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## CHAPTER 6

# Mending the United Front in Kwangtung

Since the March 20 Coup had been bloodless, there remained many controversial persons and issues. One was the Hong Kong-Kwangtung Strike and its organization, which polarized the pro-Communist and anti-Communist members of the KMT, and thus severely tested the solidarity of the United Front. Those participating in the coup generally agreed that an expedition would require the resumption of trade with Hong Kong for economic purposes, and the restraint of the Strike Committee for political purposes. To them the Strike Committee pre-saged a Communist take-over of the Revolutionary Base. The same day that the Whampoa cadets moved against the strike headquarters, a note reportedly signed by Chairman Wang Ching-wei went from Canton to Hong Kong's British governor, Sir Cecil Clement, proposing that he and Canton each appoint three representatives to negotiate the settlement of the strike (by then in its ninth month).<sup>1</sup>

During the rest of March and into April 1926, representatives of Canton and Hong Kong reviewed the major obstacles to a settlement. What had begun as a political maneuver in 1925 took on strong economic colorings in order to retain the participation of Kwangtung labor. By spring 1926, the demand most difficult to resolve concerned retroactive payment of the nine months of wages lost by the tens of thousands of strikers.<sup>2</sup> This strike Committee demand bespoke Russia's keen interest in hampering British trade in China as well as in developing a broad base of mass support for the CCP. Diverse KMT leaders proposed ways of reining in the strike and its mass organization. By the spring of 1926, the KMT Center and Right wanted an end to the strike—but could not afford to prejudice the Russian aid program. From the March 20 Coup until the July launching

of the expedition, various KMT luminaries confronted the Strike Organization, and the tensions within the KMT-CCP coalition can be seen through their experiences.

In the search for a *modus vivendi* after the coup, there emerged compromises that were typically Chinese. Although Chiang had forced out of key positions a group of CCP members, his faction in turn had to give in to the pressure of the Russian-CCP bloc demanding a similar ousting of the most active anti-Communists for the good of the United Front. Thus, the CCP attacked Wu T'ieh-ch'eng, the chief of the Canton police, commander of the First Army's Eleventh Division, and CEC member. He had collaborated with Mayor C.C. Wu in the use of police to curtail the armed strike pickets in the Communist union movement. The police had been called out to reinforce non-Communist unions during conflicts with rival CCP unions directed by the Strike Committee. Wu's police did not resist the coup of March 20, but joined with Chiang's Whampoa elements and then afterward provided the surveillance force around the Strike Organization. From his police headquarters had come the order preventing unions from: 1) arming members, 2) arresting workers, or 3) forcibly settling disputes among unions without National Government orders.<sup>3</sup> However, the KMT was not yet ready or able to disarm the CCP unions. When violence broke out between strikers and the police, Wu had to call off his police. In such a confrontation on March 29, 1926, at the memorial service for the KMTs seventy-two martyrs of the 1911 revolution, two mounted police had moved against a group of strikers only to find themselves in the hands of the Strike Committee and under investigation.<sup>4</sup>

Encouraging the committee were its Russian patrons and also the political power of the tens of thousands of affiliated, disciplined union members. Only a week after Chiang's coup, the strikers operated as usual in preventing communications with Hong Kong. They continued to demand travel passes to and from Hong Kong. Rumors even circulated that the committee planned a general strike to protest against the search and seizure of strikers at the headquarters during the coup.<sup>5</sup>

The restraining of Wu T'ieh-ch'eng could be seen by early April when the order to disarm the unions became modified to pertain to all unions *except* the strike pickets (the police did retain a measure of control through the requirement that all unions register their meetings, ahead of time, at police headquarters).<sup>6</sup> Not only was Wu forced to rein in his police from intervening against the CCP labor movement, but also in his

compromise with the Communists, Chiang used the police to prevent *ant i*-Communists from holding a planned demonstration.<sup>7</sup>

One significant outcome of the March 20 Coup was the concentration of power around centrist Chiang, at the expense of both the Communists and the KMT Rightists, or anti-Communists. (At that point the Right could be defined as anti-Communist.) To the Russia-CCP bloc, Wu T'ieh-ch'eng symbolized the avowed anti-Communist and enemy of "red" unions. But to Chiang, Wu also represented a focal point of military and police power, of which Chiang's rivals in the KMT Right might make use. In the settlement demanded of Chiang in return for continuance of Russian aid, Wu T'ieh-ch'eng, a sponsor of the militant Sun Yat-senists, became a sacrificial offering that saved "face" for the demoted CCP and undermined rivals of Chiang. Apparently Wu was not able to prove to Chiang that his loyalties were not tied to the Rightists. On April 24, Wu found himself dismissed as police chief and from First Army divisional command, and by late May he was confined first at his own police headquarters and then at Whampoa.<sup>8</sup> In recognition of the new locus of power, Wu's replacement took his orders from Chiang's Military Council rather than from the municipal and provincial governments.

