



# MOSCOW AND THE EMERGENCE OF COMMUNIST POWER IN CHINA 1925-30

The Nanchang Rising and the Birth of the Red Army

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First published 2009  
by Routledge  
2 Park Square, Milton Park, Abingdon, Oxon OX14 4RN

Simultaneously published in the USA and Canada  
by Routledge  
270 Madison Ave, New York, NY 10016

*Routledge is an imprint of the Taylor & Francis Group, an Informa business*  
This edition published in the Taylor & Francis e-Library, 2009.

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*British Library Cataloguing in Publication Data*  
A catalogue record for this book is available from the British Library

*Library of Congress Cataloging in Publication Data*

Elleman, Bruce A., 1959-

Moscow and the emergence of communist power in China, 1925-30: the Nanchang Rising and the birth of the Red Army.

p. cm. – (Routledge studies in the modern history of Asia ; v. 55)

Includes bibliographical references and index.

ISBN 978-0-415-77614-1 (hardback : alk. paper) 1. China—History—Warlord Period, 1916-1928 2. Communism—China. 3. Communism—Soviet Union. I. Title. II. Title: Nanchang Rising and the birth of the Red Army.

DS777.36.E55 2009

951.04'2—dc22

2008036868

ISBN 0-203-88160-5 Master e-book ISBN

ISBN 978-0-415-77614-1 (hbk)

ISBN 978-0-203-88160-6 (ebk)

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# Introduction

This book will examine the Soviet Union's relations with China before, during, and after the 1 August 1927 Nanchang Uprising. The Nanchang Uprising was the Chinese Communist Party's (CCP) first independent military action and—even though a dismal failure—is celebrated today as the birthplace of the People's Liberation Army (PLA). Following Mao Zedong's adoption of guerrilla tactics during the 1930s, the PLA played a key role in achieving the CCP's 1949 rise to power. For this reason, the Nanchang Uprising has had an important and enduring impact on modern Chinese history. Unlike other histories of this event, however, this book will argue that Stalin orchestrated such revolutionary events not to assist China's socialist revolution, but to destroy his political rivals in the USSR, including Leon Trotsky, Gregory Zinoviev, and Nikolai Bukharin.

The Nanchang Uprising took place during tumultuous times. With the break in the Communist–Guomindang United Front in April 1927, Soviet assistance and participation in the Northern Expedition to reunite China came to an end. In July, the so-called Left Guomindang (GMD) in Hankou—with the cities of Wuchang and Hanyang, also called Wuhan—and the CCP split, leaving the Soviet Union without any backing whatsoever within China's Nationalist movement. Faced with arrest and possible imprisonment, the Soviet military advisers withdrew to the Soviet Union, with the head adviser Mikhail Borodin leaving China in late July 1927.

All chances for a Chinese socialist revolution to develop out of the Nationalist revolution seemed doomed to fail. However, under orders from Moscow, the Chinese Communist Party declared that the time was ripe for urban revolution. The uprising in Nanchang on 1 August 1927 was the first revolt of its type, resulting in the establishment of China's first-ever workers' soviet, or council in Russian; this soviet lasted for only a few days before being destroyed by the Nationalist Army. Later, in December, a second CCP-supported urban revolt in Canton—the Canton Commune—quickly collapsed. Finally, a third little-known uprising in Bargu during September 1928 was similarly short-lived.

Both the Nanchang Uprising and the Canton Commune proved disastrous for the Chinese Communists. As a result of these failures, the Chinese

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Communists were forced to retreat into the countryside, where they were eventually isolated and besieged by Nationalist forces. The failure of the Bargu revolt weakened the Inner Mongolian Communists as well. All of these defeats seemed to prove that China was not ready for a socialist revolution. Why then did Moscow order them to take place?

As this book will strive to show, these events in China cannot be understood without examining the intra-party battles taking place in Moscow throughout 1925–28. Both of the failed urban uprisings in China corresponded with government and party conferences in Russia. For example, news of the Nanchang Uprising reached Moscow during the August plenum of the Central Committee, while the Canton Commune was timed to correspond with the Bolsheviks' Fifteenth Party Congress. Meanwhile, the Bargu revolt was timed to fall during a plenary session of the Moscow party committee.

The timing of these revolutionary events was to have a crucial impact on the Soviet government's and Bolshevik party's decisions on a whole host of issues, including "Socialism in One Country," the adoption of the first Five-Year Plan, and collectivization. In particular, Stalin used the existence of the Nanchang Uprising to disprove the claims of the United Opposition—under the leadership of Trotsky and Zinoviev—that China was not ready for socialism. As a result of the Canton Commune, Trotsky and Zinoviev, plus 75 of their closest supporters, were expelled from the Bolshevik party. During the Bargu revolt, Stalin openly attacked his former ally Bukharin, accusing him of leading an anti-government Right Opposition; during the 1929 Sino-Soviet War, Bukharin was then ousted from the Politburo.

This book will argue that Stalin time after time willingly sacrificed the Chinese and Mongolian Communists in order to manipulate events in Moscow and thereby eliminate his political rivals, foremost among them Trotsky and Zinoviev, but later also including Bukharin. China's Communist leaders could not help but suspect that they had merely become pawns in the ongoing factional struggle in Moscow. Such self-serving tactics were later to become a major source of friction between Mao Zedong and Stalin.

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By 1925, the Soviet Union had become one of the most influential foreign powers in China. An important facet of the USSR's China policy was its dual relations with the Beijing government in the North and the Guomindang government in the South. Without this policy of playing North against South, the Soviet Union could arguably never have made the inroads that it did in China. Likewise, this policy inevitably faltered when the North and South reunified.

The USSR's power over the Beijing government derived from the 31 May 1924 Sino-Soviet Friendship Treaty. This treaty specified that the two governments would meet within a month of signing to determine exactly how all of the Soviet Union's promises of equality would be enacted. Claiming that

China had not carried out its promises to return the Russian embassies and consulates to Moscow, however, the Soviet government refused to go to the bargaining table, which meant that all of the terms of the former unequal Tsarist treaties remained valid. Thus, by resorting to secret diplomacy and by refusing to carry through on its treaty obligations with Beijing, the Soviet government retained the unequal rights and privileges of the Tsarist government. This was contrary to Soviet propaganda, which claimed that Russia and China had formed “equal” relations.<sup>1</sup>

This situation had a particularly important impact on the Soviet occupation of Outer Mongolia, since it gave the Soviet government enormous leverage over Beijing. While the Red Army did eventually withdraw most of its troops from Outer Mongolia, the Soviet government warned the Chinese government not to send Chinese soldiers to replace them—even threatening that Soviet troops would immediately help the Mongolians defend themselves if China intervened. In effect, Outer Mongolia remained a Soviet protectorate, a position the Tsarist government had held previously.

As for the Chinese Eastern Railway, although Soviet ambassador Lev Karakhan promised many times that the Soviet government would allow China to buy back the Chinese Eastern Railway, in September 1924 the Soviet government signed an additional treaty with Zhang Zuolin’s government in Manchuria that superseded the May treaty with Beijing. A secret clause promised that joint control would be held by the Soviet government and Zhang Zuolin, which meant that the Beijing government lost its authority over the railway. However, by means of separate convention with Japan, signed in January 1925, the USSR was able to retake majority control over this crucial railway away from Zhang Zuolin. Such imperialist policies angered the Chinese.

In addition to its diplomacy, Moscow simultaneously formed the United Front with the Guomindang government in Guangzhou. With the beginning of this policy in 1923, the Comintern sent political, propaganda, and military advisers to China to help reorganize the Guomindang and to develop its military forces. As the Guomindang increased in size, so did its United Front ally, the Chinese Communist Party, and through the spring of 1926, the CCP’s influence in the Guomindang grew. By directing the propaganda organs, which the Comintern had helped the Guomindang to build, against the North, the USSR was able to exert enormous diplomatic leverage on Beijing.

Moscow’s ultimate objective was to use this dual policy to bring about a Nationalist revolution in China. This revolution would be anti-imperialist in nature and might lead to the ousting of all other foreigners from China. Japan, in particular, was highly vulnerable to this strategy, since the Japanese had extensive economic holdings in southern Manchuria. It was the Comintern’s primary task to develop the Nationalist revolution in China. Following the success of the Nationalist revolution, the Comintern’s second goal was to instigate a socialist revolution under the control of the CCP.

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Stalin hoped that proletariat revolution in the capitalist countries would follow: some Bolsheviks forecast that revolutionary movement in China would soon spread to Europe. When the socialist phase of the Chinese revolution should begin became a hotly debated topic in Moscow. During spring 1926, Trotsky became the first Bolshevik leader to advocate a break between the Chinese Communists and the Guomindang. The CCP should take direct control over the Nationalist, and later the socialist, revolution. Stalin disagreed, proclaiming that the time was not ripe to dissolve the United Front.

However, various leaders of the Guomindang realized that the USSR hoped to take control over the Chinese revolution. After Sun Yat-sen's death in 1925, power struggles within the Guomindang intensified, with supreme military power devolving to Chiang Kai-shek. With Chiang's backing, a consensus was reached among the Guomindang leaders that a Northern Expedition to reunite China was necessary. For good reason, Moscow's Comintern advisers disputed this plan, fearing that their power in China would collapse once the country united. They objected to the Northern Expedition.

In response, during the spring of 1926, Chiang instigated a political coup that put the Soviet advisers in their place and reduced the influence of the Chinese Communists in the Guomindang. Once the Northern Expedition began, it successfully won back most of China south of the Yangtze River by taking the cities of Nanchang, Hankou, Nanjing, and Shanghai. During spring 1927, Chiang led a second coup against the Chinese Communists to eliminate Soviet power within the Guomindang. At the same time, the Beijing government broke relations with Moscow, raided the Soviet embassy, and arrested and executed many important Chinese Communists. This setback was a disaster for Stalin.

Following Chiang's anti-Communist purge, and Beijing's decision to break diplomatic relations, the pro-Soviet Hankou government continued to claim power for several months. However, by July 1927 the United Front policy collapsed completely following a final break between the Chinese Communists and the Left Guomindang. For all intents and purposes, Moscow's China policy was a failure, the very thing that Trotsky and his United Opposition followers had been warning the Bolshevik Central Committee would happen since mid-1926. Stalin's prospects looked bleak.

