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Retrieving an Asian American Anarchist tradition

Jane Mee Wong

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4th March 2008

Retrieved on July 26, 2009 from web.archive.org DOI :
10.17953/amer.34.1.7180718k92617u23
This piece has been published in the Spring 2008 issue of
Amerasia Journal]

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arrested many revolutionaries recently, from the conservative party, the nationalist party, and the communist party [illegible]

Notes

The author would like to thank Professor Robert Lee, Wei Chi Poon, Him Mark Lai, the Ethnic Studies librarians at the University of California, Berkeley, and the Research at Brown grant for making this project possible.

However, a co-worker reported me to the owner, saying that I was being counterproductive and hurting the business. His owner got all agitated and fired me. When this happened, I worked even harder to spread the word, even though my livelihood had become a problem. I scramble around in poverty and hardship, but I never gave in to the capitalist class. This is how I had been living my past year.

Recently, I have been living in a village, hoping to awaken the farmers who earn only [illegible] eight cents [illegible] for every twelve hours that they work... [illegible] to fight against their wage allocation. Some of the workers asked me at first, what ideology I was saying. [illegible] But after ten over days, they gradually believed in it too. It was a disaster however, that the supervisor found out, and purposely focused on supervising me and ill-treating me. Eventually, being unable to tolerate this anymore, I retaliated and yelled at him for being inhumane, for being a running dog (in all honesty though, he and his wife have never had a full meal, and his pay is barely a dollar and one cent everyday). Hearing this, he responded by calling me a communist, and called on the owner to fire me. I wanted to [illegible] him but my co-workers held me back. When they heard about what happened, my co-workers all advised me to leave the place. Having experienced so much hardship, how can I bear not working harder in the struggle! Now I am trying to join another group of workers, and will write you with some news when it happens.

Cuba's government is getting more brutal day by day, and the people are suffering immeasurably. They have

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By not writing to you at all in the past year, I have not only let you down, but also let myself down by allowing my beliefs (anarchism) to dwindle and die. And the “apologies” you wrote in your letter for not having written, should have been said by me, not you.

My ideas and revolutionary spirit are very weak, because I am an almost uneducated farmer, having received only two years of rough education. To add to that, I am not a naturally sharp person, and it is my greatest regret that I cannot effectively do the work of saving the masses. My last letter to you was made up simply of words for me to deal with my deep pain. Yet in response, you praised me for my ideas and spirit, didn't mind that it was too late, and instead told me about Yan [Zheng Zheng].

I believe in this ideology with a fearless and sacrificing sort of spirit. The prisons, the guns and the barbwire are not enough to dampen my resolve. We are nothing like the opportunistic politicians of the ruling party, nothing like the ridicules that Yan Zheng Zheng pass of us. To trust him, is no different from believing in the Goddess Kwanyin. Even though I have not directly been able to contribute to anarcho-communism, I have struggled and fought, as I will share with you. But I want to make clear first, that I am not trying to claim credit for my “selfless courage,” because this is also a selfish personal struggle for me, and all of humanity, to break through our chains, to fight for our freedoms, and I can't possibly back out of working for this. I will tell you about my experiences in this past year.

Last May when I was working as a wage slave at XX town, I started distributing anarcho-communist pamphlets during break, to inspire other workers.

our present situation, particularly when China's movements are a disappointment to all people. But our ideal is the ideal of masses of everyday people, it is the ideal of all humanity. For everyone to achieve happiness, we need to realize this ideal. The pulse of peoples' lives, the quest for liberation, depend on the success of this ideal. Regardless of our incapacities, it will continue to grow. The situation in China now makes it impossible to organize an A party, but we will continue to strive, and when the time is ripe, our hidden strengths will come forth, and our movement will grow in spurts. Wait and see, I [illegible].

I wonder what Pugong thinks of this.

Feigan

D. Letter from Carlos Cajan to Ray Jones³³

Addressed to Pingshe

1129 Stockton St,

San Francisco California, USA

April 10, 1929

From: Carlos Cajan, Partada No. 19 Palmira, Cuba

Zhongshi,

A few days ago I got a package full of articles from you through my co-worker. I have read through all of them, and know that you are very sincere. I regret that I haven't been able to thank you properly, and can do no better than write these simple words to express my gratitude.

³³ Carlos Cajan letter to Ray Jones. April 10, 1929. Ray Jones archives, University of California,

I may be old and lonely, but I have resisted in wars, agitated in movements, and marched numerous times to where the crowd gathered.

