



Chiang Kai-Shek with Roosevelt and Churchill, Cairo 1943

the united front on the KMT's terms, was rejected by the Chinese communists who saw clearly what the KMT was, and were afraid of losing both their independence and their ability to operate.

Trotsky opposed the united front from the beginning, although his opposition was not made public until much later. In 1927 he rubbished the idea of a "bloc of four classes". "...This by no means signifies that the imperialist yoke is a mechanical one, subjugating 'all' the classes of China in the 'same' way. The very powerful role of foreign capital in the life of China has caused very strong sections of the Chinese bourgeoisie, the bureaucracy and the military to join their destiny with that of imperialism..."

"It would further be profounder naivete to believe that an abyss lies between the so-called comprador bourgeoisie, that is, the economic and political agency of foreign capital in China, and the so-called national bourgeoisie. No, these two sections stand incomparably closer to each other than the bourgeoisie and the masses of workers and peasants.

"Installed within the Kuomintang and its leadership, the national bourgeoisie has been essentially an instrument of the compradors and imperialism..."

"It is a gross mistake to think that imperialism mechanically welds together all the classes of China from without ... The revolutionary struggle against imperialism does not weaken, but rather strengthens the political differentiation of the classes." (*The Chinese Revolution and the Theses of Comrade Stalin*).

Reorganisation of the KMT

ON 4 September 1922, Sun Yat-sen announced his intention to reorganise the KMT. The plans were agreed by January of the following year, drawn up with the help of Chen Tu-hsiu, and with input from the CI and Russia. The negotiations included Yoffe, Lenin's ambassador to China. In 1923 Sun began to build an independent nationalist army, sending Chiang Kai Shek to Russia to collect arms and study military organisation.

At the 3rd Congress of the CCP, held in June 1923, the party again debated its relationship with the KMT. Once more, Maring bore instructions from the CI to maintain the "bloc within", saying that the KMT should take the lead in the national revolution. There was considerable opposition from Chen and others to the bloc, but the CI's position was agreed, and included a statement that the CCP was to maintain its independence within the bloc.

In fact, as the communists were soon to learn to their cost, this "independence" was an illusion. Even though it was CP members who did lead the most radical workers' struggles, this was from within the KMT. The idea of CP independence "within" the KMT was used by conservative nationalists against the communists, and to agitate against the two parties having such a close alliance.

Despite misgivings (and open antagonism) from both sides, the KMT's first national congress in January 1924 included the communists. It reorganised the party along hierarchical lines, with the communists well represented at every level, particularly in the organisational and labour bureaux. The only place the communists were not able to penetrate was the KMT military council, or to obtain the senior roles in the military fields that they enjoyed in the political work of the KMT. At the Military Academy at Whampoa (established in 1924), communists and Young Socialists made up a large minority of recruits and graduates, but CCP leadership was on the political, rather than the military, side of the academy's work.

Within the KMT, the CCP organised itself into fractions, and were acknowledged to be the most energetic party workers and organisers. The CP attempted to manipulate the left of the KMT against the right, and so gain the leadership of key areas of party life. In this they were largely successful, but they did arouse opposition from KMT conservatives.

After Sun's death in 1925, the conservatives gradually increased their power behind the scenes, with disastrous consequences for the CCP. The CCP had difficulty retaining an independent class profile in, for example, labour work. The KMT wanted this directed primarily towards nationalist goals, the CCP were not prepared to mislead the working class into thinking that a united China would significantly improve their lot. Some KMT conservatives were landlords and factory owners — the communists' urge was to cut against these people.

Such contradictions abounded and fuelled antagonism between communists and conservatives. It was the class nature of the KMT which caused the contradictions. By 1924 the CCP was again ready to leave. Once again, pressure from the CI, and changes in the political situation kept the front alive. The working class began to recover from the May 7th massacre of railway workers, and to take strike action in Canton and Shanghai, and to build new unions. Cooperation in these activities between CCP and KMT buried their differences amongst the activists. The 4th CCP Congress (25 January) maintained the united front, but Chen criticised those communists who were too subservient to the KMT within it. At the same Congress, the CP (then numbering just under 1,000) decided to relax its membership conditions and attempt to turn itself into a mass proletarian party rather than a mainly intellectual group.

The events of 1925

BY the end of 1925 there were over 10,000 members of the CCP — a wave of powerful strikes swept through China, influenced by communists, new unions were set up and the brutal insensitivity of the imperialists won thousands of recruits to the nationalist and communist causes.

As the CCP relaxed its membership rules, the

newly radicalised workers could, and did, join in large numbers. The contradictions between communism and bourgeois nationalism were felt even more strongly, but Stalin's policy remained the same.

The return of workers' confidence was felt in Shanghai where strikes were held against the Japanese owners of the textile mills, and on the railways the National Railroad Union held its second congress in February 1925. The leaders of the powerful Chinese Seamen's Union joined the CCP. The National General Labour Union was formed by 166 unions in 1925, and held a congress in 1925 representing over half a million workers. The union was led by communists, who could now claim to influence a significant proportion of China's workers. By 1927 the CCP claimed to represent three million organised workers — the unions and other workers' organisations were growing, and as they grew they moved leftwards.

