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Letter No. 425 from L.D. Wilgress, Canadian Embassy, Moscow, to the Secretary of State for External Affairs, W.L. Mackenzie King

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CANADIAN EMBASSY

Moscow,

November 25th, 1944

No. 425

Sir,

I have the honour to report that on November 21st I called upon Mr. Foo Ping-Sheung and had another long conversation with him. I always find the Chinese Ambassador to be the best barometer of how the Soviet Government are acting in international affairs. Whereas the Czechoslovak Ambassador can always be counted upon to take a stand corresponding to that of the Soviet Government and the Netherlands Ambassador is always sure to be full of forebodings about the evil designs of the Soviet Government, Mr. Foo is never quite the same. He is exuberant or depressed according to how he views the prospects of future Soviet cooperation with the other two great powers. This is because he sees so clearly that the future of China is dependent to a great extent upon cooperation after the war between the Soviet Union and the United States.

2. I was not surprised, therefore, on this occasion to find Mr. Foo feeling very depressed. He told me he was worried about certain recent manifestations of Soviet policy. He was not distrustful of the intentions of the Soviet Government and at present he was more inclined to criticize their methods rather than their motives, but it was these very methods which can make it so very difficult for other countries to cooperate with the Soviet Union and thereby spoil the chances for future peace and stability. He instanced the crude bullying of Iran over the granting of oil concessions; the apparent interference in the internal affairs of Roumania after Molotov's assurance that the Soviet Government had no desire to change the social or economic structure of that country; the failure of the Soviet Union to participate in recent international conferences; and their general tendency to disregard the reasonable views of other countries by insisting on the imposition of their own. He had a feeling that things had not gone as well as had been made out during the recent visit of Mr. Churchill and Mr. Eden to Moscow.

3. After remarking that I shared his anxiety about the future I steered the conversation to the subject of China on which it is always so interesting to have a discussion with Mr. Foo. When I introduced the subject by mentioning the recent changes in the government at Chungking his natural cheerfulness returned. He said this was a development he had long been hoping for. In his personal letters to the Generalissimo he had urged two steps, both of which had now been taken. One of these had been the recall of Governor Sheng from Sinkiang and the other the liberalization of the government. He

-/advocated

The Right Honourable,
The Secretary of State
for External Affairs,
OTTAWA, Canada.

W.L. Mackenzie King Papers, 1944, Correspondence, Primary Series, Vasilevich - Wilgress
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advocated the latter on general grounds but also because it would undermine Soviet insinuations about the reactionary character of the Chinese Government. He knew personally the new ministers and foresaw a new situation as a result of their appointment. The new Minister of Finance had been his secretary before he became Mayor of Shanghai and in the latter post had an excellent record free of any suspicion of corruption. The new Minister of War had the reputation of being able to get on with foreigners, whereas his predecessor was imbued with anti-foreign ideas and having been trained in Japan had somewhat the mentality of a Japanese officer. It had also been a salutary step to have got rid of Mr. Chen, the former Minister of Education, who had been regarded as the most reactionary member of the government. Mr. Foo said the liberalization of the government had been planned for some time, but the Generalissimo had waited until the meeting of the People's Political Council could give voice to criticism of the conduct of the war and of the state finances so that he would have full moral backing for the changes in the government.

4. After this we talked for some time about the Chinese Communists but no information or views developed which I have not already reported to you. I then led the conversation to Sinkiang by referring to Dr. Liu, the Counsellor of the Chinese Embassy, who is being transferred to Urumchi to be the local representative of the Chinese Ministry of Foreign Affairs in the place of Mr. Chaucer Wu. Dr. Liu was brought up in Russia, speaks the language perfectly and has a Polish wife. The Ambassador said he had tried to keep Dr. Liu in Moscow, but Chungking had pointed out how important it was to have someone in Urumchi who knew Russian psychology.

5. I asked Mr. Foo what had happened to the Manchurian troops of Governor Sheng. He replied by stating that they had all been transferred to Kansu and placed with the forces guarding the Communists. The two army corps of the Central Government were remaining in Sinkiang. I asked if it had not been a formidable undertaking to move so many troops from Kansu to Sinkiang and Sheng's troops from Sinkiang to Kansu. He said it had been a very formidable undertaking as the whole journey had to be made on foot. It had taken the Central Government forces two months to make the trip.

6. I then asked if there had been any trouble from the Mohammedans or other minority groups as a result of the removal of Governor Sheng. He replied by explaining that in China there were no dissensions arising out of religious differences because there had been no persecution of religion. The so-called Mohammedan revolt against Sheng had been a typical Chinese struggle for power provoked by the Ma family. After the revolt had been put down with Soviet help the head of the Ma family had been brought to Moscow where he was being kept in case he might be of use to the Soviet Government in the future. It was during this revolt that Sheng had recruited "white" Russians living in Sinkiang. These had later been trained by Sheng's Soviet military advisers. Afterwards the Soviet Government claimed that these Russians were Soviet citizens and this was one of the causes of friction, some of these Russians having been arrested by Sheng who claimed they were not Soviet citizens. I tried

-/to get

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to get more details from the Chinese Ambassador about what difficulties actually had arisen between Sheng and the Soviet Government, but I sensed that he did not wish to be pressed. On another occasion I shall try again to obtain from Mr. Foo more details of what I find to be a fascinating subject.

I have the honour to be,
Sir,
Your obedient servant,

ldw/ef

(Sgd) L.D. Wilgress

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