

# A NEW ZEALANDER IN CHINA

## Rewi Alley's Important Job Of Work

*An appreciation of the work which Rewi Alley is doing in China, was given by James Bertram in the course of a series of talks for the NBS. This is a summary, and includes Mr. Bertram's description of China's "Guerrilla Industry."*

THERE'S one Australian in China whom a good many people have heard of—W. H. Donald, the friend and confidant of the Generalissimo and Madame Chiang Kai-shek. His place in the Far Eastern picture seems to be secured—if only, as one American paper rather rudely puts it, as "China's Number One White Boy." Few people on the other hand, know much about another Antipodean in China, and a movement which is likely to be associated with his name whenever the real history of this Chinese war comes to be written—both of them by then, I fancy, will have earned a major place in the story.

The movement—only eighteen months old, but already recognised as one of the most constructive developments of the war period in China—is the Chinese Industrial Co-operatives. And the man behind it is a stocky New Zealander with sandy hair and the knees of a Rugby footballer, who answers in Chinese to the very correct courtesy name of "Ai Li"—which means "Love Virtue." He would probably still be known down Canterbury way as Rewi Alley.

It sounds pretty formidable to call anyone a practical humanitarian, or even a "constructive social worker"; but Rewi Alley is both these things, and a good deal more. At this centenary time we've been hearing quite a lot about "great New Zealanders": if I had my chance to add another nomination to the list I think my first choice would be the name of Alley.

### War, Sheep, Fires

Like most stories of useful constructive work done in any country this one could be summarised by a single phrase: the right man in the right place. Only a little needs to be said about how he got there. Rewi Alley, who fought through the Great War in France, returned to New Zealand to try sheep-farming. But things didn't go too well and he couldn't settle down, so he packed a bag at a venture and one day a disillusioned ex-soldier found himself in Shanghai applying for a very unromantic job in the Shanghai Fire Brigade.

He hadn't been in China long before his imagination was caught and held by two outstanding features of the Chinese scene: the appalling conditions under which the vast mass of Chinese peasants and workers live; and their fundamental decency and immense possibilities as human beings.

### Hell on Earth

The factory district of Shanghai was a kind of hell on earth until the Industrial Section of the Shanghai Municipal Council got after it, and was able, with such energetic leadership, to do something for the protection of the workers. The history of industrial conditions in Shanghai is a large and insalubrious chapter in itself, and this isn't the place for it. But what I do want to suggest was that, if ever a foreigner in China has identified himself with the interests of oppressed classes in one of the worst centres of economic exploitation in the world, that man was Rewi Alley. He knew Chinese small-factory production inside out.

Carry on the story ten years and we are into the first months of war, with the Japanese columns over-running North China, Tientsin and Tsingtao occupied, and Japanese bombs, for the second time in six years, reducing the factory district of Shanghai to a howling wilderness. One by one the key centres of Chinese industry (most of them concentrated along the vul-

nerable coastline) came under Japanese control. By the end of 1938, with the fall of Canton and Hankow, Japan had virtually obliterated China's industrial bases and the first line of her economic defence.

### Salvage of War

From a few cities the Chinese Government was able to salvage a certain amount of valuable factory plant, and this was hastily shipped up the Yangtze, or transported inland to those western provinces where a new base for heavy industry was to be created.

It was in an attempt to solve this major economic problem that a scheme for Industrial Co-operatives in free China was sponsored by a joint committee of Chinese and foreigners in Shanghai; with the unofficial assistance of the British Ambassador, the plan was approved by Dr. H. H. Kung, then Chinese Premier, and Madame Chiang Kai-shek, and "C.I.C." came into being as an official organisation under the Executive Yuan in August, 1938. The first appointment made was that of Rewi Alley as Chief Technical Director and Field Organiser.

