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POLITICAL CONFLICT IN CHINA

For twenty years Generalissimo Chiang Kai-shek has been attempting to build a strong central state in China under the leadership of the nationalist party, the Kuomintang. In this process he has had to cope with three powerful forces of opposition — the political liberals both inside and outside the Kuomintang, the provincial warlords, and the Communists.

In 1936 and 1937 all of the major political elements in China recognized their mutual interest in cooperation against Japanese aggression. Under pressure from China's students, shopkeepers, peasants, workers, and eventually from her merchants, bankers, and industrialists, the landlord-dominated Kuomintang abandoned its policy of appeasement and in 1937 agreed to enter a loose anti-Japanese coalition including the Communists.

Since then, however, the united front has tended to disintegrate. With the loss of the eastern coastal cities to the Japanese, the commercial, banking, and industrial groups lost the basis of their power. Their moderating influence on the reactionary landlord groups in the Kuomintang declined. Hostility among all Chinese factions has increased and has produced a continuing crisis. In the past year especially, critical military reverses, mounting inflation, and reported corruption and disorganization in the Chungking administration have seriously weakened the political position of the Central Government.

The Chinese Communists and liberals of all parties, including the Kuomintang, agree with Chiang on the necessity of building a strong China and driving out the Japanese. But they oppose the Kuomintang's present one-party rule, and demand more effective conduct of the war, democratic reforms, and a share in the national government for themselves. The warlords, whose influence for the most part rests solely on their provincial military and political power, oppose and fear Central Government encroachment on local prerogatives. The liberals and the warlords in southern and southwestern China have planned a coalition in opposition to the Chungking Government and have made overtures to the third dissident element, the Chinese Communists. The Allied war effort in Asia and the post-war position of China largely depend upon Chiang Kai-shek's ability to draw together a preponderance of these disparate forces and avoid civil war.

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Chiang Kai-shek and the Kuomintang

Chiang Kai-shek stands above all groups in Free China as a symbol of leadership toward national unification. His professed aim has been to build a strong, cohesive, modern China which can exert a beneficial leadership in Far Eastern and world affairs. In striving for this goal, the Central Government has maintained that it must reduce warlordism and provincial separatism, and cannot tolerate control of territory or support of an independent army by the Chinese Communists.

Chiang heads the whole machinery of government, which is in the hands of a single party, the Kuomintang. According to the theory on which the Chinese Republic was founded, the masses of the people are too illiterate and inexperienced to handle their own destiny until after an indefinite period of tutelage in the exercise of political rights. While the Central Government has promised the adoption of a democratic constitution and the end of Kuomintang tutelage shortly after the war, Chungking has continued to concentrate increasing authority in the hands of one man and one party. Chiang, as leader of party, government, and armed forces, wields extraordinarily broad discretionary powers under a system of government that does not at present pretend to be responsible to any higher authority than a single political party.

Within that party, the Kuomintang, a struggle for power is now going on partly as a normal, personal rivalry for power, but also partly a struggle between Western-type liberalism versus political reaction. The strongest faction is the extreme nationalist "CC" clique, led by the Chen brothers. These old-line Party members believe that a strong and united China can be achieved only by strict Kuomintang control in terms of their strongly nationalistic interpretation of Sun Yat-sen's Three People's Principles. While willing to accept the technical advantages of Western science, the "CC" clique insists on the renaissance of ancient Chinese culture. Supported by the landlord-official class, this faction and its Army counterpart, the Whampoa Military Clique, have long dominated the Chungking Government.

In China, the landlord is at the same time merchant, money-lender, and official. Acting in these various capacities, members of the landlord class have been able to monopolize control of the economy and government at the village or county level and to supply most of the political leaders for the provincial and national governments as well. The typical landlord-official in China is concerned chiefly with collecting rents, taxes, and interest. He is opposed to economic changes which would upset his special position and opposed to sharing political power with the peasants and other groups in society. An anti-foreign attitude is fairly common as a result of fear that pressure from the outside will strengthen the forces tending to undermine his unique position.

Another segment of the Kuomintang consists of members of the once-dominant group of merchants, bankers and industrialists together with their small but efficient following of technical assistants. Some of

these members, such as T. V. Soong, still occupy important positions in the Central Government. Since the loss of the economic resources of the coastal cities, this comparatively moderate element in the Kuomintang has become generally subservient to the reactionary wing of the party.