It was at this point that Stalin ordered the 1 August 1927 Nanchang Uprising as proof of the ideological validity of the USSR's China policy. Discussion over this uprising, and over the Canton Commune that followed later during that same year, became a crucial element in the intra-party turmoil focused on Trotsky, who supported "Permanent Revolution," and Stalin, the major promoter of "Socialism in One Country." By December 1927, Stalin had used the apparent success of his China policy to oust Trotsky and Zinoviev from the Bolshevik party and, in league with Bukharin, took full control over the Soviet government. Beginning in 1928, Stalin used an uprising in Bargu, Inner Mongolia, to turn on Bukharin, and eventually overthrew him. In the end, control over the China policy proved to be one of the key

levers Stalin used to eliminate Trotsky, Zinoviev, and Bukharin, and thereby consolidate full power over the Soviet government.

The Nanchang Uprising was a disaster: not only did the Nationalist Army defeat the Communist forces in only three days, but the CCP and its followers were quickly dispersed and fled. The Canton Commune met a similar fate. Still, these events were destined to have an enormous impact on the history of the Chinese Communist Party. The Nanchang Uprising, in particular, was widely proclaimed as the birthplace of the Communists' PLA. Surviving Communist leaders who had participated or were in other ways linked to this revolt—such as Zhu De and Lin Biao—later became important leaders of the PLA and the CCP. Finally, only after Nanchang and Canton did many Chinese Communist leaders join with Mao Zedong in promoting rural, as versus urban, revolutionary uprisings. By the late 1930s, therefore, Mao's guerrilla tactics had been generally adopted by the CCP, an essential step on the Communists' road to power.

Meanwhile, following their victory over the Nanchang Uprising and the Canton Commune, the Guomindang-led Nationalist revolution continued unabated. The Left GMD's separatist government in Hankou dissolved itself in February 1928, and Chiang Kai-shek accepted many of the Left GMD's members back into the Guomindang. On 6 January 1928, Chiang consolidated full control over the Nationalist Party. With the Soviet advisers ousted and his former Chinese Communist allies either killed, imprisoned, or in hiding, Chiang took direct control over the Nationalist Army and resumed the Northern Expedition in early 1928. Later that year, Chiang reunified China—on paper at least—when he concluded several agreements with the northern warlords, such as Zhang Xueliang in Manchuria, and established China's new Republican capital in Nanjing.

With the Communists' defeat and Chiang's success, China appeared to many foreign observers to be a united country again for the first time in almost twenty years. But this assessment overlooked the military and political importance of the Nanchang Uprising. In the aftermath of Nanchang the nascent Communist movement in the countryside continued to grow. Escaping Nationalist encirclement in Jiangxi, Mao Zedong and the other major Communist leaders successfully carried out the Long March in the early to mid-1930s, relocating to the mountainous northwestern regions of Yan'an. From here, Mao and the PLA began a period of growth that would eventually lead to their taking power over all of China some twenty-five years after the Nanchang Uprising.

Arguably, one of the most important elements in the CCP's survival and its later success during the 1940s was the myth surrounding Nanchang, the myth that the Chinese Communists and their army—the People's Liberation Army—were an independent force that enjoyed equal relations with their revolutionary ally, the Soviet Union. If the truth behind the Nanchang Uprising had been known, and if average Chinese had realized how the CCP and PLA had been turned into pawns at the beck and call of Stalin's

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factional needs, it is doubtful that Mao would have garnered so much public support. For this reason, the real history of the Nanchang Uprising deserves special attention.

The failure of the Nanching Uprising, the Canton Commune, and the Bargu revolution also had an enormous impact on the Soviet Union. During the years from 1925 to 1928, which included both the apparent success and the ultimate defeat of the Comintern policy in China, Stalin managed to destroy Trotsky and his United Opposition followers, took full control with Bukharin over the Soviet government, and adopted an isolationist policy in the USSR called “Socialism in One Country.” In the years that followed the Nanchang Uprising, Stalin turned on his closest ally and eliminated Bukharin, adopted the first Five-Year Plan emphasizing heavy industry and widespread rural collectivization, and initiated extensive migration policies intended to shore up the Soviet Union’s borders with China from possible invasion. It was these very policies that helped set the interwar course of the USSR, and which became the defining characteristics of Stalinism.

Stalin’s policies had an enormous impact on Siberia and on the Sino-Soviet border. As early as January 1928, Soviet authorities in Siberia began to arrest Chinese merchants and confiscate their goods, while similar treatment was soon accorded to all merchants, as the Soviet government cracked down and centralized control over commerce and trade. During the summer of 1929, a Sino-Soviet military conflict broke out in Manchuria over the ownership of the Chinese Eastern Railway. Although the Soviet Red Army proved victorious, the “war scare” that accompanied these events produced immediate effects within Soviet society, as the Soviet government rapidly rounded up rich peasants—called kulaks—and began to ship them to Siberia to help build up a foundation of local support for the military actions then underway.

One unintended consequence of the failure of the USSR’s China policy was the growing security threat from Manchuria. This eastern threat eventually led not only to mass migration policies of peasants, but to the formation of the Siberian labor camps—the gulag system; the construction of the gulags was a direct response to the military threat from, first, China, and, second, Japan. As a result of Stalin’s purges, many members of the United Opposition and Bukharin’s Right Opposition were rounded up and exiled to Siberia. To guarantee that Leon Trotsky could not undermine the central government further, he was brought back from internal exile in 1929 and was expelled from the Soviet Union. With this victory, Stalin had removed the final obstacles to his goal of obtaining full power over both the Soviet government and the international Communist movement.

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As this book will discuss, in the middle of 1925 the Soviet leadership was brimming with enthusiasm that its policies in China might bring about a

Nationalist revolution, to be followed soon afterward by a socialist upheaval. If successful, these events could undermine the capitalist nations, produce chaos and revolution in Europe, and might even bring about the long-awaited proletariat revolution. Many Bolshevik leaders saw a successful revolt in China as the prerequisite for a worldwide revolution.

By 1929, however, the USSR's China policy had utterly failed. In addition, the international tide had turned against the Soviet government. Not only had the European revolution failed to appear, but the Bolsheviks found themselves threatened along their entire eastern border by large-scale battles with China, as well as an increasing military threat from Japan. These policy failures forced a general policy of retreat, in which Stalin's "Socialism in One Country" dominated and replaced Trotsky's more international "Permanent Revolution." Stalin used this period of retreat to shore up not only the Soviet Union's power, but also his own personal authority.

Seen in this light, the importance of the failed China policy to both Chinese and Soviet history cannot be ignored. In particular, the Nanchang Uprising, the Canton Commune, and the Bargu revolt were crucial to China's and the USSR's later Communist development. This book will discuss the historical setting, the contentious intra-party debates over the China policy, and the eventual outcome of these events, focusing in particular on the specific political disputes in Moscow that preceded the order to sponsor revolts in Nanchang, Canton, and Bargu. As this work will strive to show, the impact of the Trotsky-Stalin factional infighting over the formation of the China policy was fated to make it one of the truly watershed events in twentieth-century history.

# 1 The origin of Soviet factional battles over the China question

As the Chinese national revolution intensified during 1925 and 1926, China's importance in the eyes of the Soviet leadership soared—to the point where the Chinese national revolution was proclaimed by some as the most important hope for the future of world revolution. Because of China's large geographical size and immense population, it was thought that a successful national-bourgeois revolution could potentially disrupt the capitalist countries and might even deliver their long-awaited death blow. Perhaps what the Bolsheviks had failed to accomplish so far in Europe could be accomplished in Asia.

With so much riding on the ultimate success or failure of the Comintern's actions in China, marked differences of opinion soon arose over the formation and execution of this policy. The intensity of these debates—both in the Soviet Union and in China—threatened to tear the Bolshevik party apart and was fated to cause similar turmoil later on within the United Front between the Guomindang and the Chinese Communist Party. As important as these debates were at the time, however, it is difficult to piece together all of the relevant arguments, mainly because in the aftermath of Stalin's victory all dissenting opinions were repressed, and many of the publications discussing the China question were either destroyed or relocated to restricted archives.

As this chapter will show, between mid-1925 and early 1926, a large number of opinions appeared in the Soviet press, and most importantly in the pages of the main Comintern journal, *Communist International*, attempting to evaluate policy goals and to devise proper methods in order to bring the Chinese revolution to fruition. To begin with, the two major “schools” of thought on China included those who supported the continuation of the United Front policy in China unchanged and those critics who claimed that China's position as an Asiatic state meant that it was not yet ready for a socialist revolution; by extension; this meant that the United Front policy was ill-timed and could lead only to failure.

The first group was initially led by Joseph Stalin and Nikolai Bukharin—and, later, by Stalin alone—and were often referred to as the “Centrists.” The second group eventually included Leon Trotsky, Karl Radek, and Gregory Zinoviev under the name “United Opposition.” The intense intra-party debate over the China question, although initially of a scholarly and

academic nature, would prove to have important long-term repercussions in both countries. This chapter will outline some of the earliest debates over the Comintern's China policy during 1925–26, debates that preceded and eventually helped to create the United Opposition.

## The Soviet Union in spring 1925

With the deaths of Lenin in January 1924 and Sun Yat-sen only a little over a year later in March 1925, the United Front between the USSR/CCP and the Guomindang began to show signs of strain. In the Soviet Union, there was a sharp debate over whether the international revolution was most important, or whether the USSR had to be prepared for a period of isolation that would require it to stand on its own. Encapsulated by Trotsky's theory of "Permanent Revolution" versus Stalin's "Socialism in One Country," the outcome of such a debate would have a direct and immediate impact on the Comintern, and thereby on the future of the United Front policy in China.

Following Lenin's death in early 1924, a new ruling triumvirate was formed with Zinoviev, Kamenev, and Stalin at the helm. This triumvirate broke down near the end of 1924, with Zinoviev using his position as the head of the Comintern to criticize Stalin and his isolationist policy of "Socialism in One Country." According to Robert Daniels, during April 1925 Zinoviev opposed Stalin's view that world capitalism had stabilized and that the long-awaited world revolution should not be expected anytime soon: "The world position as a whole ... remains revolutionary." Zinoviev further denounced the "right sickness" of thinking that capitalism was too stable and urged that more "fresh, leftward-leaning leaders" be put in charge of Communist parties in the Comintern.<sup>1</sup>

Stalin fought back when he succeeded at the Fourteenth Party Conference, later during that year, in having an obscurely worded statement accepted that seemed to support his doctrine of "Socialism in One Country." Invoking Lenin's legacy, Stalin said:

Lenin is opposed to the contention that the relatively backward economic condition of Russia would make it impossible for that country to realize socialism ... Were this true, there would have been no sense in our seizing power in October 1917 and bringing about the revolution. For if ... we exclude the possibility and necessity of building up a fully socialized system of society in Russia, then the October revolution has no meaning. He who denies the possibility of inaugurating socialism in one country alone, must, if he be logical, likewise deny the expediency of the October revolution.

