidents provoked by foreigners,” with the Fascisti capable of “much more evil than good” unless “well-managed and restrained.” They, like other groups, were formed from “panicky” men who “think of many expedients to save the situation.”<sup>125</sup> Sowerby thought the chairman was simply stating that the Fascisti needed proper leadership,<sup>126</sup> but it is apparent that Fessenden was not fond of any troublemakers in Shanghai that sought to seek change through violent methods.<sup>127</sup>

Among those in the Foreign Office, criticism was even more stark. J. Pratt referred to the organization as “equally ridiculous” as the CDL, with “no doubt” that the league and the Fascisti were formed by people from both groups. He suggested ignoring them entirely unless they proved troublesome.<sup>128</sup> Criticism also came from, as before, the use of the word “fascist” in itself, due to the negative connotations associated with it and the potential for “unfavourable

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<sup>124</sup>A. E. N. Howard, “The Glorification of Infamy,” *The North China Herald and Supreme Court & Consular Gazette*, November 12, 1927, 288.

<sup>125</sup> “A Tale of Two Meetings,” *The China Weekly Review*, October 8, 1927, 143.

<sup>126</sup> “THE SHANGHAI FASCISTI: A Hopeful Effort,” 82.

<sup>127</sup> Clifford, *Spoilt Children of Empire*, 262.

<sup>128</sup> Foreign Office Minutes, 12 August 1927, Foreign Office Files for China, 1919-1980, FO 371/12511, The National Archives, UK.

comment” in England.<sup>129</sup> S. Barton, the British consul general, also noted that the Fascisti had “many persons” from the CDL, but he did not find “either the existence or the doings of the Shanghai Fascisti need give rise to serious anxiety.”<sup>130</sup> Even with Barton’s view, those in the Foreign Office found the Fascisti to either be an unfortunately named problem or something that was ridiculous in presentation and action.

Ultimately, by early 1928, the Fascisti would cease showing up in the press, only being published in passing twice during 1928 after their second meeting in January.<sup>131</sup> A “Shanghai Fascisti” is mentioned in 1933, and as late as 1936, celebrating Fascist Italy’s victory over Ethiopia. Firth, however, had in fact died in 1932, and Dyer four years before him, neither obituary showcasing their Fascisti ties.<sup>132</sup> Sowerby, meanwhile, had joined the British Residents’ Association to “represent Shanghailanders interests against the SMC, and to lobby against reform of extraterritoriality.”<sup>133</sup> It is safe to assume that by Dyer’s death, the Fascisti had ceased to exist, with not much to showcase for its efforts, and some of its members had gone on to other political endeavors.

The Shanghai Fascisti inspired some pretty alarming violent rhetoric in the press of Shanghai, and the mere inclusion of “fascist” in its naming convention set off alarm bells in the minds of foreign officials. It won praise from those who viewed foreign Shanghai’s position as

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<sup>129</sup> Mr. Mounsey to Sir S. Barton, 2 September 1927, Foreign Office Files for China, 1919-1980, FO 371/12511, The National Archives, UK.

<sup>130</sup> S. Barton to Mr. Gwatkin.

<sup>131</sup> “China in 1927,” *The North China Herald and Supreme Court & Consular Gazette*, February 11, 1928, 211; Bruno Schwartz, “A Great Bolshevick Plot in the North Sea,” *The North China Herald and Supreme Court & Consular Gazette*, March 17, 1928, 61.

<sup>132</sup> “ITALIAN VICTORY CELEBRATED: Special Mass at Church of the Sacred Heart,” *The North China Herald and Supreme Court & Consular Gazette*, May 27, 1936, 368; “Fleming Off For England On Neurialia: British Commander In Shanghai Turns Over Duties To Thackeray.” *The China Press*, November 15, 1933, 9; “Last Rites Held For Late Bernard Firth: Deceased Associated With Wheelock And Company,” *The China Press*, October 27, 1932, 4; “OBITUARY: Mr. Bernard Firth,” *The North China Herald and Supreme Court & Consular Gazette*, October 26, 1932, 138; “Mr. W. J. Norman Dyer,” 452.