Recently, however, a small element of the Kuomintang led by Legislative Yuan President Sun Fo and including liberal businessmen and intellectuals has become increasingly vocal. Members of this group are generally convinced that their own interests as well as China's will best be served by the modernization of the country somewhat along the lines of American capitalistic democracy. Aided by strong foreign criticism of China and by weakening of Government prestige through Japanese military successes, Sun Fo's followers have recently come out more strongly for the loosening of censorship regulations, establishment of habeas corpus, and a somewhat more conciliatory Kuomintang attitude toward the Chinese Communists. But these comparatively liberal leaders are less politicians than modern civil service administrators, and have neither the organizational nor the ideological strength of the "CC" and Wham-poa cliques.

The membership of the three main groups in the Kuomintang is not fixed. Individual members of the party side with one group on certain issues and with another group on other issues. The main distinction among the groups is their attitude toward democratic reforms and toward cooperation with the Communists in a coalition government. The Kuomintang liberals want civil liberties and efficient government as much as the Communists do. They are also willing to work with the Chinese Communists and the Soviet Union. The "CC" clique, on the other hand, wants nothing that will shake its grip on the government machine. Its members refuse to compromise with the Communists and express opposition to Soviet participation in the war against Japan. The moderate group in the Kuomintang does not take a strong, independent stand one way or the other. At present it is following the lead of the dominant "CC" clique. Freed of the influence of this clique, most if not all of the moderate group would probably be willing to participate in a coalition government with the Communists.

The Democratic League

Strong opposition to the policies and methods of Chiang and the Central Government comes also from members of the minority parties constituting the Federation of Democratic Parties. They take advantage of their relatively greater freedom in the areas of the anti-Chungking warlords to castigate the government for failing to meet their demands for democratic rights, domestic reforms, and vigorous prosecution of the war. They urge concessions to the Communists and a coalition government. At present their only power is as a pressure group both inside and outside the Government.

The most important parties in the League are the Youth Party, the National Socialists, the National Salvationists, and the Third Party. The

membership of the parties is quite small, consisting of college professors, newspaper editors, students, some conservative bankers, industrialists, minor officials, junior officers, and small merchants, who have little actual power but considerable influence because of their prestige and contacts. Since early 1941 the League has expressed opposition to Kuomintang policies and attempted to bring about coalition among anti-Kuomintang groups.

The center of League activity has been Kunming, where it operated with relative freedom under the protection of General Lung Yun, Chairman of the Yunnan Provincial Government. Membership in this area includes personnel from the faculties of the various universities situated in Kunming. In July 1944 League members in Kunming stated that they had given up hope for reform from the Central Government, that Generalissimo Chiang himself was solely responsible for the weakness of the Chinese Government, and that a movement had been organized to oppose the Chungking regime.

Provincial Warlords

The impunity with which the comparatively small liberal group in the Democratic League criticizes the Central Government is largely due to its alliance with the anti-Chungking provincial warlords. The warlords' opposition to the Central Government is based on a tradition of provincial authority characteristic of China's semifeudal political life. Chiang's efforts at unification and centralization inevitably reduce their military and political power. They also declare that Chiang uses their troops in desperate struggles against the Japanese in order to eliminate provincial military strength as a factor in the future struggle for power in China. Politically they are at least as authoritarian in their methods as the Kuomintang, to which some of them belong, and they probably do not sincerely subscribe to the democratic aims of the liberals. But fearing elimination by a centralized authority, they may be willing to make a bargain with the popular front.

Many provincial leaders occupy a semi-autonomous role, and Central Government authority must be maintained by means of working agreements with military leaders who are willing to compromise in order to insure their own survival. By a system of barter and threats, the Generalissimo has managed to keep the controlling power over these warlords. While he is willing to make certain concessions, Chiang reserves the right to command them to furnish troops when necessary. The warlords are pledged to be loyal and many have a rudimentary patriotism. But their loyalty is usually subordinated to their self-interest in the event of a clash. The Generalissimo apparently assumes that he can deal with these warlords separately, and that they are individually too self-seeking ever to combine their forces against the Central Government.

However, various warlords appear to be planning cooperation against the Central Government allegedly on the grounds that the Generalissimo is unwilling to equip provincial troops with American lend-lease weapons.

Even under these circumstances, some of these warlords say they are willing to fight the Japanese if their own provinces are attacked. Others are reported to have reached an agreement not to use their troops against the Japanese in the event of further enemy offensive action. They are said to have decided to take their troops to inaccessible mountainous regions and hold them in readiness for the post-war maintenance of their established positions of provincial leadership. They believe that if they suddenly withdraw their support at the critical moment, Chiang's troops will be defeated by the enemy and Chiang himself will be overthrown. Both groups of warlords reportedly claim that, if given American equipment, they would be willing to place their troops under American command and allow them to be used against the Japanese.