According to Stalin, therefore, a true Bolshevik must believe in the viability of "Socialism in One Country" and he claimed that the Soviet Union was already "building under the sign of socialism."<sup>2</sup>

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Throughout 1925, Bukharin vocally supported Stalin's position and criticized Zinoviev, lumping him together with those Bolsheviks who supported Trotsky's doctrine of "permanent revolution." According to a later description of these events, Bukharin thought such people doubted that socialism could be built at all:

Why did we expose at that time the theory of permanent revolution? We exposed it because it seemed to us ... that the errors of the United Opposition concealed within them the embryo of doubt as to the possibility of building socialism in our country.<sup>3</sup>

Not surprising, considering his position as head of the Comintern, Zinoviev continued to disagree with Stalin and Bukharin. He argued instead that: "The final victory of socialism is impossible in one country ... The final victory of the socialist order over the capitalist will be decided on an international scale." Claiming that the creation of the Comintern was one of the greatest victories of the international working class, Zinoviev agreed that one could begin to build socialism in a single country, but to complete the building of socialism required international participation:<sup>4</sup>

We are in dispute only over whether it is possible to complete the building of socialism ... in one country ... We are not in dispute over whether the building of socialism is impossible: the numbers of the effective proletariat in the Soviet Union are sufficient for this, the economic prerequisites are present, the general political circumstances are altogether favorable for building socialism very successfully, it being remembered that we have the support of the international working class, that our building of socialism will be finally completed on an international scale.

To Zinoviev, revolution on the international sphere—and especially in Asian countries like China—could hold the key to the USSR's future.

Although the word "China" never appeared in these early debates on the direction of the Soviet revolution, it was in fact the developments in China that were being considered. In particular, following Sun Yat-sen's death in March 1925, the United Front policy in China seemed to have reached a dead end. Some Bolshevik leaders even argued that the funds being sent to China to foment revolution could be better spent in constructing socialism in the Soviet Union. These doubts were cut short, however, by the unanticipated rise of a new phase in the Chinese workers' movement during the spring and summer of 1925 popularly called the May 30th Movement. As the next section will show, the ongoing debate in the USSR soon shifted from *whether* to support the Chinese revolution to intensive discussions over *how* this movement could be best organized to achieve maximum results.

## The May 30th Movement in China

Following the outbreak of the anti-foreign May 30th Movement in China, advocates of active support for international revolution—such as Zinoviev and Trotsky—appeared to be correct. The May 30th Movement began in Shanghai after two Chinese workmen died at the hands of foreign police in the International Settlement on 15 May 1925. Workers' unrest rapidly increased, and by late May this incident had turned into an anti-imperialist movement that appeared to many to represent the early stage of a widespread Nationalist revolution; ultimately, a Nationalist revolution might evolve into a socialist one.

Comintern reports on the revolutionary situation in China were widely read in Russia. To many, the workers' movement in China appeared even more politically motivated following a second incident on 30 May. One such report, entitled “Awakening China,” appeared under the initials F.F. and stated:

With their volleys [of gunfire], the English and Japanese imperialists have stirred up and set in motion a wide section of the Chinese masses with much greater success than could have been accomplished by even the most eloquent Comintern agitator. As a result, the movement, which began with a simple economic strike, has passed into the wider arena of political struggle, causing it to collide face to face with the most cruel oppressors of the Chinese people—the foreign imperialists.<sup>5</sup>

As support for this thesis, the following five political demands, adopted by the leaders of the May 30th Movement on 31 May 1925, were listed:

- (1) the abolition of all unequal treaties; (2) the restoration to China of all foreign concessions; (3) the dismissal of all foreign police and substituting Chinese in their place; (4) transfer to China of the Shanghai municipality; (5) freeing those arrested.

The author of this report then optimistically concluded: “It is possible to say, that the national liberation movement in China now really does include the whole nation.”<sup>6</sup>

The Soviet leaders were excited and pleased by these signs that world revolution was not dead. Instead of looking solely to Europe to spark revolutions throughout the colonial world, it was now hoped that countries like China might soon become the new vanguard. The Soviet press even went so far as to predict: “Today China has woken up, tomorrow Indo-China and India will awaken. Today Shanghai, Hong Kong, Beijing and Canton have risen up, tomorrow Calcutta and Madras will rise up.”<sup>7</sup>

The Chinese Communist Party was also heartened by these events. Prior to the outbreak of the May 30th Movement, the CCP was considered a junior

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partner in the Communist–Nationalist United Front. Now, according to the Chinese Communist leader Ch'u Ch'iu-pai, the May 30th Movement signified the real “beginning of the Chinese national revolution.” Comintern advisers, like Gregory Voitinsky, would later even divide the history of the Chinese Communist movement into three stages based on this event: (1) from its birth in 1921 to the Shanghai events of 1925; (2) from May 1925 to the 1927 split with the Guomindang; (3) and then up to 1930. Voitinsky even credited the May 30th Movement with leading to the enormous expansion of the Chinese Communist Party.<sup>8</sup>

The Soviet labor representative Sergei Dalin also referred to this movement in a 1926 book:

Only after the death of Sun Yat-sen did the Chinese working class appear on the historical stage as a powerful force, and only after his death did the peasants' mass organization begin, and by creating these organizations the Canton government began to fortify and envelop all of Guangdong province.<sup>9</sup>

Later, in 1928, Dalin further stated that it was “from May 30, 1925, that the proletariat began its struggle for hegemony.”<sup>10</sup>

Widespread enthusiasm for the Chinese revolution pushed to one side discussions of “Socialism in One Country.” Under Zinoviev's leadership, the Comintern acted quickly to capitalize on these events. On 17 June 1925, a telegram was sent to the Communist parties in France, Italy, the United States ordering them to organize protest meetings and to use the slogans:

- (1) Get the Imperialists out of China;
- (2) Abolish China's infamous unequal treaties;
- (3) Abolish extraterritoriality;
- (4) Satisfy the striking workers;
- (5) Immediately try those responsible for and guilty of shooting workers and students in Shanghai, Hankou, Qingdao and other places.

Later, on 6 July, the Comintern's Central Committee also sent a letter to the CCP urging them to intensify the revolution by forming local committees to organize workers and peasants. The peasantry was especially important, and the Comintern described them as China's “decisive strength” and a group that “properly organized and armed would make the Chinese revolution invincible.”<sup>11</sup>

Instead of ordering the CCP to work through its own party organization, however, the Comintern instructed them to use the Guomindang's. Only by working through the Nationalist Party could the CCP “immediately start urgent preparations to organize and lead peasant unions reliably.” Such actions could remain under CCP control, but it was necessary to “pass a red thread through all of the work of the Guomindang's peasant department and the activities of all of the peasant unions” so that “the organization of armed detachments from the peasant unions would be completely in their hands.”

The Comintern was well aware that such measures might disrupt the United Front, even warning that the “right wing of the Guomindang would inevitably use all measures to ... hamper the work of drawing the peasantry into the revolutionary movement.”<sup>12</sup>

In reality, the Chinese Communists were being ordered to use the Guomindang’s party organization as a cover for their own work. Open conflict with the Guomindang’s right wing at this stage had to be avoided at any cost. Therefore, it was important that the CCP “continue its line of world-wide expansion and the intensification of the national revolutionary movement, united around the slogans of liberating China and a National assembly of the workers’ and peasant masses along with students, intellectuals, petty merchants, artisans, etc.” At the same time, however, it must “reveal in all of its work its basic class orientation, and unite in its ranks the workers and leading peasants.”<sup>13</sup>

Such Comintern orders were highly contradictory, since the Chinese Communists could not possibly keep their actions secret and take a leading role at the same time. These instructions stemmed from a basic misunderstanding of the Guomindang’s revolutionary history. As one Comintern specialist explained, the Guomindang after Sun’s death was merely a “national revolutionary bloc” and was not really a party at all. According to this view, the CCP had not “become absorbed into the Guomindang, but on the contrary, has come forward as a united group with well-defined Communist views.”<sup>14</sup>

Accordingly, in a manner that was similar to the Right Guomindang faction, the Chinese Communist Party wanted to become a “predominate influence” within the United Front, but the party of the working class cannot be the “left wing” of a bourgeoisie party and so could only form a “tactical bloc” with the Left Guomindang. Based on this analysis, the Comintern article warned:

a split within the Guomindang, or it would be more correct to say, the breaking off of the Right Guomindangists, is absolutely inevitable ... The task of the young Chinese Communist Party is not to force this split, but in every way possible to delay the moment of its coming and to do all that is possible so as to retain under their influence the majority of the Guomindang.<sup>15</sup>

This article dating to July 1925 not only accurately described the main goal behind the Comintern’s China policy, but it also indicated one of its most important risks: how could the CCP hope to retain influence over a majority of the Guomindang membership once this “inevitable” split took place? It was this dilemma that the Comintern would continually confront as it strove to convince the Guomindang leadership of the CCP’s loyalty to the United Front on the one hand, while secretly urging the Chinese Communists to take control of the revolutionary movement on the other hand.

The leaders of the CCP were well aware of the potential dangers inherent in this strategy; one influential Guomindang leader, T'ai Chi-t'ao, even published a book in July 1925 accusing the Soviet Union of trying to dominate the Chinese revolutionary movement.<sup>16</sup> Although this was an accusation that the Chinese Communists were quick to deny, their actions largely substantiated its validity. It was almost exactly at this time that a scholarly debate erupted in the USSR over the applicability of Marx's "Asiatic mode of production" to China. By stressing the Asiatic nature of Chinese society, and therefore the inappropriateness of putting control of the revolution in Guomindang hands, this debate appeared to provide valid arguments supporting the CCP's request to leave the United Front and assume full control over the Chinese revolution.

### **The debate on Marx's "Asiatic mode of production"**

In mid-1925, at about the same time as the May 30th Movement broke out in China, Karl Radek was appointed to be the provost of Moscow's Sun Yat-sen University for the Toilers of China. Radek's second-in-command was Pavel Mif, the political commissar of the university. Reportedly, Mif was also assigned to watch over and report on Radek's actions to Stalin and Bukharin.<sup>17</sup> While the post of provost of Sun Yat-sen University was a demotion for a man like Radek, who had once been the Secretary of the Executive Committee of the Comintern, from this position Radek and the other members of the United Opposition were able to launch an attack on Stalin's and Bukharin's China policy. The appearance of what appeared at first glance to be a dry and scholarly debate over Marx's "Asiatic mode of production" proved to be the first sign of this attack.

