German Communist Otto Braun recalls his years spent working as Comintern military adviser to the CCP in China and notes the varying levels of risk faced by non-Chinese versus Chinese Communists in Shanghai during the years 1932–1933: “the conditions under which we worked were hazardous. We non-Chinese, of course, could meet in relative safety, for we were furnished with ‘clean’ passports and lived in the International Settlement or the French Concession. We had only to exercise the necessary caution, mix exclusively with foreigners in public, occasionally visit a club, and otherwise behave as inconspicuously as possible.”1 Given the Chinese Communists’ environment of “white terror”2—as well as the facts that few Russian-, German-, and English-speaking Party functionaries knew Chinese or any other Asian languages and that Soviets in China “were under strict orders to avoid social contacts with the Chinese”3—it is not surprising that extreme isolation was a constant feature of work among Communist functionaries in China. Ignorance about local conditions and a pervasive Orientalist mentality that construed travel to and residence in China as a form of exile to an exotic hinterland compounded the problem. Reinhart Kossler writes about the memoirs of Soviet advisers to China from 1923 to 1927: “advisers often evoke a striking sense of strangeness or ‘exotism’ of the country they came to assist.” The accounts also discuss “‘medieval’ conditions where backwardness is meant to be conveyed”; moreover, in “analytic documents of the time, the same terminology and attitude prevailed.”4

On the face of things, the situation in Vladivostok was very different. Because the port city was under Soviet control, Communists did not have to work entirely underground, and the city was famous for its mix of peoples and cultures.5 Yet, from the viewpoint of the metropole and its agents, during a time of heightened tensions with rival powers when spies were everywhere in the city and nearby borderlands, Communist functionaries could not be...
too guarded in their relations with Asian cadres, Japanese or not. Proximity to Japan and China did not translate into easier communication or travel between Vladivostok and these countries. As a result, Communist functionaries experienced many of the same problems as their counterparts in Shanghai.

At the same time, on the other side of the Pacific the staff of the American Bureau—PPTUS in San Francisco—spoke of a sense of isolation, frustration, and helplessness that in spirit was remarkably akin to that expressed by the staff in Shanghai. Although the level of repression did not compare to what existed in Shanghai, both the first bureau head Harrison George and his successor Eddy felt burdened by demands impossible to meet given the human and material resources available to them, frustrated by their inability to develop and sustain ties with either Chinese and Japanese immigrant workers within the United States or Chinese and Japanese seamen on ships that sailed into U.S. ports, and cut off from both the national and local leaderships of the American Party and the apparatus in Moscow.

In this chapter I examine the spread of pan-Pacific operations of the international Communist movement, both outward from Moscow toward the Dalkrai, China, Japan, and across the Pacific and Atlantic oceans and back and forth among the countries bordering the Pacific. In particular, I focus on the activities of Communist functionaries who were appointed to positions in the PPTUS following its formation in 1927 and stationed in cities that functioned as major regional nodal points in the pan-Pacific arena. These included the Pacific ports of Shanghai, Vladivostok, and San Francisco, and the inland but strategically located city of Berlin. When regarding intelligence activity, Shanghai held particular importance because it was home to the Comintern’s FEB and the OMS in China. Although the FEB was responsible for overseeing the direction of Communist parties across Asia and also included a military section, the OMS acted as “the central relaying-point for the Comintern’s money and communications in Shanghai” and handled all logistics related to the movement and accommodation of agents.6

Within this international and regionally organized web of operations, the smooth flow of communications, materials (including money and documents), and people was regularly obstructed by an array of accidental albeit likely events, including intervention by agents of rival imperial powers and/or private shipping companies, human and technical errors and mishaps, and occasionally fierce personal rivalries combined with bitter ideological conflicts. As a result, constant maneuvering on the ground, both within and beyond the interstices of a particular spatial location, was necessary, prior to, during, and after any transaction or change of place. Indeed, only through the efforts of multiple and variously placed actors, who were more or less capable by reason of race, gender, nationality, political allegiance, and history, and happenstance of building association networks that exceeded localized social relations to spaces that encompassed the regional, national, and international
scales, was activism rather than entrapment possible. With the exception of the auxiliary roles of “wife” and contact among women workers, activism was almost exclusively gendered male. It is likewise important to recognize that in some instances all movement and resistance were rendered impossible.7

**Difficulties in Setting Up “An Apparatus for the PPTUS”**

Following the convening of the Pan-Pacific Trade Union Conference in May 1927, M. Apletin, Soviet member of the newly founded PPTUS, took charge of the “central secretarial and publishing work” from an office in Hankow. In October, after being “exiled to Moscow and then China in 1926 when Apletin left his wife for the party’s confidential typist [Paddy Ayriss], who was expecting his child,” CPGB member George Hardy,8 “together with ‘Paddy’ who acted as a technical assistant,” replaced the “old staff.” Hardy’s tenure, with Ayriss, ran through the headquarters’ relocation to Shanghai in the wake of the Canton uprising in mid-December and up to the Second Plenum of the PPTUS held in early February 1928—when Earl Browder and Karlis Janson took over—and again from mid-February 1929 to the end of April 1930, when as a result of the police “laying bare some details about the former and present George” it was decided “it is best that he be evaporated from here.”9

Writing to his supervisor Alexander in Moscow in November 1929,10 Hardy laid bare the severe constraints under which they worked.

My period at Hankow in 1[9]28 [sic] was one of almost absolute isolation, even from the Chinese, and I was forced to content myself with issuing manifestoes, trying to build up communications and getting out the ‘PPW’. . . . Now since I have returned (for nearly one year), I, with one technical worker, have carried on absolutely alone, as far as the work of the trade union movement is concerned, as well as having to take my part in the work as a member of the Far Eastern Bureau of the CI. I will only say that it has been a most strenuous period for me. Not only have I have been alone but because of the fact I have been unable to develop an apparatus for the PPTUS to efficiently carry on the work.

The situation was especially dire for the Japanese. Not only was the “possibility of police interception of postal communications in Japan” omnipresent, which necessitated communicating briefly and “in code,” but here he was “alone and it is most difficult for Japanese comrades to come to Shanghai or even to exist here when they do arrive.”11

Nor were these problems new. In March 1928, Browder told Alexander why the recent issue of the PPW was late: “It is very unfortunate that our technical connections are so round-about that delays like this are unavoidable, and accumulate. All the materials in this issue you have already received in manuscript.”12 And in June, Browder and Janson reported, “You may realize
the difficulty to be connected with Japan by this, that to reach us it takes 12 to 15 days, so much must one travel about before there can be any hopes to land safely in Shanghai." In addition, language was a problem. "The weakest point of our activities," Alexander reminded Hardy in September 1929, "is that the 'Pan Pacific Worker' appears only in English, whilst it is needed most of all for the Japanese, Chinese, Koreans, Hindus, and others." Moreover, such weaknesses were far more than simply "technical" matters. In the same letter, Alexander identified the countries with which the PPTUS was "situated closest" to only in geographical terms: "As regards China, where the connections are closest, the position there cannot be considered at all what it should be... Japan, despite her geographical proximity, is still rather far from us. Profound movements are taking place there... Have you any really serious connections, do you succeed in assisting and helping our Japanese comrades, or are you cut off from Japan?... Things are still worse in Korea. This year there was quite a considerable strike movement in Korea; at the same time we are badly connected with this movement... You have good connections with the Philippines, and these connections must be reinforced, but on the other hand things are bad in Singapore, Formosa, and still worse in India and Indonesia. Can we be satisfied with such a position?"

