

2. THE FIRST UNITED FRONT

Soviet overtures to Sun Yat-sen

In November 1921 the Comintern directed Dutch operative Maring (pseudonym of Henk Sneevliet), an Asia specialist, to approach Sun Yat-sen. In a ploy meant to allay Sun's wariness about communism, Maring stressed the flexibility of the Soviet policies, maintaining that their emphasis was not specifically on practicing communism, but on implementing a new economic policy (NEP). It is obvious that Sun believed Maring and that the NEP piqued his interest. Sun was obviously relieved that the NEP bore many similarities to Sun's principle of livelihood, and judging from what happened later, it made a deep impression on him.

A conversation between Maring and Sun revealed the yawning gulf between the worldviews of the two men. Maring, obviously an espouser of the communist worldview, asked Sun why he provoked revolution. Sun replied, "Because of my love for human beings." Maring, baffled by Sun's response to his question, later told GMD official Zhang Ji, "He says he causes revolution for the benefit of mankind, but if that is the case, his efforts will never succeed. We bring about revolution because we despise the human race."

Even on the basis of their starting points alone, Sun's Three Principles and the objectives of communism are as disparate as heaven and earth. Nevertheless, Sun was gravitating toward cooperation with the USSR, meaning that he was willing to tolerate communism.

On January 26, 1923 the Sun-Joffe Manifesto was announced. (Adolph Joffe was a Soviet diplomat.) The essentials of the four-page manifesto are as follows:

1. "Dr. Sun Yat-sen holds that the Communistic order or even the Soviet system cannot actually be introduced into China, because there do not exist here the conditions for the successful establishment of either Communism or Sovietism. This view is entirely shared by Mr. Joffe who is further of opinion that China's paramount and most pressing problem is to achieve national unification and attain full national independence, and regarding this great task he has assured Dr. Sun Yat-sen that China has the warmest sympathy of the Russian people and can count on the support of Russia."¹

2. "In order to clarify the situation, Dr. Sun Yat-sen has requested Mr. Joffe for a reaffirmation of the principles defined in the Russian Note to the Chinese Government, dated September 27, 1920.² Mr. Joffe has accordingly reaffirmed these principles and categorically declared to Dr. Sun Yat-sen that the Russian Government is ready and willing to enter into negotiation with China on the basis of the renunciation by Russia of all the treaties and exactions which the Tsardom imposed in China, including the treaty or treaties and agreements relating to the

¹ Milton J.T. Shieh, *The Kuomintang: Selected Historical Documents 1894-1969* (Jamaica, NY: St. John's University Press, 1970), 71.

² Second Karakhan Manifesto.

Chinese Eastern Railway (the management of which being the subject of a specific reference in Article 7 of the said Note).”³

3. “[The realities of the Chinese Eastern Railway] situation point to the desirability of a *modus vivendi* in the matter of the present management of the Railway.”⁴

4. “Mr. Joffe has categorically declared to Dr. Sun Yat-sen ... that it is not and has never been the intention or purpose of the present Russian Government to pursue an imperialistic policy in Outer Mongolia or to cause it to secede from China.”⁵

Once the Soviets had succeeded in insinuating themselves into Sun Yat-sen’s revolution plans during negotiations between Sun and Joffe, they began work on a scheme whose objective was a collaboration between the three-year-old CCP and the GMD. Consequently, at the 3rd National Congress of the CCP, held in June 1923, it was decided that the GMD was the driving force of the people’s revolution, and that the GMD and CCP would work together, forming the First United Front. Apparently, the Chinese communists concealed their primary mission, the communization of China, and cast their lot with the GMD, whose objective was a bourgeois democratic revolution. CCP members did this not of their own volition, but to comply with “tactical instructions” from the Comintern.⁶

Sun Yat-sen’s rose-colored view of communism

In August 1923 Chiang Kai-shek met with Soviet agent Maring under orders from Sun Yat-sen. Chiang then visited the USSR as a member of Dr. Sun Yat-sen’s Mission to Soviet Russia, where he observed the Soviet armed services and political processes, and Communist Party affairs; he returned to China in December. His impressions of the USSR and the conclusions he reached about communism follow:

1. Tactics formulated for use against friends of the revolution are more numerous than those for use against enemies of the revolution.
2. Soviet political organizations are “instruments of tyranny and terror, and basically incompatible with the Kuomintang’s political ideals.”⁷
3. Russian leaders have “not given up their aggressive designs on Outer Mongolia.”⁸
4. If I were asked to summarize my impressions from a three-month-long visit to the USSR, I would say that once the Soviet communist regime becomes a strong presence, it may very

³ Shieh, *op. cit.*, 71-72.

