

CHINA SPEAKS—By "Den"

In his recent Reichstag speech Herr Hitler is reported to have said that China was not strong enough mentally to exist in a modern world.

I WAS here when the world was young, as men count young,
Watched nation after nation rise in pride,
Seen pearl on pearl of passing centuries strung
Upon Time's abacus and pushed aside,
Heard thro' the ages many a conqueror
Thunder in arrogance upon my door,
Marked his pride pass as lotus petals fold.
I should be here still when the world grows old.

CALMLY I slept, awakened, slept again,
Counting the aeons as the day and night,
Seen Egypt, Babylon, Greece, Rome and Spain,
The Western peoples rise up in their might,
Dreaming, I marked the clamour, heard their boasts;
Tartar and Manchu, Genghis Khan's vast hosts
Have clouded for an hour this placid brow,
Raging against me; yet where are they now?

GONE with the yellowed leaves of yesteryear,
I, who have watched a world work out its fate,
Heard all the tales of triumph, hate, and fear,
Have learned the gift of patience; I can wait.
Wait as I waited to see young lands plot
To rediscover arts I'd long forgot;
These who bowed down before barbarian kings
When my art, literature, were ancient things.

STORMED by an Eastern upstart whose queer pride
Seeks to subdue and bend me to his will,
Mocked by a Western tyrant who'd deride
My ancient wisdom; so I dream on still.
Gadflies, exulting for one summer's day
Disturb my dreams; but these shall drift away
With olden echoes sounding down the past.
China, unconquered, lives on, ageless, vast.

This poem by C.J. Dennis ("Den") was published in the Queensland weekly newspaper *The Queenslander* of 8 March 1938. China was in the news because of the brutal Japanese invasion hence the lines

Stormed by an Eastern upstart whose queer pride
Seeks to subdue and bend me to his will

The Dalfram Dispute

Australian workers were outraged by the Japanese invasion and the refusal of the right wing Federal Government to support China and instead pander to Japanese militarism.

Unions in Port Kembla organised to stop the export of pig iron to Japan, much to the ire of Attorney General Robert Menzies who wired the Waterside Workers' Federation on 29 November 1938 advising the union to take notice that the Transport Workers' Act would be applied to Port Kembla from 6 December if the pig-iron was not loaded.

The Federal Government accused the WWF of dictating foreign policy, arguing that, as the elected government, it had the sole right to decide what relationships were to be established with foreign powers.

Menzies made an attempt to settle the dispute by calling a meeting with the Combined Union Committee at Wollongong for 11 January, 1939. On his arrival to Wollongong, he was met by an

angry demonstration of over 1000 people. He visited the Wollongong Hotel, where he was to have lunch with the Mayor and other local dignitaries.

Demonstrators held banners outside the hotel which read 'No Pig-iron for Japan' and 'No Dog Collar'. It was here that Menzies acquired the name 'Pig-Iron Bob'.

In 1964 the Melbourne songwriter Clem Parkinson wrote about the dispute

The Pig-Iron Song

a song by Clem Parkinson©1964 Clem Parkinson

Did you ever stop to wonder why the fellows on the job
Refer to Robert Menzies by the nickname Pig-Iron Bob?
It's a fascinating tale though it happened long ago
It's a part of our tradition every worker ought to know

Chorus

We wouldn't load pig-iron for the fascists of Japan
Despite intimidation we refused to lift the ban
With democracy at stake the struggle must be won
We had to beat the menace of the fascist Rising Sun

It was 1937 and aggressive Japanese
Attacked the Chinese people tried to bring them to their knees
Poorly armed and ill equipped the peasants bravely fought
While Australian water siders rallied round to lend support

Attorney General Menzies said the ship would have to sail
"If the men refuse to load it we will throw them into jail"
But our unity was strong - we were solid to a man
And we wouldn't load pig-iron for the fascists of Japan

For the Judas politicians we would pay a heavy price
The jungles of New Guinea saw a costly sacrifice
There's a lesson to be learned that we've got to understand
Peace can only be secured when the people lend a hand

In December 2006 the Illawarra Branch of the Society for the Study of Labour History erected a Plaque to commemorate that dispute, located near the Number 4 Jetty at Port Kembla, where that historic action occurred. Her Excellency Madam Fu Yng, the Chinese Ambassador, came from Canberra to unveil the Plaque.