The Sun Yat-sen University was opened during autumn 1925 to commemorate the recent death of Sun Yat-sen, the founder of the Guomindang and popularly known as the "father" of the Chinese republic. Because of the turmoil surrounding the China policy, this university survived for only five years, until 1930. The original purpose of the university was to train Chinese students from both the Guomindang and the Chinese Communist Party in modern techniques of war and revolution. Radek evidently saw himself and the Sun Yat-sen University as the "Soviet counterpart of the missionary schools in China."<sup>18</sup> During its relatively short life, the university managed to train all of the so-called "28 Bolsheviks" who were destined to become some of the most important leaders of the CCP during the early 1930s, as well as other prominent contemporary Chinese Communists, including such well-known leaders as Deng Xiaoping (Teng Hsiao-p'ing).<sup>19</sup>

Sun Yat-sen University also became an early focus for intense debates on the Comintern's China policy. Since the university's main goal was to train selected Chinese students, many of whom had come straight from the ranks of the CCP and from the Guomindang, Radek soon found that he had one of the best sources of contemporary information on the rapidly changing

revolutionary situation in China. Included in his student body were some of China's most famous future Communist leaders, as well as the sons and daughters of Guomindang leaders, including Chiang Ching-kuo, Chiang Kai-shek's son. Within a relatively short period of time after becoming provost of the university, Radek had developed a wide knowledge of affairs in China.

When Radek assumed his post at Sun Yat-sen University, he generally supported the continuation of the United Front alliance between the Chinese Communists and the Chinese Nationalists. This is not too surprising, especially when one considers that it was Radek who had helped to formulate the United Front policy in the first place. Arguably, it was the early success of this policy that had allowed the Soviet government to exert such enormous influence over the ongoing Nationalist revolution in China.

However, by summer 1925 Radek had lost all faith that the Chinese Communists could dominate the United Front, especially since the proletarian class in China equaled only one-half of 1 percent of the Chinese population. Furthermore, Chinese workers were considered to still be at a low level of class consciousness; as early as 1922, at the Fourth Comintern Congress, Radek had even warned the participants that the undeveloped nature of the Chinese Communist Party meant that "socialism is not the order of the day" in China.<sup>20</sup>

Radek particularly feared that the Chinese Communists might overplay their hand and try to take power too soon. After assuming his post at Sun Yat-sen University, Radek warned: "At the present, and in the near future, the Chinese proletariat will not be capable of independently seizing power."<sup>21</sup> Radek was also concerned that the Guomindang had a wider appeal in China, and could simultaneously attract the petty bourgeoisie and the peasants to the ranks of their party. The Chinese Communists, on the other hand, were "more engrossed in abstract questions than in practical solutions" and Radek advised them to "get out of their Confucian study rooms and go to the masses."<sup>22</sup>

It was at this point that an important scholarly debate erupted over the nature of the ongoing revolution in China. The Hungarian revolutionary Evgenii S. Varga started this debate during 1925 when he claimed that Marx's "Asiatic mode of production" was still in existence in China and continued to play an important role there. According to Varga, the ruling class in China was a "scholar-elite," and the "tyranny of the clan" in the villages had stopped the early development of capitalism. As a result, governmental control in China was still based on control of large-scale flood control systems.<sup>23</sup> Later referred to by Karl Wittfogel as "Oriental despotism," this theory suggested that Asian societies—like China—were not ready for a Nationalist revolution, much less a socialist one.<sup>24</sup>

If the Asiatic mode of production was still present in China, however, then China should rightfully be characterized as an Asiatic or semi-feudal society, which meant that the Comintern's recent analysis that China was in a period of "bourgeois-democratic revolution" was necessarily incorrect. By extension,

the United Front policy between the CCP and the Guomindang was also based on an improper evaluation of conditions in China. If true, then the Comintern's China policy could not possibly succeed.

Those Bolshevik leaders who opposed Stalin's and Bukharin's China policy were quick to take advantage of this debate over the Asiatic mode of production to criticize the United Front strategy in China; some went so far as to argue for the dissolution of the United Front. Karl Radek, in particular, began to base his criticism of the China policy on arguments that China was really "Asiatic" in nature, and so required a revolution led by the peasants and the proletariat under the direct control of the CCP. Trotsky would have most likely been attracted to Radek's argument, since in Trotsky's book on the 1917 Bolshevik Revolution he had formerly accused even the Tsarist government of exhibiting characteristics of "Asiatic despotism."<sup>25</sup>

To Radek, therefore, it seemed that the Comintern's biggest mistake was treating the situation in China as a bourgeois-democratic revolution focused on destroying the feudal structure of China, while "simultaneously delivering the land from foreign imperialism." Radek denied that feudalism was the primary factor in Chinese society and instead pointed to "imperialist-supported capitalism," and the "class struggle of peasants and workers against their exploiters."<sup>26</sup> Thus, supporting the Comintern's existing United Front policy would actually impede the Chinese revolution, instead of furthering it. By contrast, Radek thought a better solution to China's problems was to allow the CCP to take control of the Chinese revolution away from the bourgeois-dominated Guomindang.

Radek's views were in the process of being formed when the Central Committee met in October 1925. At this meeting, Stalin and Zinoviev split and a new opposition group formed under the leadership of Zinoviev, Kamenev, Sokolnikov, and Lenin's widow N. Krupskaya generally known as the "Zinoviev Opposition." Stalin and Bukharin retained firm control over the Moscow party organization while Zinoviev and his supporters dominated the Leningrad organization. Both sides were busy passing "unanimous resolutions against each other" up until the beginning of the Fourteenth Party Congress in December 1925.<sup>27</sup> It was in this setting that the platform of the Zinoviev Opposition was criticized and eventually defeated. As the next section will discuss in greater detail, only after the defeat of the Zinoviev Opposition was the time ripe for Trotsky, Radek, and Zinoviev to ally and form their own United Opposition.

## **The defeat of the Zinoviev Opposition**

Throughout Asia as a whole, the Comintern's work was not going well; by 1925, many Asian countries had not even founded Communist Party cells.<sup>28</sup> But China was portrayed as an important exception to this trend. In several articles published in October and November 1925, Zinoviev placed great importance on the revolutionary events even then unfolding in China. In

particular, in “Our International Situation” he emphasized that the “main hope for the awakening East is the USSR.”<sup>29</sup> This stance implied that the Soviet government needed to adopt a more activist policy in China.

At the Central Committee meeting in October 1925, Zinoviev supported expanding the Comintern’s role in China. In his speech “Eight Years of the Revolution” Zinoviev quoted a letter from a Comintern representative in China:

He reports that Canton reminds one of Leningrad or Moscow: the trade unions there are in the best homes, with Red Guards protecting the buildings of the trade unions, and parades in honor of visiting representatives of the Russian trade unions. Canton is a small Leningrad or a small Moscow, and not even that small, because the population in China is much larger than ours and in Canton alone there are one and a half million inhabitants. One doesn’t need to be a prophet in order to predict for the imperialists quite a surprise: as if from their own backyard, there should arise a second center of the revolutionary movement in China—red Shanghai [applause]. We think that such a threat is hanging over them.<sup>30</sup>

While emphasizing the importance of China to the world revolution, Zinoviev discussed the three different “channels” that he thought the Comintern should pursue. Events in Asia were now so important that Zinoviev placed them ahead of revolutionary events in Europe, although Zinoviev made clear that they were intimately linked with imperialist countries like England:

The first channel—the East. I think that this channel, in my judgement, appears now to be especially important, to its liking and with furious strength they are advancing like a torrent, undermining the stronghold of the world, and in particular the English imperialists. The second channel—is the revolutionization of the reformist detachments of the European workers’ movement, and in particular, of the English movement—the Anglo-Soviet rapprochement of trade unions has in this sense historical importance. And the third channel—the old, generally accepted party channel—the training and fostering of the individual cells of the world proletarian revolution, and of the communist parties.

Zinoviev concluded his comments by reiterating that “the World revolution is moving along [several] distinctive paths. For the time being there are three channels, but perhaps, the great river of the revolution will break forth into a new, unexpected channel.”<sup>31</sup>

An article called “The Workers’ Movement in China” by L. Teller generally supporting Zinoviev’s views appeared in the November issue of the *Communist International*. It argued that: “The workers’ movement has grown to be the central focus of the whole peoples-revolutionary movement in

China. The working class, without a doubt, is the prominent movement and has appointed itself to correlate with the military forces in China.” Efforts were also being made to increase contacts with the peasantry in the Chinese countryside:

The collaboration of the Chinese communists with the Left Guomindang, the only mass party of petty bourgeoisie and radical intellectuals, is forming already into a genuine strong bloc between the proletariat and the urban petty bourgeoisie, and is preparing in the future a union of the proletariat with the peasantry, and the beginning of this union we have already accomplished in the provinces of Guangdong and Hunan.<sup>32</sup>

Meanwhile, among the Comintern advisers and Soviet diplomats in China, a similar debate over the United Front policy was taking place between Voitinsky, on the one hand, and Lev Karakhan and Mikhail Borodin, on the other hand. In this case, Voitinsky actively supported a grass-roots policy based on mass movement, while Karakhan and Borodin were pushing for a military solution that included sending Soviet military experts and munitions to Feng Yuxiang in North China so that he could be enticed to join the United Front.<sup>33</sup>

Voitinsky openly criticized allying with Chinese merchants and warlords, arguing instead that “people from all classes in the whole country are all supporting the national revolutionary movement.” He pointed to the demonstrations in Beijing during 29 and 30 November 1925 as proof. These demonstrations not only opposed the imperialists and warlords, but also called for the Guomindang’s national army and others to organize a National Executive Committee to rid China of the unequal treaties, to give the people a democratic government, and to convene a National Congress.<sup>34</sup>

Although the mass movement was still not strong enough to do the job on its own, Voitinsky thought that it could put “pressure on the military forces” to “march forward along with the masses.” But, to do this properly it was necessary to unite the masses of the Right Guomindang (but not the leaders of the Right Guomindang, since they opposed the mass movement), with the Left Guomindang and the CCP. They would then be able to press the army to unite with them to create a “dependable democratic military force.” As for the leaders of the Right Guomindang:

We originally were jointly carrying out an anti-imperialist and anti-warlord revolution with them, but they should now stand to one side of the mass movement and they should not say that they are revolutionary, since they have really joined with the anti-revolutionary faction.<sup>35</sup>

However, in sharp contrast to Radek, Zinoviev, and other Comintern theorists, like Voitinsky, who pointed to China as being on the verge of revolution, the Central Committee Report from 23 December 1925 formally adopted

Stalin's policy of "Socialism in One Country" and proclaimed that "the basic task of our party is to struggle for the victory of socialist construction in the USSR." Even while acknowledging that the revolutionary situation in China had "gained gigantic and hitherto unprecedented dimensions," the Congress reconfirmed that the recent period of "so-called peaceful coexistence of the USSR with the capitalist states" had offered a "breathing space" during which the Soviet Union could continue its socialist construction.<sup>36</sup>