Ray Jones 1968¹

Contrary to racist beliefs of Asian passivity and apathy, Asian Americans have historically contributed to revolutionary traditions in American politics.

However, one may argue, the political strands in progressive and radical Asian American circles have largely been dominated by state-driven conceptions of socialism. As Him Mark Lai documents in his important study of the Chinese left in America, Asian American involvement in the first half of the 20th century was mainly channeled into the Communist Party mechanism.² The level of sophistication that the Comintern offered organizationally attracted many Asian radicals who subsequently endorsed the popular front tactics of Soviet Stalinism. From the 1960s onward, statist visions of Maoism also gained popularity for putting forth a vision of unity among third world peoples within the US and internationally. Nonetheless the mass-line and vanguardist approach of Maoism toward political organizing rendered it severely undemocratic, and vulnerable to unprincipled maneuvers of identity politics.

It is within this context that the literature of Pingshe, otherwise known as the Equality Society, and the writings of Ray Jones are refreshing and inspiring. Jones offers a more democratic vision of Asian-American radicalism from below. Despite the limited amount of information available about him, the collection of

¹ Jones, (n.d), Personal note. Ray Jones archives, Box 1: Folder 3. University of California, Berkeley, Asian American Studies, California.

² Him Mark Lai, "To Bring Forth a New China, To Build a Better America: The Chinese Marxist Left in America to the 1960s," in *Chinese America: History and Perspective* (San Francisco: Chinese Historical Society of America, San Francisco State University, 1992): 3–82.

his works, including those compiled by Him Mark Lai at the Ethnic Studies library archives at UC Berkeley, have been immensely valuable. These archives have allowed me, a young Asian American political activist, to piece together parts of an Asian American anarchist tradition.

Internationalist and American at the same time, the work of the Equality Society³ rips apart the notion of Asians as perpetual foreigners, interested only in the affairs of the homeland. It reflects how involvement in politics of the homeland and immersion into US domestic politics are not inseparable, but come together as necessary and integral aspects of internationalism.

Ray Jones and the Equality Society

An explicitly left libertarian, anarchist organization, Pingshe set up shop in San Francisco Chinatown around the 1920s. It was an overseas branch of the China-based Equality Society, involving known anarchists such as Ba Jin⁴ and Lu Jianbo. Ray Jones, otherwise known as Liu Zhongshi,⁵ was a worker himself and the main organizer of the US branch. In Joseph Spivak's account of organizing with Pingshe, as a member of the Road to Freedom, a New York-based English language anarchist publication, he

³ The Equality Society is the English translation of the Chinese name of the organization, Pingshe (平舍). I use both names interchangeably throughout the piece.

⁴ Ba Jin (巴金) is the pen name of the well-known Chinese anarchist and writer, Li Feigan (李贻甘). His pen name is derived from the names of two leading Russian anarchist thinkers, Bakunin and Kropotkin.

⁵ Jones, in his writings, does not explain how he got his name. If I, as the translator, could wax lyrical on Ray Jones's name, I would say it might have been a combination of the imageries that he refers to in his poem: "Glow in the Dark, the Library of Ray Jones." Ray as in glow, and Jones, a phonetic translation of his Chinese name, Zhong. I would imagine too that part of it was an attempt to "Americanize" his name, and in some sense, even make his ethnicity somewhat ambiguous.

five hundred yuan, all of which would cost less than a thousand yuan. But if you buy the type prints, it would cost you more than a thousand yuan (and maybe even more), and the shipping is expensive. Type prints also don't last as long as type molds do. What do you think? Is it convenient to find a typecast in the U.S.? I don't know about this and will need to count on you to find that out. [illegible].

It is impossible for Pingdeng to be back on track. Huiling will not be staying in Shanghai for long, and so far has only published three issues and had a couple of meetings. Every time Huiling leaves the house, he is searched several times. There is no way to continue, and the person who is responsible for distribution is not trustworthy. All in all, there is no hope for Pingdeng to be distributed in Shanghai. My health is deteriorating, and there is much work, so I will not be able to bear total responsibility for publishing Pingdeng. I am remorseful about this, and can only hope that your publishing center will gradually flourish, so that we can return to publishing Pingdeng in the future. The books are printed already, and will reach you within half a month (because it is being packaged right now). I haven't received [illegible]. I suppose it should arrive soon. The eight hundred small booklets and the two hundred books can be mailed together. Please mail [illegible] separately.