At the same time, the threat of persecution entailed isolation from local activists and movements in neighboring countries where forms of communication were risky, "round-about," and protracted if not entirely obstructed, involved a severe lack of personnel (in particular of staff fluent in Asian languages) or other resources, and imposed always uncertain delivery of funding to carry out an extremely ambitious agenda. In addition to the sum total of these largely external problems impeding the establishment of an apparatus for the PPTUS in Shanghai, fierce personal and partisan rivalries among leading staff members presented significant internal problems. In fact, shortly after Browder replaced Hardy as head of the PPTUS such conflicts severely undermined, if not paralyzed, the entire operation.

In hindsight, the arrangement by which Browder (known as Morris and Russell in China) was expected to cooperate with Janson (alias Charlie Stein) in directing the work from the shared headquarters in Shanghai was bound to generate conflict, especially because Janson came to this assignment with considerable experience for the Profintern and Comintern in Japan and China, including in Shanghai. By the beginning of December 1927, therefore, he was in a position to send Alexander detailed "notes" on the situation in the CCP and the Chinese trade unions, as well as the work of the PPTUS. Janson also benefited from the assistance of his wife Annie. Perhaps most important, he received "over $5000," of which "$1500" had to be paid to "the printing house" while the rest went toward meeting the costs of convening the Second Plenum of the PPTUS and sending delegates to the Fourth Profintern Congress that spring in Moscow. In this regard, E. H. Carr comments, "The authority
of Yanson resting in his role as the dispenser of Comintern funds, channelled through the Far Eastern bureau of Comintern in Shanghai, was also doubtless enhanced.”20

Although initially Browder reported, “We keep in the closest touch in all questions of policy and practical work and so far have had no trouble in arriving at common views,”21 the situation rapidly deteriorated. Hardy claimed that during the period “E. B. was in charge . . . nothing was done except to publish the magazine [PPW], except for what Stein did in building up communications with Singapore and Japan, and giving direction to the Chinese strikes . . . You are also fully aware of the fact that E. B. was most of the time absent from headquarters at Shanghai, part time in the Philippines and then at the VI World Congress, as well as being engaged in a factional struggle [among the top ranks of the CPUSA]22 which extended to China.”23

For his part, on the heels of the Third Plenum of the PPTUS, held October 27–28, 1928, in Shanghai, Janson informed Lozovsky that Browder had abruptly “dropped all work and left for Moscow, departing he categorically declined to give me the keys to the PPTUS post office box . . . Already in the spring it became clear that Earl does not want to provide for TOS [PPTUS] a collective leadership and wants to dismiss me.” By Janson’s own account, he challenged Browder’s authority, such as when he refused to approve “his journey from Bombay to Australia . . . consider[ing] that Earl’s participation in the Congress in Australia could strain relations with TOS and it is more expedient to organize by letter.” More to the point perhaps, he commented, “in general Earl does not enjoy authority and popularity among the Chinese and Japanese comrades even Filipino comrades all turn more to me.” In conclusion, Janson declared, “it is necessary for one of us to leave here. I am pointing out that I cannot concede the Chinese trade union leadership to Earl because it signified that I am subordinate to him.”24 The impasse was resolved at the end of January of the next year when “everybody had to take to their heels and flee” against the threat of a raid and immediate arrest by “police and intelligence services of the Chinese and other governments.” Once in Moscow, “Stalin saved Browder’s neck.”25

“We Are Hanging As If By a Thread”: The Odds against Conducting Pan-Pacific Work from Offices in Shanghai

In January 1928 head of the Profintern Solomon A. Lozovsky wrote his PPTUS “friends” in China: “I personally give great significance to this work.” Six weeks later “at the very height of the [Fourth Profintern] congress he declared in another letter that among all the commissions at work “for us the most important, of course, are the Chinese and Japanese.”26 Moreover, the magnitude of the task more than equaled the weight of Lozovsky’s endorsement. During the first year and a half, the PPTUS staff’s duties included writing, editing,
publishing, and disseminating the *PPW*, which with No. 17 was issued “under a new cover, entitled the ‘Far Eastern Monthly’”; beginning in April an “Australian edition” of the *PPW* began to appear “twice a month.” In addition, the PPTUS staff gave advice and funds to the All-China Labor Federation (ACLF) with whose leaders it met weekly, convened conferences with representatives of the ACLF and delegations from Japan and the Philippines, organized the Second Pan-Pacific Trade Union Conference from August 15 to 20, 1929, in Vladivostok, issued manifestoes and press statements, ran a “Press Service” that sent out a “constant supply of information” to other countries, and formed connections with and supported Communists, trade union activists, and native workers in China, Japan, the Philippines, Korea, Indonesia, the Malay States, Formosa, and India. During the first half of 1928 the staff initiated “the systematic translation of important documents and articles into the principal languages of the Far East,” after which the staff submitted a proposal to the secretariat of the Profintern to organize “a translation-publishing program in the Eastern languages—Chinese, Japanese, Indonesian, Tagalo [sic] etc.”

Yet, barely two months after the move to Shanghai the operations suffered an almost total collapse. “Esteemed Aleksandr,” Janson wrote, “During the last period raids and arrests are happening everywhere. The party and trade union apparatus in Shanghai, Hankow and Changsha are completely smashed . . . We are organizationally shattered.” To make matters worse, Janson knew that he might be held personally responsible for the debacle and thus errant in the Profintern’s judgment. He therefore gave a detailed account of the situation, to which Browder assented in a separate letter. First, the CCP “underestimates the trade union work,” and at the recent trade union conference the delegates adopted a resolution advocating “armed insurrection” over his recommendation to focus on “organizational work and strike strategy.” Nor did they have any “less difficulty with Japan” in trade union work. Janson also offered a thorough explanation about his inability to fulfill Alexander’s request for a certain size trade union delegation: “Even if the situation with regard to the police were not so highly unfavorable, we would still not have enough money, because now, with no ships to take, every delegate costs 425 am. dollars. And secondly . . . through H. we could send only a group of ten . . . and thirdly, we could not because many in Shanghai / including 2 Japanese comrades / have been arrested. Here now are concentrated so many spies / Chinese, English, Japanese /, that we are hanging as if by a thread. This is why I hope that although you will criticize me severely, all the same you will not send me to hard labor, because I did everything possible, frankly I am worn out.”