Tentative Warlord-Liberal Coalition

Since the military reverses of early and mid-1944, tentative plans have been made for a loose coalition of liberals and provincial warlords in opposition to the Central Government. The essential element uniting these groups is their deep-seated opposition to the policies of the Central Government. The Democratic League is interested chiefly in reversing what it considers the reactionary trend at Chungking and securing real and immediate democratic reform. The provincial militarists' attitude, although partly a genuine dissatisfaction with the Central Government's corruption and inefficiency on the home front and its failure to provide properly for the army, is mainly an opposition to the attempted centralization of all power and authority in Chungking.

Despite the disparity in objectives, both sides recognize the value of cooperation. The minority parties realize that military power and support are absolutely necessary for any change. They further recognize that many of the interested militarists are willing to grant more concessions than the Chungking leaders, and feel certain that they would have a significant influence in any new government that they helped establish. The provincial militarists on their part naturally welcome Federation support for the increased prestige and respectability it brings to the movement.

Chinese Communists

The Communists are the most powerful group opposing the present Chungking regime, and their military and political power is rapidly increasing. In contrast to the divided Kuomintang, the Communists have been able to keep a high degree of internal unity as a result of their uniformly rural area of control, their successful economic program, and their protection of the people from the Japanese.

Before 1937 the Chinese Communist Party existed in underground units throughout Kuomintang China and in small independent pockets opposing Central Government military forces. In that year the Communists announced the abandonment of their policy of forcible confiscation of land for redistribution among landless peasants and advanced a program designed to appeal to wider sections of Chinese society. By advo-

cating opposition to Japan and moderate internal reforms, they have won the cooperation not only of the peasants but also of most landlords, small merchants, intellectuals, and other groups throughout the extensive areas in which they operate.

During 1940 and 1941 after the Kuomintang had inaugurated an economic and military blockade of the Communist area in North China, the Communists were in great economic difficulties. But eventually they found that by increasing agricultural and industrial production they could be almost self-sufficient. The Communist guerrilla forces, several hundred thousand strong, have been able to construct a net of popular resistance around the Japanese garrisons and railways in the vital provinces of northern and eastern China. Territorially the Communists claim they already control larger, more strategic areas in China than the Kuomintang. They regard as theirs most of China north of the Yellow River and claim to be gaining ground in the provinces of Honan, Hunan, Kwangtung, Chekiang, Kiangsi, and Fukien.

Kuomintang-Communist Stalemate

In the long negotiations and maneuverings which have taken place between the Kuomintang and the Communist Party since 1936, neither side has essentially modified its original proposals. The Communists still insist on a coalition government, recognition of Communist Party and army, recognition of governments established behind Japanese lines, release of political prisoners, and a bill of rights involving freedom of the press, freedom of assembly, and freedom from arbitrary arrest. Various parts of these demands are advocated also by anti-Kuomintang military leaders and by the parties comprising the Democratic Federation. On its part the Kuomintang has refused to accept the existence of semi-autonomous armies and governments and seems insistent upon retaining its actual monopoly of power while conceding only advisory roles to other groups.

The Present Balance of Power

Both the Kuomintang and its most powerful opponent, the Communists, fear hostile intervention by a non-Chinese third power. The Kuomintang claims that the Communist Party in China is the agent of the USSR, and that, should Russia fight Japan, she would cooperate with the Chinese Communists in the vital area of North China. For their part, the Chinese Communists fear an American intervention that is not equal on the sides of Chungking and the Communists respectively, or in proportions calculated to preserve the present balance of power. They fear that the United States will virtually abandon Yen-an, and they are trying to prove that they look to America as much as to Russia for future friendship and guidance.

The Communists also profess to fear indirect intervention by Japan. They assert that the Kuomintang, under the pressure of the 1944-45 military threat to Chungking, has entered into a secret agreement where-

by Japan will use its forces only to cut into US military power and will leave Chungking forces intact to carry out a ruthless anti-Communist policy. After the war the Kuomintang would enter an economic partnership with the Japanese in China, while internationally they would attempt to secure US aid in a Chinese civil war against Yen-an and the USSR. From the Japanese point of view this future US-Japanese alliance is calculated on the basis of historic American friendship with Chungking, into which the Japanese might thus indirectly insinuate themselves.

In the absence of decisive intervention in China by foreign powers, the "CC" clique in the Kuomintang has little chance of retaining its exclusive political and military control in the face of growing opposition inside and outside the party. Chiang Kai-shek may therefore find it necessary to dissociate the Central Government from the reactionary "CC" clique. The Kuomintang's role as a major political factor would then depend upon the eventual political resurgence of moderate elements in the party, which will probably result when China enters a period of commercial, industrial, and financial reconstruction. In any case the opposition groups, especially the Communists, are firmly established. The early formation of a broad coalition government, excluding the "CC" clique, appears to offer the Generalissimo the only opportunity of avoiding civil war in China.