(back page)

I have received Pugong's letter. Now we need to have a relentless spirit of endurance, even if now our supporters are few, and results are small, we will eventually make an impact. We must not be discouraged by

intended to print one thousand five hundred copies of the small pamphlets, but the printers made a mistake and only printed one thousand. I have mailed eight hundred copies, with two hundred remaining here, while will be stored at the Freedom bookstore. When you run out, please let us know and we will send more. The books at Freedom bookstore are managed by Le Fu, and details can be sorted out later.

Shu Rao's one hundred yuan has not arrived. I am wondering if its been sent.

You mentioned before the idea of buying a [illegible]. I am considering it seriously now... It is much more expensive buying it from the market.

The publishing of Pingdeng in Shanghai is again running into problems. For one, Huiling is leaving. Also, our distributing site has been discovered by the Kuomintang. We need to set up overseas branches, as most revolutionary organizations around the world do, to take over the publication of our journals. It is only a matter of time before we face state repression. I am sending you the price list now. Please consider how we should next act.

Feigan

2. Received date unknown, 1929

Zhongshi:

I have received your letter. Buying type prints [illegible], but I think rather than getting type prints, why not buy the type mold? It needs only two thousand words, and costs less than five hundred yuan. I heard that in the U.S. you can typecast for less than four or

compares the enthusiasm of Pingshe members, to that of "the early revolutionists in Russia."⁶ He describes Ray Jones's living environment,

I went up to see Comrade Red [Ray] Jones the secretary of the group. He lives on a second floor of a very old fashioned building in the Chinese section of San Francisco. He, as well as most of the Chinese there, is very poor. He occupies a small room and according to the number of beds in this room is occupied by three. Yet when I entered the room I felt I was in an atmosphere of Ideal! The room was actually filled with literature, every inch of space is made use of for this purpose. Comrade Jones immediately began to show me one book after another in the Chinese language which were received from China and which he spreads among the Chinese population. [sic]⁷

The San Francisco Pingshe office was part of a sophisticated network including mainland Chinese anarchists who were organizing under the threat of imminent state repression. In a letter to Ray Jones, Ba Jin writes, "Our distribution site has been discovered by the Kuomintang. We need to set up overseas branches, as most revolutionary organizations around the world do, to take over the publication of our journals. It is only a matter of time before we face state repression."⁸ As we shall see however, the publications of San Francisco Pingshe were not simply confined to a mainland Chinese sensibility. The publication took on its own form, appeal-

⁶ Mitch, "Chinese Anarchists in the 1920s USA—The Equality Society," *Anarkismo*, article posted October 31, 2005, anarkismo.net (accessed December 1, 2007).

⁷ *Ibid.*

⁸ Ba Jin, Letter to Ray Jones, June 26, 1929. Ray Jones archives, Box 1: Folder 5. University of California, Berkeley, Asian American Studies, California.

ing to a Chinese American audience, set in both mainland Chinese and American political reality.

San Francisco Pingshe was an active publisher of two anarchist newsletters, the *Equality* journal⁹ and later, the *Anarcho-Communist Monthly*, both targeted at Chinese workers in San Francisco Chinatown. It also took on the organizational name, the Anarcho-Communist Alliance. Predominantly a propaganda circle, Jones and his comrades also published fliers and pamphlets. It is unclear from the literature in Ray Jones's archives, the degree and depth of organizing he engaged in at his own workplace.

This article showcases translations of articles from the two journals, the fliers, as well as selections of personal writings by Jones. I wish to highlight certain aspects of the Pingshe's that are valuable for young generations of Asian activists in constructing a vision of anti-statist, left libertarian politics that are both internationalist and relevant to the US.

The Internationalism of the Equality Society

The anti-statist politics of Pingshe comes up most clearly in its polemics against the Chinese Communist Party (CCP) and the Nationalist Party, the Kuomintang (KMT). One can only imagine the repercussions that these anarchist comrades faced for publicly denouncing the latter in the KMT-stronghold of San Francisco Chinatown. It is not surprising that their public denouncement also won them the wrath of the US government. In a report to an Anarchist Conference held in New York City in 1928, Equality Society members wrote that “[...] a few months ago, the imperialistic government of America threatened to destroy [Equality Society] by

⁹ The *Equality* journal is the English translation of the Chinese title, Pingdeng (平登). I use the two names interchangeably.

workers. This strike has given all American workers the opportunity to seek liberation. Those of us who are in unions should instantly respond in support and those without should immediately organize amongst themselves.

