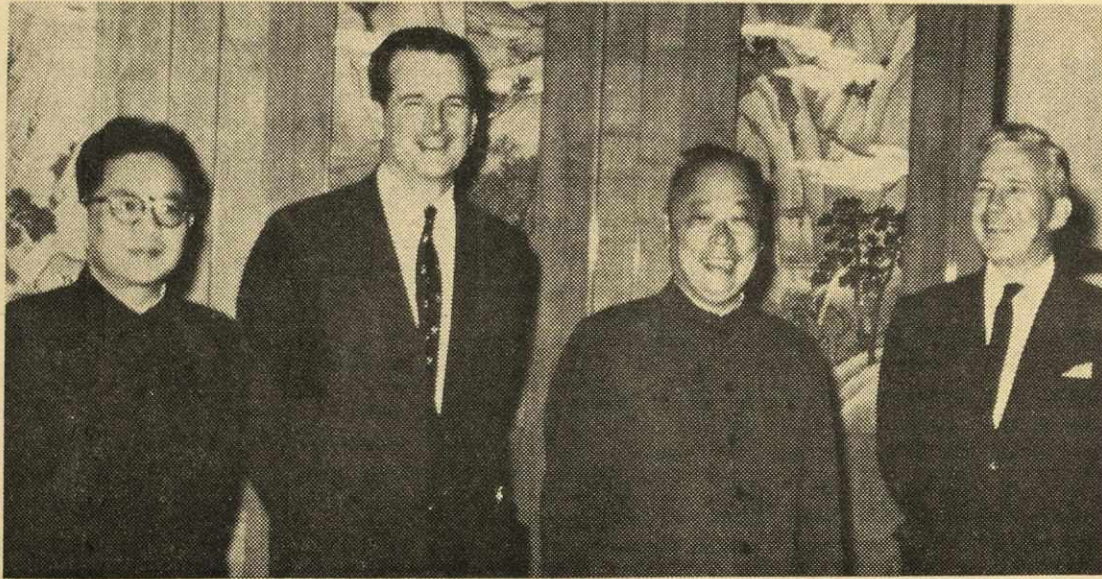


BEHIND THE BAMBOO CURTAIN :



Last spring Dr. Bissell visited China at the invitation of the Chinese themselves, thus joining the relatively small group of Westerners who have been privileged to see behind the "bamboo curtain". In the photograph above, Dr. Bissell (second from left) is flanked by Mr. Chen Chung Ching (left) his official host, and the foreign minister (right, Marshall Chen Yi). Also in the picture is Dr. Bissell's companion during the trip, Dr. Geoffrey Andrew, executive director of the Canadian Universities Foundation.

SPECIAL REPORT
A RARE VISIT by DR. CLAUDE BISSELL
RED CHINA TODAY

FROM THE VARSITY

The invitation to visit China came from the Chinese People's Association for Cultural Relations with Foreign Countries and was a direct aftermath of the visit to Canada in the late summer and early fall of 1960 of the Peking Opera company. I met the Vice-President of the Association, Mr. Chen Chung-Ching, who accompanied the opera company, on several occasions, and it was as a result of our conversations that the invitation came. A similar invitation had come to Geoffrey Andrew, at the time Dean and Deputy to the President of The University of British Columbia, and now Executive Director of the Canadian Universities Foundation, and we arranged to go together. Our direct concern in China was with the system of higher education and the cultural life. But on occasion we deviated from this programme in order to see some of the industrial expansion and to observe at first-hand the operation of a commune.

Without a knowledge of the language and cultural and historical background, one can make only groping, personal, and highly tentative conclusion. Of one thing, however, I am sure: it is absurd to see China either as a land of Utopian splendour or as one of gray and grim depression. Such attitudes are the result of a highly biased principle of selectivity. China supplies evidence for almost any conclusion you wish to draw, given the proper moral and political presuppositions. Of another thing I am sure: the Chinese have turned the entertainment of official guests into a high art. It may be, as I was told by an embittered informant in Hong Kong, that they are adept in the use of extravagant friendliness for political purposes. This may be so, but it is impossible not to be charmed by the Chinese. There is a meticulous concern for one's every convenience — always relaxed and informal, never fussy and officious.