Nor was such a turn of events an isolated occurrence: in May 1930 CPUSA member Philip Aronberg “came to take over something and found nothing,” and about a year later beginning in April 1931 things again ground to a halt due to “a whole series of arrests which to a very large degree shattered our apparatus . . . have not ended as yet [June 9, 1931],” and the “absence of Leon
[head of the PPTUS Bureau from sometime during the first half of 1930][31] and the representative from FEB," leaving behind “the Chinese comrades Alice and myself [Edward].”[32] Moreover, the latest blow was truly devastating because it involved the arrest and defection of the head of the CCP’s Red Brigade Gu Shunzhang whose revelations to the KMT led to days of arrests and raids that decimated the CCP in Shanghai and also fostered “a paranoia that was as damaging as the raids themselves.”[33] Not a week later Yakov Rudnik (alias Hilaire Noulens), head of the OMS in Shanghai from March 1930, and his wife Tatyana Moiseenko were arrested, which temporarily forced the FEB to close and severed lines of communication between the Comintern and local Asian Communist parties.[34] Finally, the assault on Communists during this period was nearly lethal but for the “beginning of a policy of official collaboration” between the KMT and foreign police forces.[35] “Under such conditions,” Hardy noted, “there was a limit to the period a foreigner could stay in China without putting the lives of Chinese fellow-workers in jeopardy.”[36] In this regard, Lozovsky advised Stein, “The bulletin should not be clamorous.”[37] In a separate letter, he warned, “You ought to take into consideration the objective conditions and restrain the harshness in the style . . . To take into consideration the militarists, the terror, the fact that the workers are sent by the hundreds and thousands to execution for printing any kind of leaflet, it is essential.”[38] But, even while the CCP was riven by factionalism and nearly decimated by external suppression, “party leaders continued to make the organizing of labor the backbone of policy and to call for armed uprisings among workers and peasants.”[39] The policy accorded well with the Comintern leadership’s adoption of hard-line positions during the Third Period.

A single incident both captures this reality and raises the knotty question of racial prejudice. In May 1928 Browder and Janson reported, “Our printing arrangements have broken down entirely.” By their initial account, blame rested with the Chinese workers: “The trouble came from the Chinese workers in the shop, who resigned in a body rather than continue to print what they thought endangered their necks. The crisis came after another print shop, suspected of having printed a ‘red’ leaflet, had its whole staff of seventeen workers taken out and shot. It seems impossible to resume printing at this time, although we may be able to soon, having some encouragement from the proprietor who ‘wants the money.’ We have not been able to find a new printing place.” In his formal report on the PPTUS work since February, Browder rephrased his account in a way that demonstrated greater concern for the welfare of the Chinese workers, stating that they “lost” two issues of the PPW “due to the white terror, which by executing a whole print-shop staff so terrorized the printers that we could get nothing printed for three months.”[40] More significant, however, PPTUS staff were evidently reluctant if not unwilling to work jointly with Asian rather than Western cadres in the Shanghai bureau’s operations. In June 1930 and again about a month later, Leon warned by wire
and letter that, “until we get a real typist here (preferably an American typist) our work will be greatly hindered and we shall NOT be able to publish the Far Eastern [Bulletin].”

To be sure, for some tasks it was difficult to find anyone, be she American or non-Western. Reporting on what was accomplished in 1928, Browder commented, “Undoubtedly the weakest point in our work is the lack of a sufficient number of workers qualified to function in more than one country, that is, to really be able to work outside their own immediate trade unions, on an international scale.” More relevant perhaps, though presented by Browder as flowing “from this [weakest point],” was “the lack of interest still manifested by the left-wing movement in the imperialist countries, who do not sufficiently appreciate the importance of the Pan-Pacific movement, who neglect it, and who do not sufficiently try to understand it.” Indeed, more than two years later, in a letter addressed to the Executive Buro of the Profintern, the PPTUS decried the fact that “the connections & inter-relations between these two sectors of our international revolutionary front have been lamentably neglected.”

In February 1930 Hardy spelled out for the leadership in Moscow precisely just what such neglect entailed, in particular, the severity of the binding constraints and penalties to be incurred by Chinese activists who sought to move from activism at the local scale within the national space to organizing at the regional scale in the pan-Pacific arena.

The position is such that if I am arrested or removed at any time, most of the work stops. This is the risk you run as long as I remain alone. The next point: that of developing [sic] our organisation by helping out affiliated organisations directly. To do this I must have a capable comrade to go to the various countries to give organisational advice, etc. and help them to build up their respective organisations. I can use Chinese comrades in limited cases only such as for Singapore, Indo-China, Siam, but they cannot be used for Japan, Formosa, Korea, Philippines, Sumatra, Java etc. In the last two places there are high fees to pay to enter, recommendations to get and guarantees to be given by some merchant living there [sic] ... The USA immigration laws apply in the Philippines and the Japanese authorities also want guarantees ... Preferably an Anglo-Saxon comrade should be sent for this job, or if this is not possible, at least one who can speak and write a good English. He must have a good appearance and pass for a salesman, etc. ... We do not want persons here which the different Parties are desirous of getting rid of themselves, but comrades who are developing [sic] and have some experience, who can return home and make good use of their experiences here in their future work.

At the same time, fair-minded as the above account is, the report is nonetheless colored by suggestions of Western, or, to quote Hardy, “Anglo-Saxon,”
One wonders why his first concern was developing cadres for work back “home” rather than investing in the training of Chinese for work right “here.”

The CCP held a favorable opinion of Hardy. In response to the news several months earlier that he was to be called back to the USSR, the CCP Central Politbureau wrote to the Profintern leadership to “insistently demand” that they postpone his departure until May 1, 1930, or later. Yet their reasons showed that they did not share Hardy’s point of view regarding the purpose of sending foreign cadres to do work in China. They explained, “Com. Georg has stayed in China for a longer period, has understood more of conditions in China, and has rendered considerable help to our labour movement. At present when our work should be more intensified, it is of particul [sic] importance to have comrades who understand actual conditions here to guide work.”

This last insight was confirmed on a number of occasions by PPTUS staff themselves in their reports on the work in China. For example, in February 1928 Browder commented, “A very favorable influence upon our work has been exerted by the active collaboration in the Executive, since the Plenum, by Chinese and Japanese representatives. It is our opinion, drawn from this experience, that it is necessary not only in Plenum meetings, but in the interim work, that more representatives from other countries shall from time to time work for a month or two with the Executive Bureau.” In January 1931, on Moscow’s orders, a Chinese cadre was appointed to the newly reorganized Executive Bureau of the PPTUS. Lozovsky directed that the bureau was to include one representative of the ACLF and one representative of the FEB, along with Yufei as chairman, Leon as secretary, and Kennedy as organization-secretary. Two months later, even as he reiterated his threat regarding the need for “a special technical worker,” Leon reported favorably on the new “division of work,” by noting, “it helps us to pay more detailed attention to China.”

Thus, the leaderships in Moscow and Shanghai recognized that the PPTUS must form ties with local trade union activists and integrate into the highest levels of its operations Chinese, Japanese, and other “representatives” from countries across the region, if only to be able to produce and disseminate the PPW in the languages of the peoples for whom “it is needed most.” In this regard, the staff in Shanghai feared that with the contemplated “removal of the magazine” from China, the PPTUS “may lose its Oriental face.” This same staff, however, considered it essential that they receive Western-certified “technical” help whose allegiances were probably entirely extra-local and therefore more politically reliable. At the same time, the constant threat of repression, suffered unequally by Westerners and non-Westerners, dwarfed all other considerations.

Under these circumstances, one solution was to perfect the system of operation. In anticipation of the headquarters’ relocation to Shanghai, at the beginning of December 1927 Janson laid out detailed plans to this effect. First, they would issue the PPW in Shanghai, but they would nonetheless have “to
remain underground, and on account of the organization of the printing house, etc. to grease the French police." “On a parallel front,” they must create a “Research Institute of Industry and Agriculture” that would “not only gather information we need, but that could also serve as our legal apparatus for the congress and so on.” Last, they must “create a covert apparatus for connecting with Chinese trade unions since the apparatus formed by the OMS ECCI trade union meeting does not function.”50 Alternatively, they could transfer the PPTUS base of operations to single or multiple sites outside China.