Our fellow workers, we have been oppressed too long, with atrocious treatment, meager wages and long hours, under conditions that no human can take. Rise, rise! All of us of different gender, nationalities and race, unite together! Stop slogging our lives away! We have some words of utmost importance: All political parties, nations and bureaucrats plunder from the working class. They are all our enemies! All workers, do not be manipulated and deceived by them and their lackey organizations! Workers, we need to trust ourselves to rise and take on the responsibilities of the working class.

Rise to fight for our freedom, struggle together!

Forward, forward!

C. Letters from Ba Jin (Li Feigan) to Ray Jones (Liu Zhongshi)³¹³²

1. Letter received June 26, 1929

Zhongshi:

I believe you have received the letter I sent. The small and big pamphlets can be ready at the same time. I

³¹ Letters from Li Pei Kan (Ba Jin) in Ray Jones archives had been transcribed by Yamayuchi Mamory (山内), Nihon University Chair of Chinese Literature Department on October 30, 1995.

³² Correspondence with Li Pei Kan. June 26, 1929. Ray Jones archives, University of California, Berkeley, Asian American Studies, California.

should not let them exist while you lower your pride to beg them for work.

Hard work has always been a precious thing. It is only in a capitalist society like now, that people's labor is seen as something excessive and useless. To avoid this pathetic fate, people have resisted by shouting,

"Give us work to do!" My friends, there is no one who can provide us with work. We should unite and seize work for ourselves. This way, we can work to overthrow the injustices in our society!

B. "Liberation has Arrived"³⁰

Liberation has arrived for Chinese Workers

Zhongxing Garment Workers are at the frontline

All American workers unite in struggle

We, the Chinese workers in America have experienced humiliation and hardship under our bosses for the past seventy to eighty years. Until now, we have not seen Chinese workers strike for better wages. This strike wave led by the male and female garment workers is an earth shattering action by Chinese workers. We, Pingshe, may not be in total agreement with the extent of their demands, but we fully respect the courage and persistence of these workers. Alongside our whole-hearted support, Pingshe would like to offer some words to all our fellow Chinese

³⁰ San Francisco Pingshe, "Liberation has Arrived," July 1938. Anarchism collection, Ctn 1: 34 / Him Mark Lai Collection, University of California, Berkeley, Asian American Studies, California.

arresting comrade Jones and confiscating all our literatures. However, this only made us more militant than ever before."¹⁰

Their militancy made its way into propaganda pieces. In an article entitled "The So-Called People's Revolution" published in the June 1934 issue of the *Anarcho-Communist Monthly*, Jones and his comrades write,

The Kuomintang claims to be for the people's revolution. The so-called People's Revolution is presumably that which incites merchants, peasants, and workers to revolt. The merchants belong to the capitalist class, while the workers, the working class. Given that these two classes are fundamentally opposed to one another, is it really possible for them to unite? This kind of a revolution can only revoltingly kill the poor! [...] Indeed, [KMT] is killing off the poor! Its officials and military are seizing power, depriving the masses of their livelihoods and exploiting the labor of workers and peasants. Those who seek justice have to fear for their lives.¹¹

The scathing criticism against the class-collaborationist politics of the KMT that Jones and his Chinese American anarchist comrades laid out in 1934 had its precedence set earlier. Based in Shanghai, Ba Jin had written a polemic against the presumed left-wing of the KMT party in a 1928 special issue of the *Equality* journal. The issue was also distributed in San Francisco. His attacks suggest tensions regarding the organizing principles of Chinese anarchists during this period. Instead of building independent anarchist parties such as the Pingshe, influential anarchist thinkers such as Wu

¹⁰ Mitch, "Chinese Anarchists in the 1920s USA—The Equality Society."

¹¹ Pingshe, "The So-Called People's Revolution," *Anarcho-Communist Monthly*, June 1934. Him Mark Lai Collection, Carton 1: 35. University of California, Berkeley, Asian American Studies, California.