C.C. Wu, diplomat for the KMT as well as mayor of Canton, earlier had been frustrated by the recalcitrant Strike Committee while negotiating with the British. Shortly after the March 20 Coup, British-educated Wu resumed informal talks with representatives from Hong Kong in hopes of using the strike as bargaining leverage with the British. On the matter of paying the strikers' lost wages, the British indicated a willingness to allow Hong Kong merchants to settle with the Strike Committee.<sup>9</sup> There was even talk of a British offer to finance the completion of the Canton-Hankow railway.<sup>10</sup> Less dependence on Russian aid would certainly have appealed to the anti-Communist element in the KMT with which C.C. Wu had close ties. However, Wu's optimism over a strike settlement was premature.

The postcoup compromise, while removing the Russian-CCP bloc from military leadership, had allowed it to retain a primary role among the mass organizations and in the strike. Once removed from NRA leadership and its Political Departments, the CCP and the strike apparatus were expected to concede their tacit support to the Northern Expedition and direct the supportive cooperation of the peasants and workers. C.C. Wu was

apparently not a party to the deal, since but one week following the coup he blasted the Strike Committee as “troublemakers” and their pickets as “bribe-takers.” Then, at the Kwangtung Labor Conference, Wu staged a walkout of KMT union delegates in protest against the affair as a CCP-dominated sham.<sup>11</sup>

Although C.C. Wu had not bolted Canton in 1925 with the anti-Communist Western Hills faction, he worked as a Sun Yat-senist against the Russian alliance and the coalition with the CCP. The pressure of these anti-Communists at Canton was sufficient to force the Strike Committee to make at least some show of subordination to the KMT. Stalin also insisted that the CCP uphold the United Front. In early April 1926, the Strike Committee responding to Wu’s charges did publicize an investigation of alleged corruption and extortion among pickets enforcing the boycott.<sup>12</sup> However, conflict between the strikers and the nonaffiliated unions went on and the committee pressed the KMT to remove the most influential enemies of the strike from positions of authority. This was a trying time for the KMT, still tending its own wounds from the coup as well as trying to coexist with its CCP partner. Another of the points of compromise was the neutralization of the two most antagonistic political organizations—the CCP’s Communist Youth and the KMT’s Sun Yat-senists (Sun Wen Chu-i Hsüeh-hui). When the antagonists in the CCP and KMT agreed to disband these groups, the leading sponsor of the Sun Yat-senists, C.C. Wu, must also have been threatened along with his associate, Wu T’ieh-ch’eng.

By the end of April, Wu realized that his role was that of scapegoat and exiled himself from Canton, only avoiding arrest by a well-timed departure for Shanghai to visit the tomb of his father, Wu T’ing-fang.<sup>13</sup> He left the posts of Canton mayor, CEC member, National Government committeeman, and Military Councilman. In the last group, membership was narrowing to those amenable to Chiang’s leadership. Of the eight men appointed in July 1925 to the Military Council, only Chiang, T’an Yen-k’ai, and loyal Chu P’ei-teh remained by late April 1926. Out, via a number of means, were: ex-chairman Wang Ching-wei, who was superceded in the coup; Liao Chung-k’ai, who was assassinated in 1925; Hu Han-min, discredited and exiled to Moscow by that assassination; Hsü Ch’ung-chih, ousted the preceding fall as the alleged collaborator of warlord Ch’én Chiung-ming; and C.C. Wu, anti-Communist casualty of the postcoup reconciliation. On April 16, 1926, Chiang received the powers of chairman of the Military Council from the CEC and the National Government.<sup>14</sup>

As quick as was the turnover in KMT leadership, the actual purging of the Sun Yat-senists proved to be a temporary show. Chinese politicians have Taoist resiliency, as well as flexibility. With the reconciliation efforts that preceded the launching of the expedition, exiled anti-Communists gravitated back to Canton. Later, following the KMT's split with the CCP in 1927, both ousted Wus returned to positions of Party leadership. One month after the Shanghai purge of April 1927, C.C. Wu emerged as Foreign Minister of Nanking. For Wu T'ieh-ch'eng, his release came after eight months' confinement, strangely enough through the intercessions of Leftist Mme. Sun Yat-sen (Soong Ch'ing-ling). She pled with Chiang that Wu T'ieh-ch'eng had performed innumerable services for Sun during their long association and acted as a guarantor that Wu would not interfere in politics.<sup>15</sup> Later Wu rose within the Party as mayor of Shanghai and then governor of Kwangsi.

