

FOR THE CHINESE, NOTHING BUT CHINA

James Bertram Talks Of Power Politics In The East

JUST as the centre of a cyclone is calm, so China stands calm in the centre of the power politics storm in the East, says James Bertram, whose experience through the critical years of China's recent history gives his opinion more than usual authority.

He is a New Zealand Rhodes Scholar. He was born in Auckland, educated at Waitaki Boys' High School and Auckland University College. From Auckland he won the Rhodes Scholarship in 1932 and took a first in English and Modern Languages at Oxford. After Oxford came some journalistic experience, first with the London "Times." Then a Rhodes Fellowship enabled him to go to China to spend a year studying Chinese at a Chinese University and social conditions through the country.

In the thick of events during recent years, he has made his name as a reporter and commentator through books and news correspondence for a number of papers, including the "Manchester Guardian."

When the European war began, he left China for Australia, spent a month there, and has been in New Zealand since December. Last week he was in Wellington arranging talks for the NBS.

China's Simple Ambition

A crucial period in Eastern affairs may be reached during the next few months, he believes. He told *The Listener* why.

Out of all the conflicting ambitions and ideologies of Pacific politics he says that only China has a simple philosophy. For her there is no ambition but the ambition to retain her identity. For her no threats against neighbours, no concessions bought with concessions. For her no part in the international game of put and take.

But for the other—a different story.

Japan Seeks a Way Out

Japan he sees as a nation blanketed in its efforts to push into Asia and looking for (1) an easy and honourable way out of her costly Chinese engagements, and (2) an alternative direction in which to push out in political, military, or naval adventure.

Like Marc. T. Greene, who was interviewed on the same subject a month ago, he believes that Japan has found the experiment of aggression in China too expensive. She will retreat as best she can from her commitments in China proper, but will not sacrifice her winnings in Manchuria. Although there the balance sheet is well into the red, one or two big commercial enterprises, with some say in national policy, are making good profits, even at the expense of the home taxpayer.

With Europe distracted, the retreat may be easier now than it might have been even in the days of pants removal, before last September. Now, he believes, Japan sees her

opportunity to make the rest of her Chinese campaign political. With her recent change of Government she has tried to placate America. America has more or less told her to think again, but elsewhere Mr. Bertram believes she might find the international recognition required for her Chinese puppets.

America, France, Russia

Once, there was a chance that the co-operation of America, with England and France, would clarify the whole situation. America, in fact, had led the way, more especially with her treaty abrogation. But now the chance had almost gone, with the European nations busy at home. French opinion in Indo-China was stiffly against



Spencer Digby, photograph

JAMES BERTRAM,

New Zealand Rhodes Scholar, reporter
and commentator

Japan, but it required the backing of the French Foreign Office. And France would do as Britain did.

Russia's position was an additional complication. If a time came when other nations might wish to make a choice of evils, the Russian evil might be considered the greater. They might line up with Japan, under pressure of what they considered necessity, disregarding what might be considered the sentimental claims of China.

In Japan itself there was some discontent, well curbed by a very extensive police organisation. But among the industrial workers, who had the greatest chance of co-operation, there was not the same excuse for discontent as among the peasantry. For they benefited from the war-time industrial boom. The discontented peasantry, on the other hand, were not organised, and were subjected to the same strict Government surveillance.

Difficulties of the Japanese Army

If there were any real cause to look for internal dissension among the Japanese—and he believed the Chinese leaders had exaggerated this possibility—then it should be looked for in the common soldiers of the Japanese Army. They had been away from home, many of them for years, fighting a most unsatisfactory campaign. Wherever they went guerrilla troops struck at them as they marched. They were rushed here to put down some trouble, and rushed back to meet trouble breaking out behind their backs. They had few successes, and all the time severe hardships.

At no stage could they live well, off the country. Their own food had to be brought to them from Japan, and transport organisation was not easy, with depots constantly changing to meet the changing fronts created by the mobile Chinese.

But it was not in local discontents that the reason could be found for Japan's projected retirement. Economic pressure was a big factor. With her economy strained all the time, she must become an opportunist nation, looking to her armies to supply from loot their own expenses. She needed quick returns. In China, when the Japanese advanced, the Chinese simply retreated, taking loot with them. As the population retreated, fast-moving troops, small in numbers, but annoying as mosquitoes, appeared from nowhere to harry the invaders, and send their casualty totals climbing.

This sort of warfare might go on for years. In Manchuria particularly, Japan had to retain a large permanent army to consolidate superficial political gains. The Chinese in Manchuria were not tamed. They used every possible opportunity to embarrass their conquerors.

But Japan would hesitate to make another really big military effort in China. She had suffered from long years of war. She would not think it advisable to waste her last strength sticking another pin into the cushion that was China. But it should be realised that she had strength for one more big effort, that the Army might be tired of fighting, but that the Navy was wanting its turn, and was politically powerful enough to take its turn.

China is Ready

In short, Japan's policy might now be the policy of the opportunist. As the war in Europe developed in the next six months, the opportunist's chance might come, to be missed or taken.

While demand met appeasement and appeasement satisfied demand, while the paths of diplomacy wound tortuously about her, China sat, waiting, watching. United as ever before, she was ready to jump forward or settle back as necessary. If Japan turned aside for a moment, China would know what to do, and was ready to do it, with all sorts and conditions of armies ready to change the guerrilla tactics for the big campaign.

All over the country were loosely-knit military organisations. Now in reserve, the famous Eighth Route Army was in process of enlargement and improvement, as the training nucleus of other divisions. In the North, the Korean Revolutionary Army was still active, and ready to co-operate when called upon.

"Among them all," says Mr. Bertram, "China is the only nation whose course is clear cut." For the others, plot and counter-plot, uncertainty, suspense. For the Chinese, nothing but China.

Four talks on the struggle in China embodying Mr. Bertram's own experiences, will be broadcast from 2YA on Monday evenings, beginning on March 11, at 7.28 p.m.