Zhihui had chosen instead to seek shelter within the umbrella of pre-existing bourgeois parties such as the KMT. They believed they could reform these parties from within, pushing them toward more radical politics.¹² In his polemic against a self-declared left-wing KMT bureaucrat, Ba Jin confronts the conservatism of the KMT and the inability of a bourgeois party to reform itself. He writes,

[...] I ask this again: “Where is the left wing of the KMT?” Zheng says that the party is led by the leftist faction, yet in reality, there has never been right or left factions in the Three Principles because Sun Yat Senism was never a social revolutionary program [...]¹³

To the Pingshe anarchists, the KMT program included at best Sun Yat Sen’s “Three Principles,” bourgeois conceptions of nationalism, democracy and equality, and at worst, Chiang Kai Shek-style authoritarianism. It could only come to power at the expense of workers and peasants. Nonetheless, in their opposition against the KMT, the Pingshe anarchists were also quick to dissociate themselves from the burgeoning Chinese Communist Party, learning from the experiences of their Russian comrades. They were strongly influenced by the accounts of Alexander Berkman, Emma Goldman, and Nestor Makhno, all anarchists who had written about the schism between the anarchist ideals and the reality of Communist Party rule in Russia after the 1917 Revolution. Jones and his Equality Society comrades distributed a flier entitled “The Difference between an Anarchist Party and a Communist Party,” where they say,

¹² Arif Dirlik, *Anarchism in the Chinese Revolution: The Revolution that Never Was* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1993).

¹³ Ba Jin, “Where is the Left?,” *Equality Society Special Issue* (July 1928): 2. Ray Jones archives, Box 1: Folder 15. University of California, Berkeley, Asian American Studies, California.

solve the problem of unemployment. Under a capitalist system of wage slavery, the problem of unemployment cannot be solved. We need as a starting point the abolishment of production based on profit, replacing it with a need-based production. Under this system, workers are no longer wage slaves. They are producing for everybody and for themselves. Workers can have what they need, and never again be in the conundrum of overproduction. There will be no more closed factories, but rather, factories will need more workers to produce to meet the needs of everyone.

Even with everyone laboring to increase production, we will still not be able to meet needs. Our only worry will be that there aren’t enough people working, and no longer will there be people who sit around with no jobs.

Human beings are not lazy bums. Everywhere in the U.S., everywhere in San Francisco, everyone is shouting, “Give me work to do!” Yet no one hears what they are saying, and even if they do, they do nothing about it.

Unemployment! Joblessness! So much energy is wasted on people trying to find jobs, searching till they die. Many people kill themselves because they cannot find any work to do, regardless of how much is still needed in this world.

“Give us work to do!” This cry has never stopped, and has even grown louder. My friends, there is work to do if you rise up! If you use the energy spent on searching desperately for jobs, to overthrow the capitalist wage system, then you will have work to do. It is the capitalists that have brought about your unemployment. You

dilemma explodes the myths that some economists believe in. In reality, we have never had that moment of “surplus production” that these economists talk about. In all honesty, there is nothing that is produced in the world today that is too much for anyone. For example, in China, there isn’t enough rice to feed anyone, but rice is still being dumped out to maintain high prices.

The purpose of capitalist production today is not to meet the needs of people, but to increase profits for a few. Take the example of England exporting loads of textile to the Chinese market while many inside England are still walking around in tattered and torn clothes. The exports of every country are not the excess of that country. The wages that workers earn are not enough to buy the supplies that they need to live on. That is why these supplies are shipped to other countries to bring in profits for the capitalists. This is why it is not true to say that workers do not need these products. It is only that workers do not have the ability to buy these products that they need.

With regards to the complexities of this question, we will discuss further in “Anarchist Theory and Practicality.” For now, we will discuss the solutions that have been put forth before. What we produce, we should consume. Our message is: From each according to ability, to each according to need.

Naturally, this is not a message that can be realized immediately. To shift from a system of production that is based on profits, to a system that is based on need and consumption requires hard work, cooperation and new methods of production. But for now, let us courageously declare that this is the most effective way to

The Marxists claim to overthrow the state power of the capitalist KMT and replace them with the state power of the Communist Party. This, they term nicely as the “power of the classless state.” Anarchists adamantly oppose all forms of state power as simply manifestations of a class above society, dominating over everyday people. The majority of people cannot exercise state power, neither do they need state power. What we need, is a stateless, self-governing and liberated socialist society.¹⁴

They go on further to assert that the Communist Party is simply another form of capitalism administered by the state:

What the Communists really mean by “communism” is really “collectivism.” Land, property and factories are completely confiscated by the state and nationalized. As a result, the state becomes a mega-capitalist. Today, the peasants and the proletariat of various countries have become the slaves of landlords and capitalists, through wage slavery. Under the Communist Party in Russia, peasants and the proletariat are enslaved by the state. Even though the state waves the banner of the “proletariat,” in reality, the state is the institution that exploits and dictates the proletariat.¹⁵

In contrast, they highlight the self-governing aspects of their program:

What anarcho-communism means, is that all property will be run by everyday people. Land will be owned by

¹⁴ Pingshe (n.d.), “The Difference between an Anarchist Party and a Communist Party.” Ray Jones archives, Box 1: Folder 7. University of California Berkeley, Asian American Studies, California.