As a result of this decision, the Zinoviev Opposition was roundly defeated at the Fourteenth Congress by a vote of 559 to 65. In an obvious attempt to purge the Leningrad organization of the oppositionists, the Party Congress also appealed directly to the members of the Leningrad party organization to correct "the errors committed by the Leningrad delegation."<sup>37</sup> Although Zinoviev kept all of his party positions, his close supporters Kamenev and Sokolnikov were each demoted: Kamenev was reduced from a full Politburo member to a candidate member, while Sokolnikov, who had been a candidate member, was removed from the Politburo altogether. Finally, the Politburo voted to increase its membership from seven to nine and Stalin filled these extra positions with three of his top supporters: Molotov, Kalinin, and Voroshilov.<sup>38</sup>

Through such methods, Stalin gradually managed to consolidate his hold over the central government bureaucracy. This was perhaps best reflected in the changing of the Bolshevik party's name to the All-Union Communist (Bolshevik) on 31 December 1925. New party rules helped centralize control over local organizations under the Politburo, and the Central Committee's powers were expanded to include organizing and directing all party institutions, appointing editors of the "central organs" and supervising their work, and controlling all party funds and personnel.<sup>39</sup>

As a result of the Fourteenth Party Congress, Stalin was able to adopt his domestic and foreign policy agenda; the United Front policy in China was retained unchanged. The defeat of the Zinoviev Opposition brought to light a significant ideological rift within the Bolshevik leadership between the "more internationalist Zinovievists and the more Russia-oriented Stalinists."<sup>40</sup> This rift widened as Zinoviev regrouped and for the first time considered allying with Radek and Trotsky in the United Opposition. The spark that created this new bloc was the threat of war with China.

## **The threat of a Soviet war with China**

In late 1925, the Soviet Union passed up the chance of granting the Chinese Communist Party a leading role in the Chinese revolution, deciding instead to continue the United Front policy unchanged. In January 1926, however, tensions over the Sino-Soviet joint management of the Chinese Eastern Railway flared up, as troops under the Manchurian warlord, Zhang Zuolin, threatened to take control by force. These tensions suggested that war might soon erupt between China and the Soviet Union. This war scare helped focus Bolshevik opposition against Stalin's and Bukharin's China policy.

As a result of the Soviet government's secret diplomacy with Beijing, Zhang Zuolin, and Japan, Moscow had reassumed majority control over the Chinese Eastern Railway in early 1925. Zhang Zuolin opposed this outcome. The railway dispute in early 1926 was sparked by a Soviet decision to reinstate one-half fares for all Chinese troops using the railway; up until that point Zhang's troops had used the railways for free. In retaliation, Zhang began seizing parts of the railway line and arresting the Soviet officials in charge. Karakhan, the Soviet ambassador to China, sent a protest to the Chinese Foreign Ministry on 19 January 1926, warning the Chinese government that the two governments might need to take "extraordinary measures" and that there might be "serious consequences" if the situation was not resolved.<sup>41</sup>

This situation continued to worsen, however, as the Soviet manager, M. Ivanov, was arrested by Zhang's troops on 21 January 1926. On 22 January, Foreign Minister Georgy Chicherin sent a note through Ambassador Karakhan to Zhang's Mukden government asking for "permission" for Soviet troops to enter Manchuria if the situation was not resolved in three days. This was actually an ultimatum. Moscow demanded that the Chinese government in Manchuria re-establish the railway administration, adhere to the treaty of 1924, and release Ivanov.<sup>42</sup> By 24 January, Ivanov had been released, and it was confirmed by the Mukden government that all of Zhang's troops would pay the half-price fare.

However, even though the Soviet threat of sending troops into Manchuria proved effective, Stalin's decision to issue an ultimatum without first obtaining approval from the Politburo disturbed many of the Old Bolsheviks, including in particular Trotsky, who had held the position of Commissar of War through January 1925. If the USSR's ultimatum had failed, Stalin's action "might have led to armed conflict" with China.<sup>43</sup> Considering that Soviet propaganda was even then stating that the USSR was the only major country to treat China as an equal, the Sino-Soviet railway conflict actually shed a highly unfavorable light on the enormous tensions underlying Sino-Soviet relations.

Furthermore, the railway incident graphically revealed the widening contradictions between the Comintern's propaganda and the Soviet government's foreign policy objectives. In a press statement released by Chicherin on 5 February 1926, he tried to gloss over these differences by complimenting the Chinese government for its "friendly and completely correct attitude to the USSR." However, it did not escape international attention that only two weeks prior Chicherin had presented China with what can only be termed a military ultimatum. Such incidents proved that the Soviet government was more concerned about retaining its own "unequal" rights and privileges than in helping the China rid itself of foreign imperialism.<sup>44</sup>

To add insult to injury, the Soviet government also thanked Japan for remaining neutral. In line with the Soviet–Japanese Convention of 1925, that had recreated the former Russian and Japanese spheres of interest in China,

Foreign Minister Chicherin expressed his thanks to the Japanese Foreign Ministry, which on 26 January 1926 had reassured the Soviet government of its neutrality by stating that the current problem was to be settled between the USSR and China and had “expressed hopes for a peaceful settlement.”<sup>45</sup> To leaders of the Guomindang—such as Chiang Kai-shek—such self-serving actions on the part of the Soviet government vis-à-vis Japan could not help but confirm his worst fears about the USSR’s intentions in China.

The self-evident contradictions in Moscow’s treatment toward China could not be hidden forever. In particular, it was becoming more and more clear that the Soviet Union and Japan were actively cooperating with each other to once again dominate much of the northern part of China—including Outer Mongolia, Inner Mongolia, and Manchuria—an imperialist imposition that the leaders of the Guomindang and the warlord government in Beijing were to find less and less palatable as time went on.<sup>46</sup> Trotsky and the other members of the future United Opposition vividly understood how Stalin’s and Bukharin’s imperialist policies could backfire on the USSR.

## Conclusions

During 1925–26, the international situation went through many ups and downs, with the revolutionary movement in China taking a new—and, as many argued, a leading—role in the world revolution. By February 1926, Zinoviev was to state in the pages of the *Communist International* that the revolutionary events in China had not only “dealt a serious blow to English influence in the East” but were also of “historical importance, proving conclusively, that dominion of imperialism is being undermined at its very foundations, as proven by the immeasurably great reserves of the world proletarian revolution in the East.” These ongoing events in China, Zinoviev argued, were also having a positive impact in India, Syria, and Morocco and showed that “national-independence movements in the colonies would inevitably grow, weakening imperialism and strengthening the vanguard of the international proletariat, fighting for socialism.”<sup>47</sup>

Although the Stalin-dominated Bolshevik party had officially adopted a pseudo-isolationist stance, known as “Socialism in One Country,” Zinoviev continued to call for several new slogans to guide the international work of the Comintern. He gave a formal nod to Stalin by calling for greater attention being paid to the “International Proletarian Industrialization of the USSR,” while simultaneously calling for “Greater Attention to the East!”<sup>48</sup> Even though giving official acknowledgment to “Socialism in One Country,” Zinoviev pointed to the events in China as being equally crucial to the survival and prosperity of the USSR and to the future growth of the worldwide socialist revolution.

The United Front policy in China appeared, on the surface at least, to be gaining strength, but Stalin’s unilateral resolution of the railway conflict was a vivid indicator that new tensions were on the horizon. Soon after this

event, in February 1926, A.S. Bubnov carried out interviews with Mikhail Borodin and several other Soviet advisers in China. N.V. Kuybyshev in particular warned of increased danger to the United Front, stating the Guomindang was a “bourgeois, unstable party … Today, it is with us, tomorrow—not with us.”<sup>49</sup> In an article from February 1926, Voitinsky also recommended that the Chinese Communists should quickly expand their own independent organization among the peasantry and should form a separate anti-imperialist United Front out of “Left Guomindangists, Centrists” and then “unsullied nationalists.”<sup>50</sup>

Clearly, the Comintern’s policy in China had been made much more difficult by Moscow’s actions. The USSR’s contradictory goals were split between those who saw the USSR’s fate tied to the success of China’s revolution, as versus those proponents of building socialism in the Soviet Union alone. The first group—which soon included the United Opposition—was to advocate increased independence of the Chinese Communist Party from the Guomindang, thereby making the first step toward full control of the national liberation movement. Conversely, the second group—headed by Stalin and Bukharin—sought to retain and maximize its influence based on the valuable economic concessions that Moscow had regained in Manchuria through the use of secret diplomacy.

Faced with these dual threats—the first a threat to its political power and the second a threat to China’s territorial integrity—the conservative leaders of the Guomindang lashed out. During March 1926, Chiang Kai-shek carried out a political coup in Guangzhou that effectively limited the power of his Chinese Communist allies and his Comintern advisers. The next chapter will examine in greater detail how this coup contributed to the creation of the United Opposition.

## **2 Chiang Kai-shek's 1926 political coup and the formation of the United Opposition**

As the Comintern's power over the Chinese Communist Party–Guomindang United Front increased, the leaders of the Guomindang began to worry about losing their own control over the party and over the progress of the national revolution. To many, the USSR's resolution of the railway incident smacked of “Red Imperialism.” In response to such threats, on 20 March 1926, Chiang Kai-shek placed Guangzhou under martial law, put his Soviet advisers under house arrest, and had many Chinese Communists removed from positions of authority in the Guomindang. To many Comintern theorists, Chiang's actions appeared to portend the long-feared coup of the Right Guomindang against both the Left Guomindang and the Chinese Communist Party.

An issue of primary importance to Chiang Kai-shek was the planned Northern Expedition to reunite China. The Northern Expedition had been one of Sun Yat-sen's highest priorities and Sun had attempted to carry it through on at least one occasion prior to his death, in 1921–22. With training provided by Comintern-recruited Soviet military advisers, the Guomindang leaders hoped that its own army could complete the job that Sun Yat-sen had started. But, Chiang's opinions did not correspond exactly with those of the Comintern advisers, who were primarily interested in using the Nationalist Army to oust the foreign imperialists, not against northern China, where the Soviet government already had obtained tremendous power through its use of secret diplomacy.

By means of his political coup of 20 March 1926, Chiang reasserted control over both wings of the Guomindang and eliminated the immediate threat posed by the Chinese Communists; this allowed Chiang to order the beginning of the Northern Expedition. To many critics of the Soviet government's China policy—and in particular to the leaders of the newly formed United Opposition, like Trotsky, Zinoviev, and Radek—Chiang's actions were seen as a direct threat to the United Front. Trotsky became the first major Bolshevik leader to argue that the Chinese Communists should assert greater independence from the Guomindang. However, under orders from Stalin and Bukharin, the Comintern supported the continuation of the United Front policy.

