

China's Sun Yat-sen on British Imperial Tyranny

In his book *The Vital Problem of China*, written in 1917, as a polemic against China joining the British (and the United States) in the Great War (World War I) against Germany, modern China's Founding Father Sun Yat-sen (1866-1925) writes that Germany stands accused of mistreating Belgium and Luxemburg. But, he notes:

"Every year, England takes large quantities of foodstuffs for her own consumption from India, where in the last ten years, 19 million people have died of starvation. It must not be imagined for a moment that India is suffering from underproduction. The fact is that what India has produced for herself has been wrested away by England.... Is that any better than submarine warfare?... Nominally, of course, the British are not plundering, but in fact the exorbitant taxation and tyrannical rule in India are such as to make it impossible for the natives to maintain their livelihood; it is nothing but plunder on a grand scale."

Sun says that England accuses Germany of asserting that "Might makes right," but asks: "Is it right for England to rob China of Hong Kong and Burma, to force our people to buy and smoke opium, and to mark out portions of Chinese territory as her sphere of influence? [Sun notes that England has declared as its "sphere of influence" within China, all of Tibet, Sichuan, and the Yangtse Valley—28% of China's land area.] If one really wants to champion the



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cause of justice today, one should first declare war on England, France and Russia, not Germany and Austria.... But China does not want to declare any war."

Sun reports that the British waged war against France in the late 18th Century, "not because England wanted to redress any possible wrongs suffered," but purely a policy of "rallying the weaker countries to crush the strongest, ... simply because France in the reigns of Louis XIV and Louis XV was the strongest country in Europe.... In order to maintain her own interests, England cannot allow any country on the European Continent to grow too strong, and when any other country grows too strong, she must get all other countries to join her in overthrowing that country."

"When another country is strong enough to be utilized, Britain sacrifices her own allies to satisfy its desires, but when that country becomes too weak to be of any use to herself, she sacrifices it to please other countries."

Britain's relation to its friends, wrote Sun, is like a farmer to a silkworm: "After all the silk had been drawn from the cocoons, they are destroyed by fire, or used as fishfood."

With this sense of the evil imperial character of the British, Sun forecast, correctly, that, were China to join the war on the side of the Allies, then "whether the Allies will win or not, China will be Britain's victim." In fact, at the Versailles Conference after World War I, Britain divided up China as spoils for those nations which had joined them in the war on Germany. He added: "It is lamentable that the would-be victims should be so willing to place themselves at the disposal of Britain and allow themselves to be tortured and mangled."—*Michael Billington*