¹⁵ Ibid.

peasants, and production will be organized by peasant councils. Factories will be run by workers and production organized by worker councils. All strategies of distribution and production will be decided by workers and peasant organizations. There will be no dominating ruling class, and everyone will enjoy the fruits of their labor, expressing their capacities and talents to the fullest. [...] This is true communism. There can never be communism under the state. Only anarchism can bring about true communism.¹⁶

Like several Chinese Americans at that time, the Pingshe members did not limit their organizing to mainland Chinese politics. The Industrial Workers of the World (I.W.W.), an anarchistic workers union that was active during the 1920s, highlights the repression that Chinese workers in the I.W.W. dealt with:

The Chinese workers in this country have discovered the I.W.W. And no sooner did it become known to the powers that direct the persecution against the I.W.W., than they began the usual raids on the meeting places of their locals, as for instance, in New York. We are informed that in Chicago they are trying to use the patriarchal mechanism of Chinese society to suppress and punish our Chinese fellow workers. Deportation is held out as an immediate prospect. Naturally they will first be held a long time in prison and suffer all kinds of brutalities [sic].

The I.W.W. article highlights particularly the collaboration between the Chinatown bourgeoisie and the US government in putting down workers' organizing attempts:

¹⁶ Ibid.

Library of Ray Jones
A Glow in the Dark
In this dark world,
I have my precious books.
Reading them word by word,
I seek brightness.
To the youth of today,
Come read these books!
The library of Ray Jones
With brightness we dispel this gloom
Freedom and fortune
will be savored
In the glorious future

Appendix

Translations of Writings by Ray Jones (Liu Zhongshi 刘宗世) and Pingshe (The Equality Society)

A. Give Us Work!²⁹

Unemployment has become an increasingly devastating problem facing our society. As the whole world sinks into deep economical crisis, we observe the increased dumping of goods, alongside increased poverty that leave hundreds and thousands of people cold and hungry. Even though government officials, capitalists, and philanthropists try to save the situation, the reality is that conditions are becoming worse and worse. That is because these people simply have no ability to solve the problem. This moment of

²⁹ Ru, "Give Us Work!" *Anarcho-Communist Monthly* December 1, 1934: 1. Anarchism collection, Ctn 1: 35. Him Mark Lai Collections, University of California, Berkeley Asian American Studies, California.

In the old society, it is not only women who experience oppression and pain. If women are not liberated, then men also cannot be liberated. You cannot think that simply because women have cut their hair short, or unbound their feet, and gone off to the factories to sell their labor as wage workers, that women are liberated. “Women’s liberation” is achieving true freedom for women, such that they are no longer bound by tradition, customs and all the repressions and authoritarianism of the old society.”

By reiterating that women’s liberation is not achieved merely by their departure from the household, and entrance into factories as wage labors, Jones shows himself to be consistent with an anti-capitalist vision of women’s liberation, albeit a secular one that sees traditions, customs and the authoritarianism of the old society as one and the same. Nonetheless, Jones and Pingshe show themselves to be striving a vision of human liberation of which women’s struggles against patriarchy is an integral part. Ray Jones and the Equality Society have contributed to the history of the Asian American radical tradition that goes beyond a politics of achieving state power. The members of his collective were workers, intellectuals and immigrants, who involved themselves in the political events occurring in China, as well as in their new home, the US. As active organizers, they distributed fliers and newsletters, corresponding also with workers in Cuba, trying to organize a branch among the Chinese workers there. As Spivak describes, they were avid readers with libraries of books cramped in their small sleeping quarters. Their history is one that will give strength to young anarchist Asian American youth, as we search for our own alternatives today. I will end this article with a message from Jones, to the “youth of today”.²⁸

²⁸ Jones, (n.d.), Manuscripts of essays. Ray Jones archives, Box 1: Folder 2. University of California, Berkeley, Asian American Studies, California

The Chinese number less than 100,000 in this country, and as they are mainly in occupations that keep them together and separate from other nationalities, we cannot see any other reason for this persecution than that the Chinese employers have turned to the headquarters of the persecution for assistance, which was, of course, cheerfully rendered [sic].¹⁷

The battle against the Chinatown bourgeoisie, who were known for their exploitation of Chinese workers, and collaboration with powers-that-be in both the U.S. and China, was also echoed by Pingshe propaganda. Embodying the spirit of class solidarity across color lines and international boundaries, Pingshe members crafted their alternative vision of worker’s control of factories, in a manner that resonated with the sentiments and conditions of Chinese American workers in San Francisco.