Chiang's rise in the KMT during the spring of 1926 was dependent partly on his abilities and also on the pivotal nature of his role as a centrist at Canton. As military leader and head of the key Whampoa Academy, Chiang could expand his influence outward among the allied "armies" in the NRA. As commander of the First Army, Chiang already controlled the force best trained and most responsive to Party interests. He managed to dominate the KMT's military establishment, and because of his Party experience he was able also to attract civilian support. Up to the time of the coup, Chiang had stayed close enough to pro-Communist elements that when he curtailed the Sun Yat-senists, he convinced Stalin, Ch'en Tu-hsiu, and other CCP members that he was still useful.<sup>16</sup> Chiang appeared to be the strong man most capable of providing the centripetal force needed to weld together the fragile United Front and revolutionary movement.

At that stage Stalin still hoped to utilize the KMT's "national bourgeois revolution," though he did not really expect its success in reuniting China. Russian efforts elsewhere in China had not come to fruition. In early April 1926, Feng Yü-hsiang's troops, despite Russian advisors and aid, were in retreat from North China into the northwest hinterland following a series of defeats. Russian diplomats were creating a conciliatory image in Peking with the ephemeral government there. At Canton the Russians continued to dole out aid and thus were able to demand concessions for the CCP by threatening to call due all loans to the KMT and to cut off aid.

By the time the Second Congress of the KMT's CEC met in mid-May, it could approve the compromises achieved between the anti-Communists, Chiang, and the Russian mission. The anti-Communists had gained the removal of CCP influence in the military and the dissolution of the Communist Youth. Aside from Kisanka and his aides who left immediately after Chiang's coup, another dozen of the most "uncooperative" members of the Russian mission departed Canton on April 14, and Chiang demanded successfully that those remaining in Canton act strictly as advisors and not as policy makers.<sup>17</sup> On the other hand, the Communists had been placated by the removal of several outspoken anti-Communists and the dissolution of the militant Sun Yat-senists. Chiang also helped quiet anxious Russian advisors by his assertion that the coup had not been an attack on the alliance or on the Russian mission, but that it was an act against individuals. It remained for the Second KMT Congress to redefine the United Front.

When the sessions began on May 15, Chiang proposed making the CCP more subordinate to the KMT. The CEC drafted a declaration reiterating the KMT ideal of the union of classes rather than class conflict and redressing the CCP for misusing the coalition. The tone was conciliatory, probably as a result of the prior day's discussion between Chiang and Borodin who had returned to Canton from North China.<sup>18</sup> At Stalin's recommendation, Borodin agreed to continue Russian aid and to hold the CCP in line with the decisions of the forthcoming CEC meetings. On May 16 when Borodin gathered together the CCP leaders at his East Mountain quarters, the Russians reproached the leaders for their: "... obvious measures to enlarge the CCP which they consider the main purpose of their work. They want to monopolize authority everywhere. This causes jealousy in KMT members and the KMT will thus be torn apart."<sup>19</sup>

Next the CEC regulated against CCP domination of the KMT organizational apparatus. CCP membership on key KMT committees was to be limited to one-third. Thus, on the key nine-man Standing Committee of the CEC, there could be no more than three "dual members," CCP members who had entered the KMT as individuals.<sup>20</sup> The lower-level Party headquarters were also to achieve the same ratio of KMT to CCP members. To ensure the validity of the membership ratio, the CCP was asked to turn over to the CEC chairman a list of all dual members.<sup>21</sup>

To implement these regulations checking CCP influence, five KMT members (Chiang and his allies T'an Yen-k'ai, Chang Ching-chiang, Wu Chih-hui, and Sun Fo) and three representing

the CCP (T'an P'ing-shan, Yu Shih-teh, and Ku Meng-yü) were to function on a bipartisan committee.<sup>22</sup> This committee was to see to it that the KMT Central Headquarters authorized all political meetings, that KMT members did not join "another party," and that Comintern orders to dual members be reviewed by KMT Headquarters.<sup>23</sup> Later, Chiang's Military Council, under the authorization of the CEC, ruled that CCP membership and service as an officer in the NRA be mutually exclusive. Thus, the "compromise" was much less favorable to the side of the Communists, although the Russians at that point felt sure that Chiang needed their support desperately.<sup>24</sup>

