

VI - 73 C - 6. Smedley, Agnes "J. B. Powell's China" book review  
of My Twenty-Five Years in China by John B. Powell -  
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## VI-73-C-6 Books in Review

## J. B. Powell's China

MANY YEARS AGO this reviewer heard an old scholar from India say that America returned her share of the Boxer Idemnity to China in order to educate a class of Chinese who would "wag their tails, beat the drums, and speak English" in defense of American business interests in China.

In many ways, Mr. John B. Powell's book<sup>1</sup>, *My Twenty-five Years in China*, which includes a defense of everything the Kuomintang dictatorship stands for, seems to bear out this analysis. On page 140, after interpreting the Chinese revolution from the Kuomintang viewpoint, Mr. Powell makes the following appeal to American chauvinism:

No Chinese student of any American university, to the writer's knowledge, ever joined the Chinese Communist faction. Thousands of American-returned students are members of the Kuomintang.

Were this statement wholly true, no greater condemnation of the American educational system could be found anywhere. Yet, like countless statements in this book, it is not true. Instead, large numbers of Chinese Communists are graduates of American universities in the United States or China—Lo Fu, member of the Central Committee of the Chinese Communists, and the two secretaries of the Chinese Communist delegate to the San Francisco Conference, to name three.

True it is, however, that large numbers of Kuomintang members, including some of its highest (and most fascist-minded) leaders, are American products. Mr. Chen Li-fu, Kuomintang-party boss and a fascist of the deepest hue, is not only one such, but Fordham University conferred an honorary degree on him last year. Mr. Chen, I believe, is not even a Christian.

While the Kuomintang is full of American-educated men, still more of its members are Japanese products, Generalissimo Chiang Kai-shek being Exhibit A. Nor has American education resulted in democracy in China. On the contrary, most Chinese laws, as also the Kuomintang-prepared Constitution, are patterned after Japanese laws and the Japanese Constitution of 1889. And the Japanese Constitution, like Japanese laws and the army, were in turn fashioned on Bismarck's Prussia.

In all his years in China, Mr. Powell reflected a modified form of the treaty-port mentality. Instead of supporting the old warlords, after 1927 he placed all his eggs in Chiang's basket. From 1922 until Pearl Harbor, he was owner and editor of the *China Weekly Review* which, like Mark Twain's innocence, was progressive in spots. He met the late Dr. Sun Yat-sen, but, like most foreigners, branded as "Red" the national revolutionary movement which Dr. Sun, aided by invited Soviet Russian advisers,

organized and unleashed against the warlords and foreign imperialism—British imperialism in particular.

Before Chiang Kai-shek's coup d'état in 1927, which overthrew the Hankow National Government and established the Nanking government, Mr. Powell regarded the Generalissimo as the great Yellow Hope. From 1927 until today, the Generalissimo remains for him that Hope, to be supported by any and every means. All who oppose Chiang are called "Reds," and nowhere in his book does he even mention the Chinese Democratic League of professional men and women, though some of its constituent groups were formed next door to him in Shanghai before the war.

Despite Mr. Powell's complete lack of first-hand knowledge of the Chinese people, or of the vast peasant revolution of which the Chinese Communist-commanded armies are the military spearhead, there are sections of his book that are eminently worth reading. From 1931 onward he stood like the rock of ages against Japanese imperialism, exposing its machinations and atrocities and its plans for world conquest. He stood at the top of every Japanese or puppet black list, and after Pearl Harbor was imprisoned under such atrocious conditions in a Japanese prison in Shanghai that all but the heels of his feet eventually had to be amputated. Unlike some other Americans, he never betrayed the Chinese nation or his own country by turning propagandist for the Japanese or their German and Italian allies. In fact, he exposes many of the foreigners, including Americans, who aided the Japanese and Nazis either directly or indirectly.