⁴ *Ibid.*, 72.

⁵ *Ibid.*

⁶ Ōkubo Yasushi, *Chūgoku kyōsantō shi* (History of the Chinese Communist Party) (Tokyo: Hara Shobō, 1971).

⁷ Chiang Kai-shek, *Soviet Russia in China* (New York: The Noonday Press, 1957), 17.

⁸ *Ibid.*

well revive the political ambitions of the Tsarist era. In that case, the calamities that befall our country and our people's revolution may be immeasurable.

5. The Soviet Communist Party's China policy is first to "convert the Northeast Provinces, Mongolia, Sinkiang [Xinjiang], and Tibet into parts of a sovietized domain. It may even harbor sinister designs on China's other provinces."⁹
6. The Soviet "brand of internationalism and World Revolution are but Czarism by other names, the better to confuse and confound the outside world."¹⁰
7. Before I departed on my journey to the USSR, I was convinced that the offer of aid from the Soviet Communist Party to the GMD was motivated by a sincere desire to treat us as equals, and was certainly not tinged with selfishness or malice. However, as a result of my observations in the USSR, those ideals and convictions evaporated like mist. I arrived at the conclusion that the United Front might help us to temporarily counter Western colonization policies, but would never enable us to achieve independence or freedom. I also felt that the tactics and purpose of the Soviet "world revolution" posed a greater danger to national independence movements in the Far East than Western colonization policies.

However, upon hearing Chiang's reports about his trip, Sun Yat-sen told him that his views about the future of Sino-Soviet relations were overly pessimistic and unsuited to the realities of revolution. Sun was convinced that the CCP could not succeed in sabotaging the national revolution by launching a class conflict if the GMD took control. Furthermore, if the Northern Expedition proved successful, attempts by the CCP to destroy the GMD would fail. The USSR would eventually recognize the GMD as the only political party capable of leading the Chinese revolution, and instruct the communists to join the GMD and obey its orders. Sun reminded Chiang that the Soviets had already conceded that they would not be able to inculcate communism in China. Sun was unwilling to make any changes to the plan he had established for the First United Front. Judging from Sun's frighteningly optimistic perception of communism, we can see how communist brainwashing quickly succeeded in penetrating the ranks of Chinese leadership.

Once the GMD decided to admit communists, CCP members began to infiltrate its ranks. Some joined on the basis of recommendations from other GMD members, others applied on an individual basis, and still others enrolled in groups. However, some of those new members did not divulge their communist affiliations for quite some time. In any case, not much time had passed before most CCP members had insinuated themselves into the GMD.

GMD reorganization under Soviet direction

In October 1923 the USSR dispatched an individual to China who went by the name of Borodin. His real name was Mikhail Gruzenberg, and he had been entrusted with a very important mission. Borodin paid a visit to Sun Yat-sen, to whom he indicated several major flaws in the GMD: the lack of both a unified party organization and strict discipline, as well as the absence of a popular support base. To become an effective revolutionary weapon, the GMD would need to

⁹ *Ibid.*, 19.