The Great Depression and the San Francisco General Strike

In “Give us work!” published in Dec 1934, during the era of the Great Depression, Pingshe members undertake an analysis of the economic shakedown that had a strong class and internationalist analysis. They wrote:

The purpose of capitalist production today is not to meet the needs of people, but to increase profits for a few. Take the example of England exporting loads of textile to the Chinese market while many inside England are still walking around in tattered and torn clothes. The exports of every country are not the excess of that country. The wages that workers earn is

¹⁷ *One Big Union Monthly*, Industrial Workers of the World, March 1919.

not enough to buy the supplies that they need to live on. That is why these supplies are shipped to other countries to bring in profits for the capitalists. This is why it is not true to say that workers do not need these products. It is only that workers do not have the ability to buy these products that they need.¹⁸

Targeted at the working people of San Francisco Chinatown, the article attempted to link their hardships in U.S. with the poverty that their relatives in China were also going through. Their message broke down the notion of capitalist development in countries such as the U.S. and England by focusing instead on the experiences of the working class in these nations. In doing so, the article asserted an internationalist working class struggle that was both particular to the needs of a Chinese American working class, and broad enough to project solidarity with other workers.

The article was also unique for its vision of who should run society. In addressing the workers, the article says:

Even though government officials, capitalists and philanthropists try to save the situation, the reality is that conditions are becoming worse and worse. That is because these people simply have no ability to solve the problem.¹⁹

Lambasting “government officials, capitalists and philanthropists” broadly, asserting “these people’s” inability to solve the problems of unemployment, the Pingshe members reiterated their opposition to any states and ruling classes, regardless of nation. Instead, they pushed for workers’ control of their own workplaces, planning and deciding production quota.

¹⁸ See Appendix 1.

¹⁹ Ibid.

The support of Pingshe toward women in the community did not begin and end with labor struggles. Addressing a public letter entitled “Women’s Liberation” to a woman named “Yun,” that was printed in the newspaper, Jones urges her to use her education towards the liberation of other men and women, and not be satisfied with a job with the sole intention of making money. His critiques of patriarchy are targeted at the marriage traditions that are predominant not only in China, but also specific to the practices of Chinese American workers. He writes,

You see, people today still see marriage as a monetary exchange. Men and women alike are similarly oppressed by such traditions belonging to the old society, and so are unable to seek sexual liberation. There are many Gold Mountain workers in America who are also enslaving young women, degrading and insulting them, selling them to old men as young mistresses. There are many overseas Chinese who have lived in America for decades and suffered under capitalism, worked humiliating and degrading jobs, or committed some shameless crimes, and saved some meager amounts of money in the process. These people go back to their hometowns, pretending that they made a fortune as a big shot in the West. Actually, it is just posturing, showing off, and a way of deceiving poor young women into becoming their mistresses. These deceitful Gold Mountain workers should feel guilty for what they are doing.²⁷

Jones ties the liberation of men and women intricately, and discusses liberation beyond superficial appearances, albeit a secular one. He continues,

²⁷ Jones, (n.d.), “Women’s Liberation,” unnamed newspaper, page[?]. Ray Jones archives, Box 1: Folder 13. University of California, Berkeley, Asian American Studies, California.

3. The vision of anarcho-communism is to abolish capitalist nations. Every anarchist worker must not deviate from this vision. To pursue this, workers need to expand their daily struggles into a working class struggle and work to destroy the very foundations of capitalism and the state.

We, the workers need to remember these three lessons when we fight our next battle!²³

A Struggle in Chinatown

Women workers were at the forefront of workers struggles in Chinatown, as Pingshe would acknowledge. Calling for support of “female garment workers who suffer from severe lung diseases [...] and thirty women who died from being overworked by the boss at the garment factory,”²⁴ Pingshe called for a general strike in support of the striking garment workers in Chinatown. The flier had the title,

Liberation has arrived for Chinese Workers
Zhongxing Garment Workers are at the frontline
All American workers unite in struggle²⁵

Even while specifically organizing Chinese workers, Pingshe’s flier projected their struggle as a nation-wide struggle alongside other American workers of “different genders, races and nationalities.”²⁶

²³ *Ibid.*

²⁴ Pingshe, “An Alert to Fellow Chinese Workers.” March 4, 1938. Ray Jones Archives, Box 1: Folder 19. University of California, Berkeley, Asian American Studies, California.