**Vladivostok: So Near and Yet So Far**

Vladivostok was the Soviets’ gateway to the Pacific. No less important than its direct connection by railroad to the Soviet seat of power was the city’s position in relation to East and Northeast Asia. Situated as it was immediately north of Korea, Northeast China (also known as Manchuria), directly across the East Sea (Sea of Japan) from Japan, and not far south of Sakhalin, the Kurile Islands, and Kamchatka, the port city was in an ideal location for disseminating Communist propaganda across Asia and recruiting Asian cadres. Moreover, the city and surrounding region included large numbers of Chinese and Koreans along with Russians and Ukrainians, as well as smaller numbers of Japanese and Latvians, a regular influx of foreign and above all Japanese seamen on Japanese ships that visited the port, and thousands of seasonal Japanese workers who converged on the nearby peninsula of Kamchatka and island of Sakhalin to work in the Japanese-dominated fishing and mining industries. The difficulty in creating a stable base of operations inside Japan added further to the strategic importance of Vladivostok. Finally, because of the mix of peoples and its sanctioned cultural autonomy during the 1920s and 1930s, the city was home to a rich cultural life with a “dozen languages echoed in local stores, banks, hotel lobbies, and brothels,” Chinese and Korean theaters, Chinese, Japanese, and Korean newspapers, and Korean schools, clubs, libraries, publishing houses, and hospitals.51

At the meeting of the Second Pan-Pacific Trade Union Conference in Vladivostok the PPTUS called attention to the strategic role played by seamen in the pan-Pacific arena, an insight the leaderships of the Profintern and transport workers in Asia had long ago articulated and acted upon. By the end of 1923, “the main activity of the Port Bureau [in Vladivostok] expressed itself in the work of the International Seamens’ [sic] Club [Interclub].”52 Organized into Japanese, Chinese, and Korean sections, the Interclub offered a wide range of services, including language classes, social events, and publications in Chinese, Japanese, and Korean. For their part, recognizing “the great need of establishing a system of international connections of worker-correspondents in the countries of the Pacific,” especially in light of the imperial powers’ renewed interest in breaking such efforts, the delegates resolved, “to draw
in the seamen, who are travelling all over the world... At the same time we must organise groups of seamen themselves. The question of colored labor amongst seamen, and the problem of the general exploitation of seamen on board of capitalist ships had not been sufficiently enlightened."^53 At this very same moment, the delegates to the Second Conference of Transport Workers, who were also gathered in Vladivostok, decided "to establish a Pan-Pacific Secretariat of Transport Workers [TOST] with temporary residence in Vladivostok" whose first priority must be "the struggle against war and the danger of war, defense of the USSR."^54 TOST would become TOS IMPR following the formation of ISH (International Seamen and Harbor Workers) at a conference held on October 3, 1930, in Hamburg.

More concretely, from the time of its formation in December 1929 the Vladburo concentrated much of its energy on directing the activities of the Vladivostok Interclub. In December 1931, newly appointed chairman of the Vladburo Kennedy reminded Janson of this fact:^55 "As I already wrote to you the seamen must be considered one of our most important fields of work and I personly [sic] think the club has done some good work and is on the road to do better... We will give attention to this problem and I personly [sic] am to work with TOST on its day to day problems."^56 Both the physical proximity and close ties and the multiracial staffs enjoyed by the Vladburo, Port Bureau with Interclub, and TOST placed the work on a particularly advantageous footing. TOST was formed in August 1929: Finn Vaino Pukka, director of the Far Eastern Labor College in Vladivostok and newly appointed secretary of TOST; the Japanese member Takasaki; Chinese member Kichi from Shanghai, previously a Chinese instructor at the Interclub; and Saiki Shinzo (alias Kavata), editor of the Interclub’s Japanese newspaper. When the Vladburo was formed four months later, Pukka, Kavata, and Takasaki “at 95 percent” came on board, along with Janson as chairman, the Russian members Loktev and Ivanov, the Korean member Kim Hoban, the Japanese members Hayasi and Terada who had long been working with the Interclub, and the Chinese members Uralov and Chap-lina (both aliases).^57

The Vladburo at once initiated publication of “a series of popular brochures on trade union questions in each country” and Chinese, Japanese, and Korean editions of the PPW.^58 At the conference in August, the newly elected secretariat had resolved to begin publishing the PPW in Chinese, Japanese, and Korean “in Vladivostok once a month, and later on twice a month,” although “publication of same shall be transferred” to Japan and Korea if and when possible. The “Chinese edition should continue publication in Vladivostok for the large block of Chinese workers living on Soviet territory.”^59 By fall 1930 the ranks of the Vladburo and Vladivostok Interclub had been strengthened by the arrival of James Green to serve as Vladburo chairman, Gen. Hermann Nereiks (alias George Barker) as his assistant and head of the European Section of the Interclub, and leading JCP member Yamamoto Kenzo (alias Tanaka).
FIGURE 4 Cover of Japanese-language edition of the PPTUS publication, *The Pan-Pacific Worker*, vol. 1, no. 1/2 (February 1930). First issued in English in early 1928 by the PPTUS bureau in Shanghai, the Chinese, Japanese, and Korean editions were initiated following the simultaneous convening of the Second Pan-Pacific Trade Union Conference and Second Conference of Transport Workers in Vladivostok in August 1929, and establishment of the Pan-Pacific Secretariat of Transport Workers [TOST]. At the latter conference, the secretariat resolved that the newly formed Vladburo would be responsible for issuing first on a monthly basis and then bimonthly the Chinese-, Japanese-, and Korean-language editions of the *PPW*. The American Bureau—PPTUS took charge of the publication of the Japanese-language *Taiheiyo Rodosha* as a 32-page biweekly following Harrison George’s appointment as head of the Bureau in early 1932.
Yamamoto immediately took charge of editing and producing the Japanese edition of the PPW as well as “brochures promised to Moscow,” oversaw the production of TOST’s newspapers, undertook to draft “a short report about the situation of Japanese seamen” (though his advanced tuberculosis and the lack of a translator did not allow its completion), and conducted “preparatory work for the establishment of connections” with Japan.60

In spite of all these assets the Vladburo grappled with many of the same problems that plagued the PPTUS office in Shanghai. Its staff complained repeatedly of chronic shortages of funds and personnel and resulting burnout and illness, of neglect and an underestimation of the importance of the work by officials in Moscow—especially when it came to the Interclub, which was headed by the Finnish cadre Lukander who knew neither “English, or German, or French, [and was] completely unfamiliar with the work among orientalists”—of myriad difficulties that stemmed from language differences, the lack of skilled translators, and “the illiteracy of Chinese workers;”61 of the pervasive presence of Japanese spies, and of ongoing and seemingly insurmountable obstacles standing in the way of forming connections with Communists and trade union activists in Manchuria, China, Japan, and Korea. Thus, geographic proximity did not necessarily translate into greater ease of communication. Hardy’s comment, “So near and yet so far,” regarding the position of the PPTUS in Shanghai in relation to Japan, also applied to the Vladburo.62 For example, Yamamoto appealed to the Profintern leadership in Moscow, “Especially I beg you to remember about the fact that connections between Japan and Vladivostok are still weaker than between Moscow and Vladivostok up to today’s day (24/XII [1930]).”63 The same comments apply to ties between Vladivostok and Shanghai. In August, Leon and Aronberg in Shanghai lamented to their “friend” in Vladivostok, “Two months have already passed, and still we have heard nothing from you, nor have we received any material, magazines or any other literature. From this end we have sent several letters to you, through different channels, and we are still waiting for an answer.” Not two months later, Leon repeated his complaint, this time spelling out “the two ways which are open to you: a) Berlin and b) present Harbin connections. I cannot understand why you have not sent on your publications and other materials, including personal letters through Berlin until now. It takes longer (from 4 to 5 weeks), but it is better than the nothing which you have sent me so far.”64