¹⁰ *Ibid.*

correct those deficiencies. Borodin seduced Sun by telling him that the time had not yet come for China to adopt communism, that the ultimate objectives of the CCP and the GMD were identical, and that the CCP should submit to GMD leadership. Sun agreed with every one of Borodin's suggestions, and immediately appointed him his advisor. Meanwhile, as already stated, more and more influential CCP members were joining the GMD. Sun Yat-sen decided to adopt Soviet and CCP tactics for his revolution. But first he addressed the reorganization of the GMD, on the eve of which he addressed party members. He told them that if they wanted to make the revolution a success they would have to learn from Russian-style methods, organizations, and training, adding that he hoped they would submit loyally to Borodin's opinions. Toward the end of October Sun Yat-sen established a provisional Central Executive Committee in Guangdong. He then began work on the draft of a manifesto, on a platform, and on the reorganization of the GMD, with Borodin again serving as his chief advisor.

The historic 1st National Congress of the GMD took place in Guangdong from January 20 to 30, 1924. Important matters ruled on at that gathering are as follows:

1. Reorganization of the GMD

The new GMD, fashioned under the guidance and influence of Borodin and his group of Soviet advisors, almost completely replicated the structure of the Soviet Communist Party. To make the entire GMD into a monolithic, unified powerful combat unit, they adopted pyramid-shaped centralized authoritarian rule with a committee system.

Incidentally, Sun stated that he was convinced that the Soviet Communist Party should be used as the model for GMD reorganization. He believed that the 1911 (Xinhai) Revolution was unsuccessful because the wrong means had been used to bring it about, unlike the Russian Revolution that occurred six years later, using the proper methods.

2. GMD-CCP United Front

There were wide differences of opinion about the United Front within the GMD. Right-wing members like Feng Ziyou and Xie Yungbo felt uneasy about admitting communists into the GMD, citing the saying, "Rent a garret to the CCP, and they will end up taking over your whole house." Anyone of sound mind would have harbored suspicions of and doubts about the CCP, but at the 1st National Congress, Sun Yat-sen attempted to conciliate and persuade with the following:

The principle of livelihood, which our party already espouses, includes socialism, communism, and collectivism.¹¹ ... The policies that Russia is implementing at this time are not pure communism, but simply policies intended to resolve problems relating to livelihood. I would like my fellow GMD members to understand that there is absolutely no conceptual conflict between communism and the principle of livelihood, only differences in scope.¹²

¹¹ Author's note: Since the principle of livelihood incorporates socialism, and socialism incorporates communism, communism is included in the principle of livelihood.

¹² Sun Yat-sen, *Zenshū* (Complete works), *Gaimushō Chōsabu yaku* (trans. Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Research Division).

Sun Yat-sen argued that since the principle of livelihood was equivalent to socialism, it also embraced communism. Not only was his reasoning erroneous, it was also exceedingly imprudent and irresponsible.

After all, in August 1924, the same year in which the 1st National Congress of the Guomindang was held, Sun addressed the cadets at Whampoa (Huangpu) Military Academy. For the first time he categorically criticized Marxism and elucidated the standpoint of the Three Principles of the People vis à vis Marxism. Sun compared historical materialism with the historical perception of his principle of livelihood. While he denounced class struggle and advocated class collaboration, and indicated the errors in the theory of surplus value, he provided evidence to the effect that capitalism will never disappear, and praised the Ford Motor Company and its production system, which he described as ideal. Sun concluded by saying, “I have nothing but praise for Marx’s scholarship, but cannot put Marxist methods into practice in China.” There are absolutely no aspects of Sun’s Three Principles that reject private ownership. The Republic of China Constitutional Draft, issued later by the Nanjing government, faithfully echoed the Three Principles of the People, but was in no way superior to the Weimar Constitution.¹³ The intrinsic differences and discrepancies between the Three Principles and communism are blatantly obvious. The story of the Second United Front lends credence to the argument that the First United Front was the first step of a process designed to achieve a Comintern-CCP tactic: turning all of China communist. This would be accomplished by taking advantage of the GMD’s strength, steadily communizing the GMD, and ultimately dominating the Chinese revolution. There were some GMD members who were doubtful and suspicious of the communists, men who opposed allowing communists to join the GMD, or who at least had enough foresight to demand clear requirements for membership in the GMD. Unfortunately, Sun Yat-sen failed to see through the communists’ far-reaching conspiracy.