²⁵ See Appendix B. Amerasia Journal 2008 Pingshe 151

²⁶ *Ibid.*

It is within these efforts to push for an overthrow of the capitalist system and struggle for a worker’s control system of production, that Pingshe members attacked President Roosevelt’s attempt to resuscitate the capitalist economy in a top-down manner. Going against the current, Pingshe members condemned the New Deal and its accompaniment, the National Recovery Administration (NRA), which more prominent revolutionary parties in the country had supported. In a polemic labeling Roosevelt a “number one leading capitalist dog” who answers to his “master,” the “capitalist ruling class,” Pingshe members wrote,

The capitalist project that Roosevelt so carefully nourished has become bankrupt. His master, the capitalist ruling class, will soon be greeted by the raving cheers of the victorious working class. In a bid to save his masters, Roosevelt has been cracking his brain day and night. Without the ingenuity of the Monkey God, his tactics, including the most famous NRA, have failed one after another. We see the loss of American jobs, the sharpening of revolutions, and we know that Roosevelt is helpless. To the Number One capitalist dog: It is time to give up!²⁰

While the victorious claims of Pingshe members may sound like empty calls today, the verdict on the victory of the working class was not clearly out yet in the early 1930s. Therefore, it is important to understand Pingshe writings in the context of rebellion and upheavals taking place in the U.S. during that period. In the same June 1934 issue of *Anarcho-Communist Monthly*, Pingshe members spread news of the San Francisco General Strike that was taking place at that time. Initiated by the International Longshoremen’s

²⁰ Anarcho Communist Alliance, “Capitalist Dog, Beware!” *Anarcho Communist Monthly* (July 1928). Him Mark Lai Collections, Carton 1: 35. University of California, Berkeley, Asian American Studies, California.

Association (ILA), San Francisco was shut down in a four-day long general strike that was as much in support of the demands of long-shoremen unions to organize independently, as it was against the repression that the police employed against the striking workers. In support of these striking workers, Pingshe members entitled their piece, "Capitalist Dogs, Beware!" It said:

The agitation of dockworkers in San Francisco has been spreading from Seattle, Portland, to Los Angeles. The actions of these heroic people have burst the bubbles of the capitalist ruling class and their servants, the police. To protect the interests of their masters, the police have roughened up, by not only intimidating these revolutionary workers but also by threatening to massacre them to bring a halt to their revolutionary actions. However, the spirit of these workers will live on forever, even if their physical bodies are tortured. The calls of revolution have shaken the entire world, the blood of revolution will burst forth. When that happens, these servants, these dogs will lose their lives. We warn them now: You, the running dogs of capitalists, beware!²¹

The third issue of the *Anarcho-Communist Monthly* coincided with the failure of the San Francisco General Strike. The article acknowledged the courage of the striking workers in resisting state repression, yet went forth to critique some of its organizing methods. The two main criticisms of the strike was that it relied too much on the union bureaucracy which Pingshe believed, ultimately betrayed the workers. They write:

The failure of this strike stems from a lack of revolutionary move toward the confiscation of goods at

²¹ *Ibid.*

the start of the strike. That is why the strike became so vulnerable to manipulation from traitors within, who thwarted the workers attempts to institute direct workers control. In the end, the strike was controlled by the bourgeois democracy. Any movement controlled by the bourgeois bureaucracy can only be a failure.²²

It is not presumptuous to assume that the "bourgeois bureaucracy" that the article referred to, was the Roosevelt administration and its union collaborators who sought to co-opt the revolutionary action of the workers toward more conciliatory directions, such as the New Deal.

The article concludes by offering some future lessons for striking workers to draw from:

Despite its failure, this recent strike imparts some valuable lessons:

1. The start of a strike needs to coincide with the confiscation of goods. Workers need to seize the fruits of their labor that have been controlled by the capitalists.
2. The working class can only seek salvation in economic equality. This is why workers need to vehemently reject the battle for bureaucratic power and the negotiation of wages. Workers must not let their movement be controlled by the bureaucracy. Our fighting strategy needs to reflect the belief that "The liberation of the working class is the matter of the working class itself."

²² Anarcho Communist Alliance, "An Analysis of the San Francisco General Strike," *Anarcho Communist Monthly* (August 1, 1934): 1. Him Mark Lai Collection, Ctn 1: 35. University of California Berkeley, Asian American Studies, California.