Like their counterparts in Shanghai, functionaries in Vladivostok had to surmount the long distances and illegal nature of much of their work by communicating variously and creatively by cable, specially appointed couriers, through the post in the case of legal publications, or through a trusted cadre in the case of illegal and especially “secret” letters and information, and often via OMS station chief “Max” in Berlin.65 To entrust a familiar cadre with mail or information by word of mouth had the added advantage of permitting both formal and informal modes of communication. For all these stratagems and
ingenuity, recurrent failure characterized the entire web of communication. As valuable as the port city was as a base from which to command space across the region and Pacific, its very location and openness made control beyond the local space and disengagement from the perilous web of social relations that crisscrossed the region difficult if not impossible.

At the same time, there was another problem whose origins were internal to the movement—the existence of Russian chauvinism. The case of Russian functionary Semen Borisovich Yurdzik illustrates the problem. From at least as early as 1928, Yurdzik was a member of the administrative department of the Profintern. In 1930, he was appointed to the Presidium of the Profintern. Around this same time if not earlier, he became chief of the OMS office of the Profintern, in which capacity he reported directly to Piatnitsky.\textsuperscript{66} As noted by Peter Huber, from the beginning of the 1920s OMS was “responsible for forging passports, transporting documents and people, for the courier service and for transferring money to parties and those parts of the apparatus working abroad.”\textsuperscript{67} Yurdzik was thus responsible for managing the Vladburo’s finances and overseeing much of its operations.

Yet, in spite of the fact that Yurdzik had once worked in Vladivostok and continued to develop relationships with Japanese, Chinese, and Korean cadres assigned to work in the area, he repeatedly and without expressed hesitation referred to the same as “eastern” or “pan-pacific children” or simply “your children.” The fact that he could not understand Japanese, Chinese, or Korean and was thousands of miles from the scene did not cause him to hesitate in meting out punishment for wrongs committed. In April 1930 Yurdzik wrote to Janson, then chairman of the Vladburo:

Our Yamagata brought a letter to the Secretariat that had been written in Russian, it’s true, by hand—so that it could be retyped. It is a translation of a letter received from your children. But the document in itself makes a bad impression . . .

Yes, Comrade Johnson, if they keep it up like this, we won’t get far! It would be interesting to know who wrote this letter—Takeda or Kavata? Whoever it is, find out and tan his hide good and proper.

Moreover, even in the face of evidence to the contrary, he refused to reconsider his assumptions regarding the character of “eastern folks.”

We are very happy about the Japanese successes and hope that in the future things will go even better. All the same, it wouldn’t hurt to take a few necessary precautions. In your letter you don’t say a word about how tested those children you recruited are? Have they been with you for a long time? Who has direct contact with them? Do they go to the seamen’s club? Do the crews know that they are party members? And can they be trusted implicitly? Surely you know that the eastern folks
are—peculiar. Among them are many mercenaries. Take everything into account. I don’t have to give you lessons!

As far as the Korean delegates, one can only advise maximum caution. For there is a saying about Koreans: “every third one is a provocateur.”

Yurdzik was neither criticized nor disciplined for manifesting “Great Russian Chauvinism”; rather, his authority was extended to the American Bureau in San Francisco. This development is not surprising, given the prevailing attitude toward Asian peoples in Russia’s “imperial borderlands.” Especially following Japan’s occupation of Manchuria in 1931 and increased tension with Japan, Soviet policy evidenced growing xenophobia. The state began to tighten border controls in the area, and in 1930 and 1931 it forcibly removed several hundred—possibly thousand—Korean ‘kulaks’ to inhospitable lands much further north. According to Sheila Fitzpatrick, “Vigilance—an attitude of watchful suspicion—was an important part of Communist mentalite.” Also, Yurdzik’s reference to Asian cadres as “children” reflected the paternalism practiced by many regional party officials in their dealings with “members of ‘backward’ ethnic groups.” Yet, Yurdzik’s communication nonetheless raises questions about the role played by OMS in such an environment. Although one cannot assume that prior to the onset of the Great Terror individual cadres many miles from Moscow blindly followed orders from OMS, much evidence indicates that by design and purpose OMS fostered a culture of suspicion, active mistrust, and betrayal, especially in relation to Asians. Yurdzik’s repeated warnings not to trust Asian cadres and to both “check over neighbors, whether everything is going well and by the most detailed method inform us” and “contact your neighbors and let them collect information about those with whom you work,” give a sharp sense of the tenor of OMS’s supervision.

From Center to Periphery and Back Again via “Uncle Max” in Berlin

Soviet surveillance requires a look at Berlin, home to the offices of OMS and the WEB. The latter was initially formed in late 1919 in Berlin under the direction of “Comrade Thomas” (Yakov S. Reich), who remained in this position until 1925. In 1921, Piatnitsky was appointed to head OMS, to which the WEB would henceforth be dependent; and following the Third Comintern Congress in 1921 Jakov Mirov-Abramov was sent as Piatnitsky’s representative to OMS in Berlin where he was responsible for setting up the apparatus of OMS for all of Central Europe. In 1930 Mirov-Abramov returned to Moscow, while from 1929 to 1932 Solomon Vladimirovich Mikhailov-Manuilov (otherwise known as Max Ziese, “Uncle Max” or “Berlin Uncle”) headed OMS’s office in Berlin. From this position, Max handled transactions between Moscow and Party functionaries and other Comintern agents and organizers working overseas. In the
meantime, in February 1928 the WEB was reestablished, and from 1929 until the closing of the office in Berlin in 1933 under Nazi pressure, Georgi Dimitrov headed the agency.75

There is little doubt that the city of Berlin, through the offices of OMS and the WEB, served as a key nodal point in the pan-Pacific web of operations extending outward from Moscow and back again and among nodal points across the periphery. According to Krebs, since 1929, Berlin “had become the field headquarters for the whole of the Communist International . . . It was decided to let all threads end in Berlin, and to retain only a single line of communication between Berlin and Moscow.”76 The authority of the WEB, in particular, spread far and wide, including across Asia,77 while a large proportion (if not the bulk) of the mail and funds traveling between Moscow and points in the Dalkrai, the Western Pacific, and North and South America passed through the hands of OMS staff in Berlin.