### "Work Together!"

The procedure is simple enough. Members of the C.I.C. staff go out into their respective districts to enlist the support of local officials, survey needs and resources, and invite the co-operation of needy workers. Large posters, featuring the triangle and the two Chinese characters "*Kung Ho*"—"Work together!"—which is the sign of the movement, are displayed in towns and villages, offering work to all who will come to report their experience and requirements. When a group of workers makes application the C.I.C. lends money (on a 6 to 9 per cent. per annum rate) for the necessary tools, machines, raw materials

and capital required to start immediate production. The average size of a group is about 50. A committee and chairman are elected by the workers themselves and no one member is allowed to buy more than 20 per cent. of the total sum invested. Wages are fixed by the committee, and a limited dividend (after reserve and extension funds are met) is payable on a basis of total contributions of members of each co-operative.

### Rewi the Key Man

Alley and his associates lead an adventurous life, salvaging machinery from under the guns of the advancing Japanese, improvising transport and new technical processes, and coping magnificently with the thousand and one difficulties that confront them in their task. Last summer Rewi himself went down with typhoid fever in Kanchow, just at a time when the Japanese were attacking in that district—he lay in hospital for a couple of weeks with a raging fever, and the hospital was bombed twice—the best his nurses could do was take his bed outside and leave it beside the river, where he could sink or swim if the worst came to the worst. I saw him for a couple of hours on the airfield at Chungking just before I took the 'plane out to Hong Kong a few months back—he had just come in by 'plane from the Sungpan, on the borders of Tibet, where he had been organising gold-mining co-operatives for Madame Chiang Kai-shek, and had come back with stories of enough gold in those western hills to pay for China's war if they could only get at it. I could understand Rewi's interest in the gold; his chief problem throughout has been finance, always of course for the movement, never for himself and his staff—who are lucky if they collect their meagre salaries, months overdue.

## PRISONERS IN THE "ALTMARK"

### Young New Zealanders Record For The N.B.S.

WEARING H.M.S. "Victory" ribbons and expansive smiles, three young New Zealand seamen gunners, who were prisoners in the "Altmark" when she was cut out by H.M.S. "Cossack" in a Norwegian Fiord, returned to New Zealand the other day, and, through the good offices of the Defence Department, the National Broadcasting Service recorded their story from the time that their ship was sighted by the "Graf Spee" to the time the rescue party on the "Altmark" shouted out "Are there any Britishers aboard?"

The three young men are W. Wheeler, of Dunedin, and R. Craig and J. Lynch, of Auckland. Naval reservists, they left New Zealand in the "Doric Star" to supply part of the gun crew. All went well till early one afternoon between Capetown and Sierra Leone a shell went over the ship. They did not see their attacker at first and they thought it was a submarine. They had to abandon ship and were taken on board the "Graf Spee," where they were pretty well treated. It was a bit crowded, though; and then they were moved to the supply ship "Altmark," and spent three weary months on board her. They went down to the Antarctic before they made a dash for Germany.

### Two Kinds of Captain

In three talks recorded by the NBS these New Zealanders tell the story. The captain of the "Graf Spee" was a decent chap, but the captain of the "Altmark" was not. The food was monotonous in the "Altmark" and there was a good deal of overcrowding. When they were taken off the ship they went away in their tropical clothes and would have been glad of more in the colder weather they struck. The overcrowding was pretty serious, but the main trouble

seemed to have been the lack of occupation. Some of the sea salts in the crew of prisoners did wonderful things with clasp knives and any pieces of wood that came along. One man made a set of draughts and another man a set of chessmen. They managed to get an old pack of German playing cards, which, by the way, are marked differently from English cards. However, they seemed to be a very cheerful lot. They survived the hardships and were not at all depressed when they were told that the German fleet was sinking the British fleet at the rate of eight ships a day.

### None The Worse For Adventures

The story the boys tell of the rescue shows that the drama of it was not at all exaggerated. They tried to attract the attention of the examining party from the Norwegian warship, but the German crew turned the hoses on them and worked the winches to drown their shouts. Then the great moment came when they heard an English voice inquiring if there were any Britishers down below, and they made it speedily plain that there were. The scene that followed must be left to listeners to hear for themselves. It was heartening, and also humorous.

The three gunners look none the worse for their adventures. In fact, they look uncommonly well. It may be explained that they wear the ribbons of H.M.S. "Victory" because every seaman in the Navy must be attached to some ship, and, after all, what better ship to be attached to than the most famous one in the Navy?

The three talks were broadcast by 2YA some days ago, and will shortly be heard from other stations.