## The “Sun Yat-sen Boat Incident” and Chiang’s political coup

Chiang Kai-shek’s coup of 20 March 1926 has often referred to in the Chinese literature as the “Sun Yat-sen Boat Affair.” The most widely accepted version of these events is that on 18 March, the *Sun Zhongshan* gunboat (Sun Yat-sen’s name in Mandarin is pronounced “Sun Zhongshan”), which was commanded by a member of the Chinese Communist Party, was ordered to move from Guangzhou to Whampoa, the location of the Guomindang’s military school. It is not clear who made this decision and why it was actually made, but Chiang Kai-shek interpreted this incident as a Communist-instigated attempt to kidnap him and remove him from power. In retaliation, he purged many Communists from their high positions within the Guomindang and strictly limited the authority of his Soviet advisers.

The *Sun Zhongshan* boat incident was linked to the recent formation of the Nationalist navy, which—during November 1925—was placed under the control of the Soviet adviser Andrei S. Bubnov. With Borodin’s support, Bubnov succeeded in having Li Zhilong, a member of the Chinese Communist Party, appointed as the head of the Nationalist navy. On 18 March 1926, Li Zhilong ordered *Sun Zhongshan*—formerly *Yong Feng*, the same ship Sun Yat-sen had used with Chiang’s help in 1922 to flee Guangzhou—and *Baobi* to proceed without prior authorization from Chiang Kai-shek from Guangzhou to Whampoa.

According to one account, Chiang was taken by surprise when he heard of the ships’ movement, and he later claimed: “I sensed a Communist plot.”<sup>1</sup> Chiang had the two ships recalled, but when *Zhongshan* returned a second time to Whampoa on the evening of 19 March, Chiang interpreted its suspicious actions as an attempt to kidnap him and take him as a prisoner to Vladivostok. According to one account, it was fear of being kidnapped that caused Chiang to take action and purge the Communists.<sup>2</sup>

On 20 March 1926, Chiang ordered many influential Communists to give up their positions within the party, the army, and the navy. He also put the Soviet advisers under house arrest. As a result of Chiang’s political coup, the Chinese Communist Party lost much of its influence within the United Front. According to one Taiwanese account, however, it was the Communists who were at fault, since they were trying to lead a mutiny against the Guomindang leadership: “In the *Zhongshan* mutiny General Chiang’s thunder-like measures quickly eliminated rebellion even before it started.”<sup>3</sup>

From late March through April 1926, Chiang used this incident to oust many high-ranking Communists from their positions in the Guomindang and he continued to limit the power of his Soviet advisers. On 15 May 1926, the Central Committee of the Guomindang issued new guidelines that the Communists within the Guomindang would have to agree to if they wished to remain within the party. They stated:<sup>4</sup>

1 Other political parties—[like] the Chinese Communist Party—should instruct those members entering into the Guomindang so that they understand

that the foundation of the Guomindang is the Three People's Principles and, therefore, they are not to criticize them or Sun Yat-sen.

- 2 A different party should turn in to the representative of the Guomindang's Central Committee a list of all of their members who have joined the Guomindang.
- 3 Members of the Executive Committee and other high bodies of the Guomindang can be members of other parties, who have entered into the Guomindang, but the number of these members should not exceed one-third of all of the Executive Committee.
- 4 Members who have come from other parties are not able to be representatives in the Central Committee of the Guomindang.
- 5 All those who have joined the Guomindang do not have the right to assemble party conferences without the permission of the Guomindang's party organization.
- 6 Without the permission of the Guomindang, members of other parties do not have the right to create their own organizations of any kind.
- 7 All of the circulated orders of other parties to their members located in the Guomindang ought to be distributed upon the agreement of a United Committee; in the event that an agreement cannot be made the circular ought to be communicated to the Central Committee of the Guomindang for its decision.

Assuming that the Chinese Communist Party accepted these terms, then it would have to agree to provide a list of its members, could not hold its yearly Party Congress, and could not issue separate orders. In addition, the above-mentioned "United Committee" was to be formed with five representatives from the Guomindang, three representatives from the CCP and then one representative from the Comintern; this division virtually guaranteed that the Guomindang delegates could outvote the CCP and the Comintern and thereby control all decisions made by this united body.

Chen Duxiu and other leading members of the CCP were quick to criticize these new terms. At the Comintern's insistence, however, the Chinese Communists were forced to agree to these regulations. Only many years later did Soviet scholars admit that these guidelines resulted in the "semi-liquidation of the Communist Party." According to one 1929 source: "The counter-revolution was consistent. Discard the Left Guomindangists, transfer power into the hands of the right-centrists elements, establish priority over the army under the party ... place civil authority under military authority"; in short, "the bourgeois 'new militaristic' reaction was striving to crush the Communist Party."<sup>5</sup>

Following Chiang Kai-shek's March coup, many Chinese Communist Party members were removed from influential posts in the Guomindang organization. Those Russian advisers who opposed Chiang's plans for a Northern Expedition, such as Kuybyshev, were forced to leave China.<sup>6</sup> As a result of these changes, Chiang Kai-shek was able to push through his plans for a Northern Expedition to reunite China.

After March 1926, many of the top Communist leaders in China advocated breaking relations with the Guomindang and venturing forth on their own. Lacking Comintern support for this plan, however, the Russian advisers and CCP members had little choice but to continue to back Chiang and remain within the United Front. The Chinese Communists, however, realized that the loss of so many important administrative positions within the Guomindang posed enormous dangers, not only to the party but to the party leadership. In order to carry through their own goals while simultaneously appearing to follow the Guomindang's new regulations, the Chinese Communists would have to organize themselves more efficiently and work secretly. The period between May 1926 and April 1927 would prove to be one of the most dangerous times in the Chinese Communist Party's early history. This period corresponded with the formation of the United Opposition in the USSR.

### **The formative period of the United Opposition**

While many of the Bolshevik leaders were disturbed by Stalin's Chinese Eastern Railway ultimatum in January 1926, Karl Radek's relatively quiet life in Moscow training some six hundred Chinese students was shattered beyond repair by Chiang Kai-shek's March 1926 political purge of the Chinese Communists. Although the United Front policy was formally retained, it was on Chiang Kai-shek's terms. This meant that positions of the Chinese Communists and the Soviet advisers within the Guomindang party were greatly weakened. To the various members of what would soon be called the United Opposition, this was an untenable position that could only lead to the eventual destruction of the Chinese Communists.

News of Chiang's purge took over a week to reach Moscow. For example, Radek published an article in *Pravda* six days after these events that made no mention of Chiang Kai-shek's actions.<sup>7</sup> It is unclear whether news of this incident was being intentionally repressed, or whether Radek had simply not heard of the purge when his article was turned in for publication. In an article written almost a year later, however, Radek tried to explain away his continued support for the United Front in March 1926 by noting that Chiang had concealed his true anti-Communist intentions by purging Guomindang party members both on the far left and on the far right.<sup>8</sup>

Other publications from this period also suggest that Radek remained optimistic. For example, in the foreword of a book published by Pavel Mif during the spring of 1926, Radek referred to the purge and tried his best to de-emphasize the importance of the 20 March events. Considering the time it took to be published, Radek's foreword to Mif's book was most likely written immediately after the events in China were first reported in Moscow. At this early stage Radek perhaps did not as yet foresee the negative consequences that Chiang's coup might have on the ongoing revolution in China. Therefore, he did not attempt to break with the Bolshevik leadership over the Comintern's

China policy. This honor was left for another future leader of the United Opposition—Leon Trotsky.

In April 1926, Trotsky was the first major Bolshevik leader to decide that it was imperative for the Chinese Communists to dissolve the United Front with the Guomindang. Trotsky probably knew more about the situation in China than any of the other Bolshevik leaders, because during March 1926 he chaired a committee, commissioned by the Politburo, to study the political situation in the Far East and in particular to review recent tensions with China over the Chinese Eastern Railway; even the formation of this commission was a tacit criticism of Stalin, since he had issued the ultimatum without the Politburo's consent. In his report "Questions on Our Policies and Relations with China and Japan," the Chinese revolution was discussed in conjunction with the stabilization of Europe and the show of unity among the imperialist countries at the signing of the Locarno treaty, and the commission determined that the revolution in China was of "great historical scope."<sup>9</sup>

Under Trotsky's leadership, this study further concluded that "in the near future the movement of broad national masses—the workers and peasants—would develop and grow stronger." But the most important problem on the immediate horizon was the "formation of a united imperialist front against China" and it was up to the leaders of the revolutionary movement in China and the Soviet government to "complicate" the formation of this United Front. In the Far East, Japan was perceived to be the greatest danger to the Chinese revolution because of her geographical position, and especially because of "her vital economic and military interests in Manchuria."<sup>10</sup>

What could prove to be most valuable for the success of the Chinese revolution, therefore, was to find a way to split Japan away from this so-called imperialist United Front and to come to a separate diplomatic agreement with her. This policy would be very difficult to execute, however, since public opinion in China might easily misconstrue Soviet actions as "sacrificing the interests of China in the hope of reconciling the Soviet Union's international relations with Japan."<sup>11</sup> Keeping this danger in mind, Trotsky concluded that the attempt still had to be made.