Thus, at the same time, Berlin established itself as home to “some 5000 political refugees and students from various colonial countries in whom radical, and particularly communist, tendencies were clearly discernible.”78 In the case of the Japanese, at the end of 1926 a number of Japanese academics studying in Germany formed a reading circle called the “Anti-Imperialist group in Berlin” to discuss Marxist literature. Beginning in 1927, other young radical Japanese scholars, students at Berlin University, and artists and journalists began to join the group; and following the Japanese intervention into Manchuria in September 1931 they formed a political organization, Association of Revolutionary Asians, whose dual task was to support independence movements in Asia and to assist the Weimar democracy in its struggle against Hitler’s growing power. While some members such as the leader Kunizaki Teido joined the German Communist Party (KPD) and worked closely with the JCP and Katayama, the membership as a whole spanned the ideological spectrum. It was not exclusively Japanese; rather, the group included a number of young Chinese Communists including Liao Chengzhi, who in 1928 had sailed from Shanghai to Germany and begun to organize Chinese seamen in Hamburg and other European ports,79 at least one Korean, Lee Kang Kuk, and one Indian, Virendranath Chattopadhyaya.80

Starting Up PPTUS Work in the United States at a Time When the Lovestone-Comintern Battle Was “So Acute that Everything Else Is Being Forgotten”

Yet, in spite of its importance as the key nodal point in the web of lines of communication connecting Moscow to the rest of the world, Berlin did not serve as an alternate base of operations for the PPTUS. Instead, San Francisco was chosen as the home first to what “must be the organ of the labor movement of the Pacific,” The Pan-Pacific Monthly, and two-and-a-half years later to
the PPTUS bureau on the North American side of the Pacific. Given its status as one of the most important ports in both the transpacific shipping trade and transpacific passenger steamship service during the 1920s and 1930s and its relatively close proximity to and/or ease of communication with the ports of San Pedro to the south, Seattle and Vancouver to the north, Honolulu to the west, and New York to the east, the city could serve as a vital base for organizing at the local, regional, national, and international scales. Furthermore, it was the logical choice for enlisting the Party’s assistance because as the site of the District 13 headquarters it already functioned as the center of party organizing for the West Coast and Hawaii and the main point of contact with the national leadership in New York.

Before such a plan could be implemented, however, PPTUS leaders first needed to agree on the American party’s position in relation to PPTUS operations within its jurisdiction. Held in 1928, the Fourth Congress of the Profintern declared in its “main thesis” that “extensive help must be given to the Pan-Pacific Trade Union Secretariat by the workers of those countries (Britain, France, Japan, U.S.A.) whose bourgeoisie have possessions in the Pacific and hold in slavery hundreds of millions of the toilers in those colonial and semi-colonial countries.”

An unpublished Profintern protocol from November 1921 stated, “On all bureaux established by the [Profintern], the Communist party of the same country shall have adequate representation with decisive vote. Where disagreement arises between the party and the bureau, the position of the party shall prevail, pending appeal to and decision by the [CEC of the Comintern].” Around the same time, in a letter to William Z. Foster, the newly appointed special representative of the Profintern in the United States, the executive bureau of the Profintern instructed:

The Special Representative shall be a person willing and capable of the closest co-operation with the C.E.C. of the C. P. of A., and he is hereby instructed to maintain such co-operation. He must understand that his work is not general Communist propaganda, but the special work of inaugurating and directing the development of the American section of the Red Trade Union International, and his activities must in no way conflict with or encroach upon the general party work and propaganda of the C. P. of A. Where disagreement arises between the Communist Party of America and the Special Representative of the Red Labor Union International, the position of the Party shall prevail, pending appeal to and decision by the Executive Committee of the Communist International.

On a practical level, such a policy meant that the American party was empowered to block the development of the PPTUS in the United States, which it did in 1929 when it refused to release George from his position as an editor in the New York office of the Daily Worker “to take charge of publications” in San Francisco.
In early January 1929 Browder first made the request to appoint George “for special work.” At that time George was in China where, in his own words, he “was engaged on an international assignment of confidential nature.”85 Browder himself was in Moscow, from which he returned to New York on January 17 bearing a “letter of the RILU [Profintern]” from Lozovsky for the Polburo and the National Committee of the TUEL regarding the new “Profintern line” as it applied to the work of the TUEL (Trade Union Educational League) in the United States.86 Seven months later, the TUEL was replaced by the TUUL (Trade Union Unity League), thereby formalizing in the trade union arena the Comintern’s shift from a United Front to a more sectarian “class against class” line that called for separate “red unions.” George’s precise return to the United States is unclear, but soon thereafter Browder informed Lozovsky of the opposition both to his proposal that he work for the TUEL in New York and George for the PPTUS in San Francisco and to the new Profintern line.87 In the latter regard, at the recent meeting of “the leading fraction of the American Transport Workers” “an organized group” had declared their intention to fight “for the removal of the leadership of our marine work on the basis of rejection of the line of forming a new union in the marine industry.”88 When it came to Browder’s proposal, American Representative to the Profintern Harry W. Wicks relayed to Lozovsky the views of the CEC of the American Party. The secretariat had decided to appoint Browder “to an important position in the TUEL and other work, if that is in harmony with his Pan-pacific tasks.” However, the Polburo refused to budge on George because “he is the only one remaining in the United States who can take care of Spanish translations,” at a time of a “new sharp aggressive turn of American imperialism toward Latin-America.”89 For his part, in early March George wrote Lozovsky that the factional battle pitting Lovestone against the Comintern was “so acute that everything else is being forgotten.”90 Although, as James R. Barrett points out, Lovestone’s stance regarding America’s exceptionalism was not entirely new and in fact “comparable ideas had been around for years,” his advocacy of such a position in the late twenties—a time when the Comintern had shifted to the Third Period line—was explosive and spelled disaster for Lovestone.91 A month later, in the midst of the turmoil, George was at last permitted to leave New York to start up publication of The Pan-Pacific Monthly in San Francisco,92 but he was not relieved of his duties at the Daily Worker.93 In fact, he later recounted, not until January 1932, “at the request of authorized comrades in New York [did] the CPUSA release[d] me for PPTUS work at San Francisco.”94 Meanwhile, from its meeting place in Vladivostok the Second Pan-Pacific Trade Union Conference resolved that given The Pan-Pacific Monthly’s legal status the editor should consider it his “task to reach a self-paying basis within the next six months.” The secretariat also resolved that the bureau in Shanghai should publish the Far Eastern Bulletin “at least once a month” and that its editors should send regularly “proper information materials” to the PPW in
Sydney and *The Pan-Pacific Monthly* in San Francisco. Around the same time, Moscow sent a directive that the journal “must be published by a decreasing allocation and increasing subscription and finding other financial means. In America with its tremendous Pan-Pacific workers emigration it would not be so difficult to find financial means by way or [sic] organising subscriptions, meetings and so on. This besides financial will have a political effect popularising the Pan-Pacific Secretariat and Movement.” This was fine in the abstract, but its reality reflected a complete lack of understanding regarding the conditions of the “Pan-Pacific workers” in America, the difficulties involved in “popularising” the Communist-led and semiclandestine “Pan-Pacific Secretariat and Movement,” and the absence of “other financial means.”

**Conducting the Pan-Pacific Work When “Our Japanese and Chinese Forces Here Are Very Limited.”**

From the time of George’s arrival in San Francisco until the formation of the American Bureau in January 1932, Browder “together with” George were “following constantly everything on the Pacific” and issuing *The Pan-Pacific Monthly* “as often as we accumulate sufficient material.” The latter was charged with “furnish[ing] all organisations affiliated to the PPTUS with regular information material and articles.” In addition, they handled domestic and “foreign circulation.” Browder’s own account to Alexander explained the uneven results of their efforts: not only was the journal “illegal in seven countries [Japan, China, Philippines, Australia, Indonesia, India, and Canada] now and whenever found is returned or destroyed,” but also the “sale of the magazine in the United States is very poor . . . The fact that the Daily Worker and the various Party papers—27 in number,—regularly carry so much material on the East, especially on China and India, makes the Pan Pacific Monthly seem unnecessary for the general readers so that the only ones who buy it regularly are those especially studying the Pacific and the few hundred of the top leading cadres of the TUUL.” Yet, he added in handwriting: “The Chinese and Japanese editions from Vladivostok are very well received by workers here.” The juxtaposition of a detailed explanation followed by an afterthought hinted at not only the divide that existed between the “general readers” of Party papers and readers of Chinese- and Japanese-language Communist publications but also the Party’s common neglect of the latter readers. Moreover, the leading sentence of his next paragraph indicated his main interest: “My own opinion is that we are securing the broadest general distribution to the Pacific countries that is possible under the present conditions and more than could be reached from any other country.”