On 15 May 1925 a factory guard killed a striker in the Shanghai cotton mills (which had been on strike since February). This was not the

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first such incident, and on May 28th the CCP central committee called for co-ordinated protest demonstrations on 30th May. As thousands of demonstrators met on Nanking Road, International Settlement Police, under a British officer, opened fire, killing 10 and wounding and arresting scores of others. The response was bigger demonstrations, culminating in a general strike on 1st June. A Shanghai General Labour Union was set up, under communist leadership.

The strikes and protests spread to other Chinese cities, climaxing in the Hong Kong-Canton strike and blockade. The strike was called by the NGLU, and a large supporting demonstration was fired on by British and French troops on 23rd June in Canton. Over 50 people were killed. This intensified the strike, involving those previously moderate and resulted in a boycott of Hong Kong which paralysed its trade. So as not to be forced to work, strikers left Hong Kong for Canton, effectively bringing it to a halt. The strike, supported by the sailors, lasted 16 months, the longest in China's history. Hardly a ship moved in or out of Hong Kong for over a year.

Again, the leaders of this tremendous revolutionary movement were communists. From being a small party composed largely of intellectuals, the CCP had increased its membership ten-fold, of which between half and two-thirds were workers.

Obviously, the May 30th movement did not just swell the ranks of the CCP, the nationalist movement benefited as well; merchants and

businessmen joined the protests. The CCP worked with these elements inside and outside the united front, but also used the time to tighten up and increase their own propaganda and educational work in the cities.

The communists targetted specific groups like women and youth, and began agitation amongst the peasants, forming peasant associations in several provinces. By 1927 the peasant associations claimed more than 9 million members in 16 provinces. Although much of the basic organisational work was done by communists in the early 1920s, the peasants were more than ready to take their place in the revolutionary struggle. Yet the pressure of the united front with the KMT was to cause the CCP to hold the peasants back from taking land, as it was to cause the communists to hold back strikes.

The situation in China had changed.

The workers' movement was strong, militant and led by communists. inevitably it would be held back if the alliance with the KMT was maintained. The workers' struggles had the power to pull sections of the bourgeoisie towards the left, and also to effectively close down imperialist enterprises in the big cities and ports. The CCP was no longer a couple of intellectuals, but a party rooted in the working class, with mass support. Even the peasants were starting to move, and move with, rather than against, the urban workers. The time had come for the communists to call for the oppressed masses to throw off all their oppressors — Chinese as well as foreign.

In other words, the time had come for the CCP to leave the united front and lead a revolution. As Trotsky put it, in September 1926: "The revolutionary struggle in China since 1925 has entered a new phase, which is characterised above all by the active intervention of broad layers of the proletariat, by strikes and the formation of trade unions. The peasants are unquestionably being drawn into motion to an increasing degree. At the same time, the commercial bourgeoisie, and the elements of the intelligentsia linked with it, are breaking off to the right, assuming a hostile attitude towards strikes, communists and the USSR."

"It is quite clear that in the light of these fundamental facts the question of revising relations between the CP and the KMT must necessarily be raised. The attempt to avoid such a revision by claiming that national-colonial oppression in China requires the permanent entry of the CP in the KMT cannot stand up under criticism."

"The leftward movement of the masses of Chinese workers is as certain a fact as the rightward movement of the Chinese bourgeoisie. [The] KMT ... must now be torn apart by the centrifugal tendencies of the class struggle. There are no magic political formulas or clever tactical devices to counter those trends, nor can there be..."

"...The CCP must now ... fight for direct independent leadership of the awakened working class."

Trotsky goes on to point out that it is the organised strength of the working class which will influence the petit-bourgeoisie, not manoeuvres within the KMT. The Stalinists, by contrast, felt that the time was not right for communism or soviets to be raised in China. They said that the CCP was not ready, and that the KMT must lead the nationalist revolution. In order to remain within the united front the CCP was to moderate its demands and its militancy. As Trotsky put it, "the desire ... [is] to convince the bourgeoisie and not to win the proletariat. This kind of position establishes the premises for inevitable retreats before the right, centre and pseudo-left leaders of the KMT." Events were to prove Trotsky right.

At the second congress of the KMT, the question of continuing the united front was again raised by the conservatives. But the left, headed by Wang Ching-wei and including (it seemed) Chiang Kai Shek, held the day.

Within the CP, many, including Chen, thought the time had come to leave the KMT, but Stalin's CI again prevailed. The CCP agreed to maintain the united front, working with the left and opposing the right, but to build their own organisation first in areas where the KMT was weak.

Chiang had other ideas. He began to talk of "deceit" from the communists, and on 20 March 1926 declared martial law. He used martial law to move against some Soviet advisers, placing them under house arrest, as well as 50 communists, alleging that they were involved in a plot against the KMT. Chiang