<sup>133</sup> Bickers, “Shanghailanders,” 198-199.

increasingly vulnerable, willing even to break the law to protect their interests. Ultimately, however, the Fascisti would not amount to really much of anything, and its goals of protecting Shanghai from a perceived aggression were met with a fierce rebuttal by the authority it claimed to hold dear. Nevertheless, even with their shortcomings, the Fascisti represented foreign Shanghai's determination to survive in the turmoil at perhaps its most aggressive manifestation.

### *Conclusion*

What, ultimately, can we take away from this look at the Constitutional Defence League, the Shanghai Publicity Bureau, and the Shanghai Fascisti? Certainly, the obvious notion is that these groups went to great lengths at protecting their interests, and their efforts won both praise and criticism from within and outside Shanghai. All three of them would effectively die out without any of their changes, goals, or ideas being implemented, even if some (like the CDL) expressed the contrary. To diplomatic officials and even those in the SMC, the groups represented a stark danger to the foreign position in Shanghai. Their membership represented a common background, with their leadership composed of businessmen and propagandists, and they held views that were antagonistic to the shifting Chinese political climate of the day, even with Chinese among their ranks.

However, as mentioned in the introduction, while these groups had differences, they had similarities as well. Clearly, at the forefront of their minds was assuredly challenges to their position, be it Nationalist, communist, or somewhere in between. Hankou represented a dire warning of things to come for both the bureau and the Fascisti, for example, a future that would come for Shanghai if their words were not heeded. Communists in particular were both inept agitators and ruthless, calculating manipulators, that required propaganda, "publicity," or



violence to effectively put down. The Guomindang, though not without lending some praise at moments, was as bad, if not worse, to all three groups. Once again, it comes as no surprise that the third issue of the *Constitutionalist* came in the midst of the Northern Expedition, when the anticommunist CDL began to place the Nationalists in the same camp of enemies to combat. The CDL, SPB, and Fascisti in general, while placing their fight into different methods, all nevertheless viewed the general political atmosphere of China at the time as monumentally ruinous toward themselves.

Their solutions to this ruinous situation ranged from secrecy to outright violence. The bureau and the Fascisti thought that Shanghai should have been taken control of by the powers, albeit for different outcomes, yet both would have resulted in a likely diplomatic nightmare and violence in itself. The CDL thought that combating communism was to propagandize like them, which ultimately resulted in their very supporters turning on them. The Fascisti's solution, of "law and order" and forcible expulsion of communists, incensed those in the press to violence and was ultimately struck down by the SMC chairman himself. Once again, the methods are different, but the "enemy" is ultimately the same. For these groups run by expatriates, it showed the lengths that a settler community would go to preserve themselves.

All of these solutions, however, stemmed ultimately from fear. A fear of change, fear of communism, and a fear of anti-foreignism. Such fear manifested itself in the CDL, an anti-communist organization that professed an international fight against Bolshevism that nevertheless was led by foreigners and ultimately won the scorn of them as well. The SPB was founded by a foreign council, was supported by foreign firms, and its secretary expressed foreign fears abroad. The Fascisti, a peculiar quasi-nationalistic organization, was created by and for Shanghailanders and sought to use violence to counteract their fear of the encroachment of

communism and Chinese nationalism into the Settlement. The foundation was built upon fear, and said fear led Shanghailanders and other settlers to react negatively to the perceived aggression they were facing from outside the Settlement, and to showcase that fear abroad to anyone who might hear their plight.

All three, however, took themselves incredibly seriously. They would obviously not make the effort if they did not, and that seriousness is evidenced in the inflammatory rhetoric they espoused, and the equally inflammatory solutions they had to “solving” the crisis in Shanghai. That is what makes them “fleeting embers,” as they are, in the turmoil of Shanghai in the late 1920s, some of the last sparks of a fire that fought desperately to keep their way of life alive. Ultimately that fire would gradually be snuffed out completely, with the Shanghailanders’ community being torn apart not by Chinese encroachment, but chiefly by the Empire of Japan, with its last remnants swept up by the emergent People’s Republic of China.<sup>134</sup> However, the seeds of expatriate Shanghai’s downfall were planted in the tumultuous period of the late 1920s, and groups like the CDL, SPB, and Fascisti are only some of the ways that the settlers voiced their fear, anger, and retaliation to the change rapidly unfolding around them.

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<sup>134</sup> Bickers, “Shanghailanders,” 210-211.

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