As suggested by the recent railway conflict in northern Manchuria, the most important single question was Japan's predominant position in southern Manchuria. Although the Chinese Communist Party and the Guomindang were to continue their "general and political struggle against Japanese imperialism," the committee acknowledged that southern Manchuria would probably continue to be under Japanese control, and Japan's influence might even spread. If Japan succeeded in forming an autonomous Manchuria, the Guomindang and the Chinese Communists would have to convince Zhang Zuolin, the pro-Japanese Manchurian warlord, to agree not to invade southward and "meddle in the internal affairs of the rest of China." Zhang Zuolin could thus be used as a "buffer" between Japan, China, and the Soviet Union.<sup>12</sup>

Within northern Manchuria, however, the Chinese Eastern Railway remained the most important point of conflict between the Soviet Union, Japan, and China. If Manchuria became autonomous, a conference would have to be arranged among the Chinese, Japanese, and Russian representatives to determine the new administration of the Chinese Eastern Railway. This conference would have to decide on a railway scheme that would benefit economic growth in Manchuria while respecting the “mutual interests” of the three countries.<sup>13</sup>

For the time being, however, the Soviet-dominated railway administration had to be more responsive to its Chinese partners by undertaking to conduct secretarial work in both Russian and Chinese, while all signs, instructions, etc., should be in both languages. There was a crying need to build a Chinese school to provide both technical and political education to the Chinese railway workers. The administrators of the railway should also try to determine points of friction between the Russian and Chinese workers and find ways to ensure that they did not escalate into open conflict.<sup>14</sup>

Most importantly, Trotsky’s proposed efforts to enlist Japan in a Far Eastern security pact included several factors. First, the Soviet Union had to work more closely with the Japanese government. In order to deepen and strengthen official ties, the committee recommended that Comrade Serebriakov be sent to Tokyo to offer concrete proposals which would “regulate disputable questions and eliminate friction” in the relations the Soviet Union, Japan, and China.<sup>15</sup>

Second, the USSR had to worry about Japanese public opinion. To placate the Japanese the committee recommended that Japanese immigrants be allowed to settle in Soviet Siberia. This was in part a propaganda ploy to show up the United States, which had recently put strict controls on Japanese immigration. But this plan was also intended to increase the productivity of remote cities like Khabarovsk, one of the areas that the committee recommended for Japanese immigration. The committee made it quite clear, however, that Japanese immigration should be carried out “with all possible caution” and that the numbers should be small; the settlements should be interspersed in a checkerboard pattern with an increase in the number of new people from Central Russia.<sup>16</sup> As with so many other government policies put forward by the opposition, Stalin would later “adopt” the latter part of Trotsky’s migration policy in 1929.

This report was issued on 26 March 1926—only six days after Chiang’s political coup—and it is highly likely that information reaching Moscow about this incident was incomplete. It is important to note, therefore, that on Trotsky’s personal copy of this study, located in the Trotsky Archives, a section pertaining to the Guangzhou government was crossed out and replaced with three new paragraphs stapled over the original page and labeled “corrected entry.” In the first paragraph, Trotsky added that,

with respects to the [Chinese] national army it is essential to carry out comprehensive political, educational, and organizational work with the

Guomindang and the CCP, so as to transform them into an active stronghold of the national revolutionary movement, free from personal authority.

The second paragraph outlined ways to strengthen the Guangzhou government by carrying out “agrarian, financial, administrative and political reform,” so as to “consolidate its internal defensive capacity.” The third paragraph stated that so as not to push the imperialists into intervening militarily, the Canton government must “decisively reject for the time being the idea of carrying out an offensive military expedition”—in other words, the Northern Expedition—to unify China.<sup>17</sup>

It is undeniable that these stapled additions to the original report were made at a later date and it is almost certain that they were included as a partial response to Chiang Kai-shek’s political coup of 20 March 1926. The need to form a national army that was “free of personal authority” obviously referred to Chiang and to his recent use of the national army to repress the Chinese Communist Party. To carry out “agrarian” reforms would benefit the Chinese Communists. Meanwhile, the rejection of the Northern Expedition would ensure that Chiang’s personal authority could not grow unchecked.

Considering how recently Chiang’s coup had taken place, Trotsky’s last-minute additions in late March appear to be a response to the limited information at his disposal. Within only a few days, however, Trotsky’s views on China began to change, and he stated for the first time that the Chinese Communist Party should be allowed to dissolve the United Front with the Guomindang. The timing of this change is crucial, since it confirms that Trotsky was probably reacting to a sudden influx of new reports from China. Previously, this shift was difficult to document, and some opponents of the United Opposition even claimed that it never happened at all. But in a speech published on 14 October 1927, Stalin is on record as accusing the United Opposition of “demanding the immediate ‘withdrawal’ of the Communists from the Guomindang” beginning in April 1926.<sup>18</sup> The next section will examine some of these reports from China.

## **The reaction of the Chinese Communists to Chiang’s coup**

It is important to emphasize that the leaders of the Chinese Communist Party and the leaders of the United Opposition had much in common. As a result of Chiang’s political coup, the CCP chairman, Chen Duxiu, immediately proposed that the Communists be allowed to withdraw from the United Front. In response, Chen was criticized by Bukharin in an article in *Pravda* and Voitinsky was reportedly sent to China to reprimand him.<sup>19</sup> Thus, the concerns expressed by Trotsky and the United Opposition were to a large degree reflecting the statements of China’s Communist leaders, like Chen Duxiu. One crucial difference, however, is that while to the Bolsheviks in Moscow such arguments were largely academic, to the Chinese Communists they were a matter of life and death.

The Chinese Communists began to criticize the United Front policy soon after Chiang's March 1926 coup. For example, Victor A. Yakhontoff has cited Borodin as stating that the Comintern condemned Chen Duxiu for his repeated requests for permission to withdraw from the Guomindang before it was too late. In order not to risk breaking apart the United Front by making Chiang even more suspicious of the Chinese Communists than he already was, Voitinsky also would not allow the Communists to arm themselves, which meant that they were completely helpless before Chiang's armies.<sup>20</sup>

Tensions increased rapidly within the CCP as a result of the Comintern's decision. The Guangzhou Communists in particular strongly disagreed with the policies of the central party leadership. According to a 1929 account by Cai Hesen called "The History of Opportunism in the Communist Party of China," the CCP's Central Committee "blamed the Guangdong comrades, arguing that the attempts to continue the Hong Kong strike had led to defeat and that precisely this policy of dragging [out the strike] had been one of the reasons for the March 20th overturn." The Guangzhou Communists violently protested this interpretation of events. Accordingly, the "drawn-out, methodical disagreements between the Central Committee and the Guangdong comrades was the beginning of a political split within the party."<sup>21</sup>

Understandably, dissatisfaction in China with the Comintern policy was growing. One of the leaders of the Guangzhou Communist section evidently even went so far as to state that: "The national revolution is coming to an end, henceforth in China there will perhaps only be the class struggle, and therefore the Guomindang will no longer be necessary." As a result of statements like this one, the Central Committee "harshly attacked" the Guangzhou Communists and as a result their authority among the Guangdong "worker-peasant masses was severely damaged."<sup>22</sup>

In order to calm widespread fears among the Chinese Communists, Comintern experts on China—most notably Voitinsky—wrote extensively about events in China following the 20 March events. In an article from the April edition of the *Communist International*, Voitinsky discussed the new political situation in China. In order for his article to have appeared in print so soon, however, Voitinsky would have probably had to write it near the end of March, before complete information about the coup could have possibly reached Moscow. As a result, Voitinsky's attempt to reassure the CCP appears hollow:

The Canton experiment, without a doubt, is shining a light on the future path of development of the Chinese people's struggle for independence and shows how, in our epoch of socialist revolutions, the oppressed masses of the East will build power towards a transition period away from feudalism.<sup>23</sup>

Voitinsky also emphasized how the Guomindang and the Chinese Communist Party were working together in military matters and stated that a fuller understanding of what was happening in China

could not be answered without taking into account the current composition of the Guomindang, the situation in Southern China where neighbouring provinces were begging to group around the Canton government, without taking into account the development of the agrarian movement and, finally, without taking into account the military situation in the south-east part of China up to Shandong province.

But, in a veiled criticism of Comintern policy, Voitinsky quoted Otto Bayer's much harsher 30 March 1926 criticism of both the 1925 Hong Kong strike and the apparent failure of the workers' movement: "China was feudal, last year in China there was a huge revolutionary movement which has now suffered defeat, and the winners were the bourgeoisie, who, with the help of the major militarists, came to power."<sup>24</sup>

The CCP's vocal condemnation of the United Front policy, in connection with Voitinsky's obviously risky decision to quote Bayer's opinion that the Chinese revolution had suffered defeat, undoubtedly had an impact on the ideological formation of the United Opposition. Faced with a revolutionary crisis in China, Trotsky, Zinoviev, and Radek buried their long-standing differences and began to call for major changes in the Comintern's China policy. Chief among them was to dissolve the United Front.

### **Renewed factional debates over the Comintern's China policy**

During April 1926 the United Opposition emerged as a coalition made up of Trotsky and Radek on the one hand, and Zinoviev and Kamenev on the other. Although both groups nursed intense hatred for each other based on earlier disputes—disputes that had resulted in Radek's ouster from the Politburo and Trotsky's forced resignation from the Military Council—in good Bolshevik tradition they did not let these differences override their mutual resentment for Stalin and Bukharin. Without a doubt, it was over criticism of the Comintern's China policy that the United Opposition first joined together to challenge the central leadership.

The United Opposition was formed out of failure. During late 1925, Stalin had decisively defeated Zinoviev and Kamenev at the Fourteenth Party Congress. In early 1926, Stalin sent Sergei Kirov to Leningrad to oust the oppositionists from their seat of power, and "it was only after they had been beaten, in the spring of 1926, that Zinoviev and Kamenev at last threw in their lot with Trotsky." Meanwhile, Trotsky was also being attacked by Stalin and he was forced to acknowledge publicly that Lenin's testament, which opposed Stalin taking power, was apocryphal. According to Deutscher, the origin of the United Opposition was not auspicious: "The union of the two oppositions represented therefore little more than the joint wreckage of their former separate selves."<sup>25</sup>

Following the successful formation of the United Opposition during April 1926, factional debates on the Chinese revolution began to take on a new

importance within the Soviet Union. News of the 20 March 1926 political coup was slowly filtering back to Moscow, and it seemed more and more evident that the Chinese Communists were the big losers. Also, Chiang was pushing for an early start to the Northern Expedition. A clear shift to the right seemed to be underway in China. The United Opposition hoped to use this shift in the Chinese revolution to discredit Stalin and Bukharin.

Karl Radek was one of the first leaders of the United Opposition to argue that the Guomindang's policies were turning to the right. Warren Lerner, Radek's political biographer, has hypothesized that Radek probably learned of this shift from his students at Sun Yat-sen University. Newly arrived from China, these students were fully cognizant of events taking place there and undoubtedly had a better understanding of the political intricacies in China than their Soviet teachers did.<sup>26</sup>

On Radek's advice, Trotsky and the other leaders of the United Opposition began to call for the Chinese Communist Party to withdraw from the Guomindang. This demand was first made in April 1926.<sup>27</sup> During May, the United Opposition discussed its platform. Instead of attacking the China policy directly, the central leadership was criticized for ignoring international Communism in favor of building socialism in the Soviet Union. According to one view:

The united opposition to Stalin became a fact in June, 1926, when a common platform prepared by Trotsky was adopted. The foundation of this platform was the denial of the Stalin theory of the possibility of socialism in one country. The lines were now drawn for battle.<sup>28</sup>

Meanwhile, the central government was also discussing the situation in China. According to one source purporting to be the diary of Maxim Litvinov, the Soviet Foreign Minister at this time, the Politburo was determined to wait for the successful conclusion of the Northern Expedition before carrying out its "plan for the immediate Sovietisation of the Chinese Revolution." Stalin apparently estimated that "a Central Soviet regime could be set up in China within twelve or eighteen months." Once this occurred, Chiang could then be removed, either "physically or politically," in a fashion to be determined by "Borodin, Galen, and Prassolov," all of whom were in China.<sup>29</sup>

Although this source is considered suspect, Litvinov reportedly dictated his memoir during the late 1930s or early 1940s, long after the China policy was proven to be a failure. His description would appear to corroborate that the Politburo was attempting to avoid any real change in the Comintern's China policy until after the Northern Expedition succeeded in reunifying North and South China. By contrast, the United Opposition reasoned that assisting the Northern Expedition would simply strengthen Chiang's hand, while correspondingly weakening the Chinese Communists. Similar arguments were being made during this period by members of the CCP.