I shall begin with a simple generalization about one's response to the general environment. Everybody who has been to China emphasizes the puritanism and austerity of the country, the lack of colour, on the streets, the dull uniformity of the faded blue uniform that is worn by both men and women. I shall never forget my first entrance to a Chinese city — Canton; it was a hauntingly depressing experience. Our car was the only passenger car on the streets and the city looked like a ghastly unearthed tomb magically populated by thousands of human beings. The signs on the supporting pillars along the sidewalks — in Hong Kong, gay and

colourful — were faded; doors beneath opened into dark, repulsive rooms. At night we drove through darkened streets with only an occasional light visible. The figures in the tomb had all suddenly disappeared. But then at a concert, or an opera, or an acrobatic show in the evening, the torch of life would suddenly be rekindled. We got the impression that the joyless puritanism of the day had disappeared and that these were a people who knew the full meaning of pleasure. There was a sense of complete absorption in the music or drama, a pure delight that embraced the whole audience — predominantly youthful in its composition, but ranging in age from young toddlers to old men and women. The regime's emphasis upon the cultural development of the country is one of the more encouraging signs. The great leap forward was not simply an attempt to create in a few years a modern industrial civilization; it was also a concerted attempt to recover the cultural past in its full glory and to make it available to as many people as possible. I emphasize the past, for the new regime has not itself fostered creativity. The art that we saw, for instance, was uniformly depressing in the best brave-new, dull-new world communist style, either conceived of as heroic posters or as cozy sentimentalism very similar to what you would find in a number of popular North American magazines.

We arrived in Peking just after the dissolution of the People's Congress — which had met in secret, and from which no significant word had emerged. But it was clear that the Congress had conducted a painful exercise in self-analysis and self-assessment. After the great leap forward the country had come to rest, a little shaken and a long way off from the announced goal. But I think that it would be false to say that China has entered upon a period of acute disillusionment or that there is any wide-spread disaffection with the regime. One got the impression of a deliberate change in pace, of a subtle attempt to adjust the regime to the new mood. There was, for instance, no evidence of propaganda on a massive and concerted basis such as previous visitors had reported. The public loud speakers were silent. Even the propaganda posters looked faded and inconspicuous. Few new buildings were going up, although there was evidence on all sides of the feverish activity during the great leap. Even the universities, in our western civilization often the liveliest centres of building activity, were not engaged in large expansion programmes. Indeed, we were told by a minister in the Department of Education that it was not proposed for a few years to expand higher education greatly beyond its present numbers, but rather to increase part-time educational facilities. The general at-

mosphere emerged obliquely in the English-language newspaper that was released for the edification of visitors, and that presumably provided a summary of the news available in Chinese. The tone was, in general, "Now, let's get together for the long haul." There was repeated insistence that there had been no abdication of the major principles. The great achievements in various fields of socialist construction," declared one editorial "have proved that the general line, the big leap forward, and the people's commune are entirely correct." "The task now," the editorial suggested, "is one of consolidation and adjustment." Then followed the significant statement, "The vital link in the present work of adjustment in the national economy is the restoration and expansion of agricultural production." Other significant statements occurred in a summary of the meeting of the third session of the Third National Committee of the Chinese People's Political Consultatives Conference. The report emphasized the necessity for improving research and the quality of teaching, and called for the adoption of the principle of democratic centralism in which there was both discipline and freedom and both unity of will and personal ease of mind. Everyone," said the report, "should accustom oneself to making and accepting criticism; the more democracy is developed, the mightier centralism will be."

From the beginning of our stay to the end we constantly explored with our hosts the problem of Sino-Soviet relationships, but we were rarely able to achieve a breakthrough. The attitude was always one of rigid correctness, a little like devout fundamentalists conscious of serious backsliding but determined to assert the pristine faith. But the signs of a rift were cumulatively impressive. For one thing, we did not see the groups of Soviet technicians that previous visitors had reported. The newspaper had almost no releases with a dateline from Moscow and very little indeed about the activities of the great seedbed of communism. On May Day, the only pictures to appear were those of Engels, Marx, Lenin and Stalin, and at the state banquet which preceded the celebration of May Day — and at which we were guests — no speaker mentioned the present Soviet leaders. The most significant reference — although an indirect one — to the relationship came in an hour-long interview that we had with Chen Yi, the Foreign Minister. He soliloquized at great length on the problem of China, declaring vigorously that the Chinese problem had been solved, by which I presume he meant the problem of unifying the country and launching it on a course of systematic development. "We have," he declared, "a problem here on a scale

FROM THE MONASTERY WINDOW :

ALAN ABBOTT
ARGUES ABOUT



OUR LIBRARY

Although my task in this column is to comment over a wide range of political affairs, I shall again reserve my venom this week for the university scene. In fact my pen will hardly be still until the monstrous inadequacy of our university library has been attended to.