Nor did Mr. Powell hesitate to condemn the sale of American scrap-iron to Japan, nor our more significant policy toward Japan during World War I. On November 1, 1917, for example, he writes of the arrival of Baron Ishii in Washington to obtain American approval for Japan's "special position" in Manchuria and Shantung Province. Failing in Washington, the astute Baron went directly to the seat of power—to "a certain powerful financial leader" in New York, who merely telephoned the White House, which in turn instructed Secretary of State Lansing, who in turn signed on the dotted line which the Japanese Baron indicated. This "Lansing-Ishii Incident" should provide the American public with a similar key for understanding our present policy in China. Secretary of State Byrnes has even admitted that he was not consulted about our policy. President Truman may not have been consulted either.


None of these courageous and factual chapters, however, can excuse the distortions and false statements about the Chinese revolution which Mr. Powell makes elsewhere. These would require many pages to list. Here are a few:

1. Communists "within the nationalist army" were responsible for attacks on foreigners in 1927 in Nanking.
2. Chiang Kai-shek had nothing to do with the massacre of 5,000 Chinese workers and students in Shanghai in April, 1927.
3. Mao Tze-tung and Chu Teh, Communist leaders, were both "trained in Moscow under Trotsky and Radek." (Mao

<sup>1</sup> *My Twenty-five Years in China*, by John B. Powell. New York: The Macmillan Company. 436 pages. \$3.50.



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Tze-tung has never been outside China, and Chu Teh was educated in Germany, not in Russia.)

4. Po Ku (erroneously called Pao Ku) is a "mystery man" and "head of the Red secret police." (Po Ku is a member of the Central Committee of the Chinese Communist Party, was never head of any secret police, and the only mystery about him is his gawkiness and his inability to sing or dance.)

5. During the Sian incident, an "American woman leftist" arrived in Sian and was utilized by the Reds to deliver speeches over the Communist radio station; and "Mao Tze-tung, Chu Teh, Chou En-lai and other Communists went to Sian to confer with her." (Since this refers to this reviewer, it can be branded for what it is: a wild and woolly fairy tale. Mao Tze-tung and Chu Teh have never set foot in Sian, either in 1936 or later. Nor had this "American woman leftist" any power whatever to "confer" with them on any subject whatever. There was no "Communist radio station" in existence in 1936-37 and I never delivered a broadcast speech in Chinese in my life. The true story of the Sian Incident and of my part in it, is related in *The Battle Hymn of China*, a copy of which I sent Mr. Powell when it appeared and which he could have consulted had he desired the facts. Or he could have consulted with me personally at any time had he wished to write facts instead of prejudiced fantasy.)

Americans will honor Mr. Powell for his stand against the Japanese. But when it comes to internal Chinese affairs, history has by-passed him.

AGNES SMEDLEY

## Special Pleader

*Wartime Mission in Spain*, by Carlton J. H. Hayes. New York: The Macmillan Company. 313 pages. \$3.

AS A HISTORIAN, Professor Hayes wrote well. As a beligerently defensive apologist for some questionable history of his own making, he writes badly. The title of his curiously confused, never dispassionate book implies an admission—his successful mission was a personal failure. For he realizes that to the future peacetime relations between the United States and Spain his mission contributed less than nothing. Hayes's specific wartime assignment was to keep Spain out of the war and to maintain friendly relations with its government. The American government gave him *carte blanche*. Although at one point—a rare flash of modesty—he calls himself "merely an agent" of American policy, he makes abundantly clear that his conception of implementation of policy was, in fact, making policy.

Did Hayes succeed in his mission? To what extent was the success personal? Except for the Blue Division, Spain's military forces did not participate directly in the war. But what Hayes calls Spain's "semi-belligerency against Russia" pinned down United Nations military forces. The possibility, which Hayes never succeeded in eliminating altogether, of Spain's direct military aid to the Axis, remained a factor of strategic importance until the final phase of the European war. Knowing that Franco neither could nor even wanted to fight openly, Hayes nevertheless went out of his way to yield to rather than try to diminish Franco's blackmail. But there is more to modern total war than military combat. Hayes insisted, against the evidence, on seeing Franco's attitude toward the Axis as reluctant appeasement. "Actually the appeasement involved giving the Axis many words and a few deeds." A few deeds! The