For his part, George sought to reach out to Chinese activists—though in doing so he ran directly into the bitter factional battle that raged following the replacement in January 1929 of DO Emanuel Levin by Emil Gardos and
the Comintern-led purge of Lovestone and his supporters. Two days after his arrival, George complained to Browder that Gardos “thinks that my every action here is to be reviewed and supervised, approved or countermanded by him. It appears that some sort of a boycott has been laid against anyone whom Comrade Gardos thinks is under his orders, against entering the building at 1212 Market street.” George’s interest in entering the building was twofold: first, “as I must keep in close touch with the Chinese comrades who are to be found only through that building which houses the Workers Library and the old headquarters of the CP”; and second, because the “Chinese Fraction of the CP is arranging a memorial meeting for Comrade Sou Chao-jen on April 21,” “to be held in the hall,” and to which he had been “invited to speak.”

This is not to say that George disagreed with Browder’s overall view of the PPTUS’s task or that in these first years he challenged the direction dictated by their superiors in Moscow. At the same time, he did continue to try to involve Chinese and Japanese activists in the work. For example, upon returning to San Francisco around the beginning of 1932 he ran into “difficulty with the organization of the Bureau”; he took advantage of the fact that we “have at our disposal a Japanese comrade, who is considered politically prepared, from the technical side—also.” This comrade was Yano Tsutomu (alias Takeda), “who came from across” and by October 1931 was secretary of District 13’s Japanese Fraction. However, bringing Yano on board did not solve the larger problem of recruiting Chinese and other Japanese cadres. George commented, “We have one-two [Chinese], who with regard to political qualifications could be suitable, but according to the knowledge of the Party, they are either lazy or undisciplined. Others are little developed in political relations, and all of them, without exception, very young and inexperienced.” Whether or not George shared the Party’s interpretation,102 by the time of the Bureau’s fourth meeting on March 2, 1932, Yano and George had found a promising Chinese candidate Olden Lee. By the next meeting on March 14, Lee had been approved, “thus completing the Bureau organization,” and by the end of the month, the “first number of the Bureau’s organ [in Japanese, was] due to come off press immediately.”

However, already in mid-February 1932 Alexander had prepared a set of instructions of which the first item flatly overturned these efforts by declaring that the Bureau should be composed of K. as chairman, John Pallo (alias Jones)—member of the Lettish Buro of the CC and editor of the Lettish paper—and Russian-born Ralph (real name Bauer). In addition, item nine noted that “the whole apparatus . . . (including the Japanese and Chinese typesetters and translators) should consist of no more than 6–8 people since the leadership ‘trio’ should not (when necessary) refuse to do ‘dirty work.’” This last point was ironic indeed because, as George pointed out following receipt of the directives in late March, this was “a larger apparatus” than was currently in place.
When it came to the Bureau’s proposed task, this, too, “indicate[d] a far larger work.” In essence, the proposed work plan included four tasks: one, publish Chinese and Japanese editions of the semimonthly newspaper *The Pan-Pacific Marine Worker (PP-MW)* and the thirty-two-page biweekly *PPW* in Japanese along with other revolutionary antiwar literature aimed at seamen of many nationalities; two, “create strong ‘duos’ and ‘trios’ on Japanese and other ships for the transfer of antiwar revolutionary literature to Japan”; three, issue leaflets, articles, and brochures, and conduct mass meetings, demonstrations, and strikes against the shipment of military supplies overseas; and four, “organize port bureaus and interclubs in the principal ports on the Pacific Coast,” with the San Francisco Bureau taking “the work in the interclubs under its immediate political direction.” In this connection, the American Bureau claimed, “The club in SF was in existence before our Bureau was established, the other two [in Seattle and Vancouver] since then.”

At the same time, of “paramount importance” should be the fight “against the military threat, especially against the military activities of Japanese imperialism in China and the feverish preparation for a military attack against the Soviet Union.” It followed that Japan should be the primary focus of the Bureau’s efforts. The Bureau “should particularly concentrate on active work among the Japanese seamen / it is fundamental.” It should exert all efforts “to establish regular ties with the revolutionary trade union organizations and other revolutionary organizations in Japan.” It should also “collect by all possible means the names of seamen and stokers on Japanese ships, the addresses of Japanese workers, peasants, students and other organizations of the working population, and likewise the addresses of individuals in Japan.” In short, it was to Japan “where revolutionary literature should be sent by all possible means.”

According to George’s report on his five-month tenure as head of the Bureau, the Bureau had already directed its energies to Japanese seamen and Japan. It had concentrated almost entirely on producing literature in Japanese, particularly a Japanese edition of the *PPW*, and seeing that what was printed “reached Japan.” The “Contacts with Seamen,” apart from a “Stop Munitions” leaflet in Chinese, focused entirely on the effort to obtain the names and home addresses and make contact with Japanese seamen and thereby convince them to carry “literature in quantity into Japan.” Only in the last section, “Connections with Organizations,” did the report cite efforts to make contact with revolutionary organizations in China, the Philippines, Australia and New Zealand, India, Indo-China, Indonesia, and Hawaii, and/or with seamen from these countries who sailed on trans-Pacific liners.

When George singled out the Bureau’s success “in getting the names of something over 300 Japanese seamen” and in “developing friendly contacts with seamen on about eight or ten Japanese ships,” he was simply reporting on what had been accomplished thus far. Similarly, he could talk about his “brief visit to Los Angeles to organize the Japanese comrades there for this
work”—alerting the Bureau to the “recent dispersal of the leading comrades there (nine of the best were already jailed for deportation)—because that was the group he had been most successful in recruiting and whose work along these lines already “promises to be carried on better in the future.” Moreover, there is no evidence that George was biased toward working with Japanese over Chinese cadres or that he held a single-minded interest in Japan. Indeed, just as he had earlier kept “in close touch with the Chinese comrades,” so in late July, after Eddy had taken his place as chairman but he continued to work with the Bureau, George reported on “meeting with the leading Chinese comrade” about forming ties with Chinese seamen and made extensive recommendations in this regard. At the following meeting, he “reported that he had spoken with the Chinese translator and arranged with him for part time work for the first two issues of the Chinese Marine Worker.”

George was not alone in making efforts to recruit Chinese immigrant activists for participation in the Bureau’s work. In fact, these efforts were initiated during George’s tenure and continued under Eddy’s supervision. At its first meeting on June 8, 1932, the new Bureau assigned duties: “Eddy, chairman and in charge of Port Bureaus, work among seamen and connections; Ralph, in charge of editorial work; Jones [Pallo], charge of printing, shipping of literature, handling of finance and archives”; and George to “remain working with us and on our payroll until we hear further about what is to be done with him.” By mid-August, Pallo reported, “that the 2000 copies of the first number of the Chinese Seamen’s paper had been shipped to all inter-clubs, to all Chinese workers’ clubs in America and small bundles to connections in several of the Japanese ports. Bundles were also sent to Hawaii and to a port in Indo-China.” Although at this time “none were sent to China direct because we have no addresses there,” three weeks later Jones reported great improvement in the entire pan-Pacific distribution network.