The Russian mission and aid program continued, and the CCP went on freely in its work with the proletariat and peasants, but the Russian-CCP partners did lose much of their influence within the military at Canton. This loss became clear the following year when the highly prized mass organizations failed to overcome the KMT military. In early 1926, CCP headquarters in Shanghai had a military department of only two minor members and little work.<sup>25</sup> By May 1926, in compensation for this loss of military presence in NRA Political Departments, the CCP had armed peasant associations for defense against "bandits" and had trained a corps of peasant experts in political techniques and ideology.<sup>26</sup> The diversion of CCP energy into mass organizing was evident a week after the coup. An example was Mao Tse-tung, until then active in the KMT Propaganda Department, who turned his attention to the peasants' movement as the secretary of the KMT Peasants' Department. In late March, Mao directed the Peasants' Movement Institute, enrolling over 300—mainly radicalized rural elite.

The institute had originally been a KMT organ, but, when it convened in late March 1926, its Communist reorientation was obvious. Besides Mao, the other five instructors were all CCP members who taught students from nineteen provinces Marxist techniques of rural revolution and ideology. The work at the institute signified the concentration of CCP energies on mass organization after the coup. Rather than CCP movements withering after March 20, the organizing of Kwangtung peasants blossomed during the spring and summer of 1926. As a flexible centrist, Chiang had to balance these mass organizations under CCP influence against the pressures from uncompromising anti-Communists—especially from within the ranks of the military. In the meantime, the CCP's mass organizing expanded rapidly in the then permissive surroundings of the Revolutionary Base. (See chapter 18.)



The CCP benefited from their predominance over the mass organizations of Kwangtung, which seemed to prove the practicality of Stalin's strategy of temporary compromise with the KMT. As soon after the coup as April 3, Ch'en Tu-hsiu acknowledged Chiang in the CCP organ, *Hsiang-tao*. Criticizing the "propaganda of the Right," which had implicated the Communists in a plot to overthrow Chiang and set up a Workers' and Peasants' Soviet—thus precipitating the coup—Ch'en argued that: "the CCP is not mad.... Chiang Kai-shek is ... the pillar of the Chinese National Revolutionary Movement. The policy of the CCP is ... not only against the splitting up of Kwangtung's revolutionary power but also hopes to unite all revolutionary power in all China." <sup>27</sup>

The French Communist Party newspaper *L'Humanité* gave the official Comintern pronouncement that the "noise reported in the press of a conflict between the Kuomintang and the Communists is unfounded." <sup>28</sup> With the return of Borodin from the north to Canton in late April came more tangible evidence of Moscow's conciliatory stance. Within a matter of days Russian freighters off-loaded shipments of war materiel, including nine aircraft accompanied by Russian trainers assigned to the NRA's Aviation Bureau. <sup>29</sup> This provided leverage, exemplified during the decisive CEC meetings in mid-May when the Russian leaders embarrassed Finance Minister T. V. Soong over the matter of repaying Russia's loans. This move forced propitiatory responses from the KMT and underlined the practical rewards of maintaining amicable KMT-Russian relations. <sup>30</sup>

### RECONCILIATION WITHIN THE KMT

The March 20 Coup involved more than a purge of Communists and uncooperative Rightists. If Chiang's long-dreamed-of Northern Expedition was to materialize, he had to reconcile the KMT factions to each other and to his ascension. He could not conduct the offensive against the warlords by himself.

After the coup, on March 29, the Western Hills faction of the Kuomintang's CEC convened in Shanghai what they claimed to be the Second National Congress. They decided to support Chiang's coup against the CCP and wired him of their approval. <sup>31</sup> To reinforce his centrist position, Chiang wired back his disapproval of the "Congress," calling instead for the upholding of the Party Central in Canton to purify the Party and launch the Northern Expedition. <sup>32</sup> Further negotiations took Sun Fo

to Shanghai as Canton's representative.<sup>33</sup> Sun returned with a covey of exiled Rightists. One was Yeh Ch'u-ts'ang, the chief editor of the Rightist newspaper *Kuo-min jih-pao* [National people's daily], who in May became the CEC's appointee to the post of Party Secretary General.<sup>34</sup> Yeh replaced CCP's T'an P'ing-shan, Lin Tsu-han, and Yang Pao-an. An associate of Yeh Ch'u-ts'ang was Shao Yüan-chung who came to head the KMT's Youth Department. Both Yeh and Shao had been among the Western Hills rebels who had split with Canton over the issue of the Russian alliance and the United Front.