Consequently, more and more CCP members joined the GMD, and ensconced themselves in important GMD positions. For instance, the 24-member Central Executive Committee welcomed three communists, among them CCP co-founder Li Dazhao and founding member Tan Pingshan. Among 17 alternate members one finds the names of communists Lin Boqu and Mao Zedong. Furthermore, in addition to communists being appointed to key posts (Li Dazhao to head the Political Branch in Beijing; Lin Boqu, the GMD Department of Peasants; and Tan Pingshan, the Organization Department), a great many of them captured other important GMD positions, forming an influential core. There was, for all intents and purposes, a Communist Party operating openly within the GMD. The GMD could not (and did not) operate on its own terms, and the people’s revolution could not continue to be a gradual, moderate process. From then on, the GMD and the people’s revolution were at the mercy of the red demons residing inside them, and had no choice but to rush full speed ahead over the violent, radical track the communists had laid.

¹³ Takahashi Yūji, *Son Bun* (Sun Yat-sen) (Tokyo: Nippon Hyōronsha, 1944).

3. Founding of the Whampoa Military Academy

The third most important resolution made at the First National Congress of the GMD was to establish a military school in Huangpu (Guangdong province) where Nationalist Army officers could receive training. Preparations were made under Borodin's leadership, using financial aid from the Comintern. To train the cadets Soviet Army officer Galen (pseudonym of Vasily Blyukher) and many of his fellow officers were dispatched to China. Of particular note is the political education of soldiers, in which party leaders participated; a Political Department was established for that purpose. An inaugural ceremony was held in June 1924; Chiang Kai-shek was installed as superintendent, and here, too, communist elements wormed their way in early on: Ye Jianying was appointed deputy chairman of the Training Department, and Zhou Enlai deputy chairman of the Political Department.

4. Manifesto of the First National Congress

Before the curtain fell on the historic congress, its final tasks (determining the GMD platform and publicly announcing the congress' manifesto) were completed. The manifesto consisted of three parts: (1) the present condition of China, (2) the principles of the GMD, and (3) the political platform of the GMD. The manifesto stressed the importance of realizing Sun Yat-sen's Three Principles, which are described therein as the principle of racial unity, the principle of popular sovereignty, and the principle of the people's livelihood. It mentions two aspects of the principle of racial unity: the pursuit of self-emancipation (independence for the Chinese people) and equality for all ethnicities in China (how to behave toward ethnic groups in remote areas of former Qing territory). About the second aspect, the manifesto states, "The Kuomintang solemnly declares that it recognizes the right of self-determination of all the races within the country; and that after the success of the revolution against the militarists and the imperialists, a freely united Republic of China, based on the free union of the races, will be established."¹⁴ However, the promise of equality and self-determination for China's minorities was never fulfilled. To this day, China has yet to recognize self-determination or independence for the peoples of Xinjiang and Tibet, which is why independence movements accompanied by bloodshed have been erupting in those regions. Moreover, after the demise of the Qing dynasty, the Chinese claimed even Manchuria as their territory. Later, when the Manchurian Incident occurred, they denied independence and self-determination to the Manchus, and clashed with the Japanese, who advocated Manchu independence. Today even the name "Manchuria" is nowhere to be seen. It has been obliterated and replaced by "Northeast China."

A noteworthy item in the platform of the GMD concerns foreign policy: "All unequal treaties, such as foreign concessions, extraterritoriality, foreign control of customs, and all categories of political power exercised by foreigners in China and prejudicial to her sovereignty should be

¹⁴ T.C. Woo, *The Kuomintang and the Future of the Chinese Revolution* (London: George Allen & Unwin, 1928), 264.

cancelled, and new treaties based on the principle of equality and mutual respect for the sovereign rights of both parties should be negotiated to take their places.”¹⁵

The inclusion of this language in the manifesto is a harbinger of the revolutionary diplomacy conducted by China in later years. The manifesto itself was based on a draft prepared by Borodin, and the Three Principles of the People that appear therein are said to be the greatest common denominator between Comintern-CCP revolutionary theory and Sun Yat-sen’s revolutionary theory.

¹⁵ *Ibid.*, 267.