Had a conference with our Chinese translator and the secretary of the committee for work among Chinese seamen. They report that 120 copies of the Sept issue of the seamen’s paper was distributed among Chinese seamen in San Francisco. The balance of this issue [was] being sent to Chinese workers’ clubs in America and to the Inter-clubs of the world. They have given us 2[?] new addresses of Chinese seamen’s organisations, seamen’s boarding houses and clubs. Of these 4 are in Singapore, 3 in Cuba 2 in South America and also the Red Seamen’s Union of Canton. And 4 addresses of contacts on ships whose home port is Vancouver. All these address[es] will be included in our shipments of the Nov. issue.

In fact, when interpreting the Bureau’s conduct, a few facts are striking: the Bureau emphasized Japan over other countries across the Pacific and Japanese over Chinese or other Asian seamen; the upward curve of reported
progress is rapid, especially given evidence of obstacles. In his summary report from June 1932, George described the enormous challenges confronting Japanese activists who sought to make contact with “Oriental seamen.”

Here we find the first difficulty to be a lack of forces numerically; secondly, of the forces available, many are occupied earning a living at long hours of labor during the hours when ships can be visited; thirdly, ‘Party work’ of various kinds occupy their free hours and it is not always easy to obtain the requisite attention to this important work of visiting ships; fourthly, the comrades have to be trained and encouraged in this work which is new to them; fifthly, the police obstacles and those put up by the ship companies.121

Similarly, the new Bureau began its report covering the next five months with the frank admission that it “had to start from the very beginning, with one or two exceptions where initial steps had already been taken by the previous Bureau, to try and make connections with our organisations in the Far East. Marine Work among the American marine workers was practically nil . . . The difficulties in reaching the Eastern seamen had hardly been tackled as yet.” The problems were both internal and external: “very little attention” from the Party on the West Coast; “very little source material” for publications; “a lack of funds”; “little experience”; a “very limited” number of Chinese and Japanese activists available, “especially for the visiting of ships; immigration laws that restricted Asian seamen from coming ashore”; and strict surveillance of seamen and immigrant activists alike.122

Moreover, the brief reference to a “lack of funds,” as elaborated elsewhere in the report, hardly suggests the scale of the problem that confronted the new Bureau. For instance, two months into its original budget, allowing the added expense of retaining George “on our pay-roll,” the Bureau was notified that its budget was cut “by about 60 percent,” that is, from not “over $2,000 a month” to $850. As a result, the Bureau “would not be able to have the staff of full time workers that was agreed upon,” and without the means “to establish an illegal print shop . . . would not be able to do printing of any kind in any language outside of the magazine [PPW] in Japanese and the Marine Worker in Japanese and Chinese” once a month. Nor would the Bureau “be able to do the traveling necessary to the other ports for the purpose of building up the work there.” In addition, Ralph’s “language difficulties” continued; the Bureau had explained the necessity of translating his articles from Russian into English, rewriting them for clarity “before being given to the Japanese and Chinese translators,” and “paying at least a little to the translator that translates Ralph’s writings”—all this, when Ralph’s sole task was “editorial work.”123

Yet, this same report claimed that the wildest goals were attainable. Basing its decisions upon the experience of the last four months as well as the results of “a special ‘questionaire’ ” that was mailed to “about 120 seamen’s clubs and
contacts all over the world" and in response to which they received “definite information from 32 ports,” it projected circulation of the PPW in Japanese and the PP-MW in Japanese and Chinese quite literally around the globe. Destination points ranged from Marine Workers International Union groups at U.S. and Canadian ports and “seamen's committees and contacts” in the United States, Canada, Cuba, Hawaii, Singapore, and the Philippines to “South and Central American ports” and “Capetown, Sydney, Wellington & Curacaol (D.E.I.)”; from Interclubs in Germany, England, and France to “Vladivostok (on direct demand)” and other ports in the Soviet Union; and from “Chinese and Japanese Seamen’s Clubs” to “Directly (by mail)” to Japan and China. Only in the discussion that followed did the authors return from wild ambition to the shaky ground on which the Bureau was presently standing: “This schedule also shows that the distribution from our main base—thru American ports—is as yet very weak, altho it is improving, because of direct and indirect pressure by our Bureau on the Seamen’s clubs.”

Was the above gesture a demonstration of revolutionary spirit and projected victory, when failure could be read as “deviation”—all the more essential when it followed oft-repeated charges of neglect and/or indifference against the leaderships in Moscow and New York? The trope of “neglect” was a charge so common among Party functionaries working outside Moscow and so frequently deployed as a weapon in factional struggles that its valence is highly uncertain; nonetheless, the American Bureau was placed in the impossible position of having to fulfill directives staggering in their reach with limited personnel, funding, and other forms of support from all levels of the Communist apparatus, whether the heads of the Profintern or the national and district leaders of the CPUSA.

The question of support ultimately returns to the overriding problem confronted by the American Bureau—namely, the difficulty in recruiting Japanese and Chinese activists. To be sure, in some matters, such as the production of literature in Chinese and Japanese, the Bureau ran into a myriad of other problems—from “receiving very little source material” to discovering that “really able Chinese translators are hard to find,” “a long time” required to produce translations into Japanese and then finding that the “printshop” willing to do the work and with printers who “can set up both Japanese and Chinese” had “a shortage of [Japanese] type” and “no Chinese type,” or that Chinese cadres “lack[ed] good scholastic education in English.” Moreover, both the recruitment problem and the difficulty in finding a printing shop willing to publish Communist materials were intimately connected to the larger security question over which the Bureau had little control. Yet, as George and then Eddy pointed out in their letters and reports to Alexander and the Home Office, if progress were to be made in the pan-Pacific arena, then the first stumbling block to confront was the absence of ties at the local level between the Party and Japanese and Chinese immigrant communities.
In this vein, in a letter to Alex following the “first meeting” of the newly reorganized Bureau in mid-June 1932, Eddy once again raised the problem of reaching out to Chinese and Japanese in the United States: “It will take several months before we can expect any income for our magazine and pamphlets”—which now included the PPW in Japanese, the PP-MW in Japanese and Chinese, “and special English, Japanese and Chinese pamphlets”—because “we are dealing chiefly with a section of the working class that is practically unorganized.” In addition, he noted, “Our friendly organisations have extremely limited organisational contact with Chinese, Japanese and other eastern peoples.” Finally, another “factor which we cannot overlook is the extreme poverty that especially at the present time prevails among the workers for whom our publications are chiefly intended.” By mid-October, the Bureau reported that “in meeting regularly with our Japanese and Chinese comrades here, we take up with them not only our special work but also the work in general, realising that to the extent that they improve” the latter so would they improve the former. However, the Bureau also acknowledged that “outside of San Francisco, we have practically no connections with American Chinese on the Pacific Coast.” There is little evidence that the Party either recognized or grappled with these problems at the local and national levels, but the Bureau certainly failed to see the ways in which they negatively impacted Chinese and Japanese activists’ ability to play their assigned international roles in the crucial campaign “against imperialist war, for the defense of the Chinese people and the Soviet Union.”