But the reconciliation was not limited to anti-Communist Western Hills men. Ku Meng-yü, ex-dean of Peking University and a leader of its student movement, who had been labeled by the Russians and CCP members as a KMT Leftist, replaced Mao Tse-tung in the strategic Propaganda Department.<sup>35</sup> Chiang gained for himself the post of acting head of the Organization Department. And what of the constitutional leader of the Canton regime at the time of the coup—its National Government Committee and Party chairman, Wang Ching-wei? Wang, who had promoted the alliance with the Communists, had benefited most from the support received from the Russians and CCP. The proponents of the coup must have been strong considering that a gathering of forces behind Chairman Wang did not materialize. Wang's opposition to Chiang's usurpation of authority was passive. Superseded by the anti-Communist coalition, Wang was isolated along with his Communist patrons. Rather than becoming the focus of a Leftist KMT-CCP campaign against Chiang, Wang waited in the wings for the results of the post coup compromise. His high rank did not guarantee him security. Neither army elements nor mass organizations rose against the coup.

By the mid-May meeting of the CEC, Wang Ching-wei had quietly left Canton "for his health." Then, when the CEC held an election for the chairmanship of the Party, Wang received two votes for that position out of thirty-five cast—as did Chiang. The CEC that had approved the curtailment of the CCP and the reconciliation of the KMT factions elected as Party chairman Chang Ching-chiang, nominated by Chiang Kai-shek, by a majority vote of nineteen.<sup>36</sup> Thus, neither Wang nor Chiang really dominated the KMT membership following the coup.

As Chiang's compromise candidate, at the age of sixty-three Chang Ching-chiang was no newcomer to Party service, but had been associated with Sun Yat-sen and his movement from before the 1911 revolution. Chang's home province was Chekiang just over the border from Shanghai, where his family had made

its fortune as merchants (a background similar to that of his younger fellow provincial Chiang Kai-shek). Chang had participated in the leadership of revolutionary movement in Kiangsu.<sup>37</sup> During the long struggle of Sun's party before and after 1911, Chang had donated a large proportion of his family capital to the revolutionary cause—thus exemplifying a source of the KMT's financial power. Although Chang was a civilian, he had close ties with the KMT military through Chiang Kai-shek, and he had not been tainted as a patron of the United Front. Although a cripple and in poor health, his persuasive powers were notable and sorely needed by the divided party.

In its May sessions, the CEC sought to placate the disaffected factions in hopes of counteracting the KMT's endemic centrifugal tendencies—which mirrored a problem common to China. It was agreed to wire a plea to Wang Ching-wei and Hu Han-min (theoretically the symbols of the Left and the Right) for their return to Canton and to their work. A committee was to persuade Hu in Shanghai of the Party's need for his presence. Since many in the CEC felt that the terms "Right" and "Left" were meaningless and divisive, Sun Fo proposed, unsuccessfully, that the terms be banned from use in the Party.<sup>38</sup>

However, the differences separating KMT members and those that existed between the KMT and CCP were deep. The anti-Communists remained fearful of collaborating with the CCP and the Russians. The CCP and the KMT Left were rankled by new regulations that, in theory, restricted their dominance. Those outside Chiang's clique had to face the *fait accompli* of his rising influence and his unyielding demand for the Northern Expedition. The traditions of consensus and loyal opposition were absent in China, so that the joining of hands in the spring of 1926 was temporary, and more apparent than real. Factionalism, so common to Chinese politics where nationhood was still in its infancy, was to remain a fatal weakness of the KMT, which was not galvanized by an overriding ideological unity. Perhaps more basic was the traditional tendency to include and synthesize approaches that are not really compatible.

Without an adequate power base of its own, the leadership at Canton had to do the best with what it had, and gambled that a course of action was preferable to further delay. While the coup had slowed the jockeying for leadership, it had not truly eliminated the rivalries. The parallel with the leadership of the Taipings' northern expedition is striking. As summer warmed at Canton the question was: Would the political energy explode outward against the warlord enemies or inward in self-destruction?