Those of us who were at the university two years ago will recall the pleasant atmosphere invoked at that time by the downstairs reading-room in which a profusion of journals and periodicals displayed in the shelves around the walls bore daily witness to the good taste of the librarian. With the departure of this worthy incumbent for greener pastures, his successor, in an unfortunate demonstration of the new broom principle swept away this oasis of good taste, only to establish in its place a minor monument to vulgarity and inefficiency. Today, alas, this once peaceful refuge of scholars is packed with "freschettes" brooding like pregnant bullfrogs over a motley assortment of works classified under the totally spurious designation "humanities." The periodicals, incredibly, are divided between two baleries of equally monstrous appearance, one upstairs and one down. The present librarian, apparently, has failed to realize that dark mahogany and light oak woodwork do not mix.

While the poverty of the librarian's aesthetic judgment might be something we have to put up with, the system under which books are distributed should not be tolerated for another unnecessary hour. For those who have experienced the unremitting fatuity of the three hour reserve system, my comments will need no further explanations. For those who are not familiar with the operation of this system, I must offer a word of explanation.

On the pretext of there being insufficient books to cover the demand, certain books are allowed to circulate only for a limited three hour period before being recalled. The three hour periods are not specified in terms of any three consecutive hours, but in terms of 9:00 a.m. to 12 noon, to 3:00 p.m., and so forth. None of these reserve books may leave the library until 9:00 p.m.

It hardly needs saying that these arbitrary periods do not correspond with the times allocated for lecture periods, which are based on intervals of half-past the hour. The result is that complicated reference works and texts, which for their proper understanding require hours of concentration and cool reflection, are necessarily ingested in chopped-up half hour sessions between lecture room and library. Usually, although happily not always, the rules are applied with a senseless rigidity and bovine, unimaginativeness worthy of the "petit fonctionnaire" mentality. Only recently I experienced having to take out a lengthy book in convenient three hour doses, when three of the four identical copies on the reserve shelf had never been opened in the course of the year. On returning the book an hour late, I was forced to pay a fine, notwithstanding the total lack of demand for the book in question. There are many ways in which stupidity can be displayed, and this, in my opinion is one of them.

I understand that professors are largely responsible for the rules governing reserve books, although not for the unimaginative way the rules are made to apply. The professor in charge of a course is responsible for ordering the copies of any book deemed suitable to his course requirements, and for placing books on the reserve list. In the case of one economics course I have had the misfortune to attend, some forty or more students have access to precisely one copy of a cheap paper-bound report of a Royal Commission which every student must peruse for the successful completion of his term paper. In my own mind there is little excuse for such parsimony and if professors of economics are indifferent to the hardships caused by the realities of supply and demand in such matters, discredit must reflect on them both in their capacities as economists and as professors.

What needs to be born in upon the minds of librarians and professors alike, is that the library exists as a vital service in the university system. It should therefore operate to serve the needs of students, and not the convenience of itself. Only the grand lady herself who works in the library at night has the wit apparently to perceive this. That there should be a shortage of books at all reflects an extraordinary sense of values on the part of the university administration. So long as substantial sums of money are voted to the Student's Council to be squandered on such fatuous and unnecessary exercises as a Winter Carnival, there should be no excuse for a lack of books.

HIGHWAYMAN RIDES AGAIN

By LANNIE RICE

The Highwaymen, famed folk singing group, did their stuff before a larger than capacity crowd in the Dal gym, Monday, the 19th of November.

The group, just out of university themselves, sang a varied selection of folk, near-folk, and pseudo-folk songs which almost held the attention of the enthusiastic crowd for two hours.

Much can be said for the reception the students gave the Highwaymen, but even more can be said for what the Highwaymen gave us in return. They proved themselves Highwaymen in every sense of the word, the general concensus of opinion being, as the Spanish say, "guano."

far greater than that faced and solved by our Russian friends. It is not a question of imitation or even of emulation of Russia; it is a question of making use of all the resources and technology, and this means," he said significantly, "calling upon the resources of western powers — of France and England and Italy, and even," he added, "the United States."

If one combines Chen Yi's words with what one noticed of the general mood of the country it may not be unfeeling to suggest that modern China is prepared for a major change in policy, perhaps for some fundamental readaptation

of the rigid doctrines by which she had lived. The problem, simply in terms of creating a subsistence economy for seven hundred million people, is so vast that even the ruling hierarchy may have awakened from their dream of a communist miracle. The great tragedy at the present time is that there appears to be no way by which the western world can help in the process of adaptation. For this China herself must take much of the blame. But our habit of viewing the Chinese dilemma as a pretext for sensational reporting or as an object lesson in communist bungling is a sad commentary both on our humanity and our political wisdom.