## The CCP June 1926 plenum and the United Front policy

In June 1926, the Chinese Communist Party held a plenum discussing possible changes in their relations with the Guomindang. Even holding this meeting technically violated their agreement with Chiang Kai-shek, since they did not seek his prior approval, and so could have resulted in their expulsion from the United Front. After much discussion, the Chinese Communist leadership adopted a series of proposals that, if instituted, would have given the CCP greater independence within the United Front policy. Upon receiving these proposals, however, the Comintern refused to accept them. Reportedly, the Comintern also criticized Chen Duxiu for following in Trotsky's footsteps. In the end, the Chinese Communists had no choice but to reconfirm the Comintern's China policy.

The CCP plenum met during June 1926 in great secrecy to respond to the most recent political events. After much discussion, it was decided to:

- (1) change from a political union from within to a political bloc; (2) establish a distinctly independent political line; (3) strive, so that under the Guomindang there would be an underpinning of the urban petty bourgeoisie democracy; (4) consider, that the Guomindang ought to organized not as a centralized party, and that its organizations in different areas ought to resemble clubs.<sup>30</sup>

This resolution appeared to be calling for a new relationship with the Guomindang. In particular, it would grant the CCP equal status with the Guomindang. The proposed Northern Expedition especially concerned the Chinese Communists, since it could potentially put even more power in the hands of the military. Chen Duxiu reportedly spoke out against supporting Chiang's military objectives, since he was concerned that this would strengthen the Guomindang to the point where the alliance with the CCP could be discarded altogether. The Comintern refused to acknowledge the validity of such criticisms, however, and favored a policy of "directing the entire Guomindang to the left and guaranteeing it a stable left policy" by continuing to work within the Guomindang party.<sup>31</sup>

The CCP's proposal to work with the Guomindang in a political bloc was also denied, therefore, which left control over the United Front in Chiang's hands. In addition, all opposition to the Northern Expedition by Chen Duxiu and the other CCP leaders was ignored. Those who continued to support these views were repudiated by the Comintern for having "deviationist tendencies."<sup>32</sup> According to one source, the Comintern later even accused Chen Duxiu of "following, and on certain points even going ahead of Trotsky."<sup>33</sup>

After the CCP plenum, Voitinsky published an article, entitled "Struggle for the Guomindang. Events in the Northern and Southern Governments," in a July 1926 edition of *Communist International* discussing the new balance

of power in China. Although his recommendations differed radically from those being put forward by the United Opposition, he did share some of their concerns about Chiang Kai-shek's coup:

The events of 20 March of this year resulted when a member of the Central Committee of the Guomindang and the leader of the Cantonese military forces, Chiang Kai-shek, attempted to seize greater influence over the government's military actions and opened all of the deep conflicts between the right and left wings of the Guomindang, conflicts which intensified especially after the triumph of the reaction in the North. Now, Chiang Kai-shek apparently realizes his mistake and even printed a declaration of repentance, asking that the Canton government punish the guilty, including himself. But, it would be extremely irresponsible to think that the struggle within the Guomindang has now been exhausted and that it has been eliminated as a basic danger to the existence of the revolutionary Cantonese government.

Voitinsky therefore further warned that the right wing of the Guomindang might turn the “policies of the national party of China against the Chinese people, against the USSR, and towards the interests of world imperialism.”<sup>34</sup>

According to Voitinsky, the activities of the “united imperialist front against the USSR” were even more dangerous than the threat posed by Chiang Kai-shek. As a result of the events in March the imperialists now hoped to

turn Guangzhou, with the help of the Right Guomindang, from a base of revolutionary struggle of the Chinese into a buffer between the revolutionary movement and the reaction, and under the best circumstances even to again draw it into the immediate sphere of imperialist influence.<sup>35</sup>

To break up the United Front prematurely would merely do what the imperialists were hoping.

While analyzing the composition of the Guomindang, Voitinsky also identified the polarization which was taking place within the party. One “capitalist” viewpoint was to force the Communists out of the Guomindang and to “rely on the military strength of the Chinese militarists and to unite with foreign capital.” Meanwhile, another tendency was “the expression of the interests of the oppressed strata of society, the striving towards liberation from the imperialists’ yoke and towards a democratic state which would complete the 1911 revolution.” The left wing of the Guomindang was the main “ideologist” of this second tendency. According to Voitinsky, this group could not have attained the results that they had without the help of the Communists, especially with respect to matters of an ideological and practical nature.<sup>36</sup>

After admitting the very real dangers inherent in a possible conflict between these two tendencies, however, Voitinsky came down firmly on behalf of the

Comintern's China policy by advocating the continuation of the Communists within the Guomindang:

the leaders of the Communist Party and the leaders of the Left Guomindang understand quite well that the departure of the Communists from the Guomindang would signify the seizure of the party by the right and the degeneration of it into a party of compradores, politicians, and prominent civil servants.

The left wing of the Guomindang should, therefore, "seek the isolation and unmasking of the right," and should not forget the "necessity of close cooperation with the Communists."<sup>37</sup>

It was only many years later that Voitinsky admitted his mistake concerning the respective strengths between the Right and Left Guomindang. In an article from 1930, Voitinsky was to explain the 20 March 1926 events very differently: "Chiang Kai-shek's action on March 20, 1926, was directed against the Communists in the Guomindang and against the Left Guomindangists ... and signified throughout all of China, the first attempt by the national bourgeoisie to 'bridle the revolution,' and 'restrict its scope'."<sup>38</sup> In effect, Voitinsky was admitting the validity of both the United Opposition's and the Chinese Communist Party's 1926 warnings. By 1930, however, Chen Duxiu—like Trotsky in the Soviet Union—had long since been purged from the Communist Party.

## Conclusions

With the Comintern's June 1926 decision to denounce the CCP's opposition to the Guomindang, the United Front policy continued unchanged. In line with Moscow's orders, the Soviet advisers began to prepare to help Chiang Kai-shek lead the Northern Expedition to reunite North and South China. Meanwhile, the head of the Soviet advisers, Borodin, advocated a gradual policy of

strengthening the left wing of the Guomindang by means of party purges, strengthening the leftward flow in the army, strengthening the work among the peasants under the auspices of an agrarian program right up to an agrarian revolution, strengthening the trade unions and the indoctrination work of the communists, and the further bolshevization of the Chinese Communist Party.<sup>39</sup>

According to one analysis of the Comintern's policy, the Northern Expedition would also allow the Communists an unimpeded opportunity to carry out rural reforms while the revolution was most intense, at a point when Chiang could no longer stifle it.<sup>40</sup>

Borodin's emphasis on the importance of the agrarian revolution was clarified in a speech called "The Peasant Movement and the Agrarian Question"

at the Peasant Congress in Hankou. Borodin's three goals to solve the land problem were: (1) the establishment of minimum land allotments for peasants; (2) the lowering of rents; and (3) "popular government at the county, provincial, and national level." However, a final solution would be possible only after the "militarists and imperialists" were defeated:

When the militarists and the imperialists are defeated and the people are freed from their oppression, the national government will also be formed on this basis. Sending village representatives to the national government is the only way to solve the land problem.<sup>41</sup>

Borodin supported the Northern Expedition as the first step in unifying the Chinese government, which would in turn allow a resolution of the rural question. The workers, according to Borodin, also could ally with the peasantry, since the development of Chinese industry was closely linked to the agrarian situation. Based on this analysis, Borodin concluded:

The Chinese workers are in the foremost ranks of your movement; they with you know that the revolution will not be concluded any earlier, than the resolving of the land problem. The development of industry and the success of the revolution cannot be achieved without the resolution of the land problem.<sup>42</sup>

Borodin stated that the first stage of the Chinese revolution would be the defeat of the "warlords and the imperialists," the second stage would be the "resolution of the land problem," while the third and final stage would be the completion of the revolution. Borodin's timing of these events agreed exactly with one of Chen Duxiu's earlier articles stressing the importance of the agrarian revolution. However, it is equally important to recall that as of May 1926, the CCP had only 12,000 members: 66 percent of them were workers, 29 percent were from the other class backgrounds, while only 5 percent were listed as peasants.<sup>43</sup> As the next chapter will show, the United Opposition opposed Borodin's optimistic goals as ill-adapted to the political realities of the Chinese revolution.

### 3 The Northern Expedition and the United Front

The Northern Expedition began during the summer and continued through winter 1926. At the same time, disputes in the USSR over the Comintern's China policy were coming to the fore. This debate was precipitated by the emergence of the United Opposition as a major faction within the Soviet leadership. Its initial demands included the recall of Ambassador Lev Karakhan from Beijing, the relinquishing of control over the Chinese Eastern Railroad, and the Chinese Communist Party's withdrawal from the Guomindang. But, the USSR's Fifteenth Party Conference in November 1926 (not to be confused with the Fifteenth Party Congress in 1927) called for the continuation of the United Front.

Meanwhile, in China, the beginning of the Northern Expedition quickly led to increased tensions with foreign powers—chief among them Britain and Japan—and renewed tensions between the Soviet Union and Zhang Zuolin over the joint management of the Chinese Eastern Railway. For a time, the possibility of further Sino-Soviet conflicts in Manchuria even led to a “war scare” in the Soviet Union. This was the first of what would turn out to be many such war scares throughout the 1920s and the early 1930s, which Stalin frequently took advantage of to attack and undermine his opponents.

During this period, it was the Chinese Communist Party that was most at risk. Under orders from the Comintern, it retained its close alliance with the Guomindang. The leaders of the United Opposition supported greater autonomy for the Chinese Communists, however, warning of a possible purge by the Right Guomindang. Their demand to recall Karakhan was actually a denunciation of his policy of using secret diplomacy to retain the unequal rights and privileges of the former Tsarist government. Finally, they advocated the return of Tsarist concessions to China, like the Chinese Eastern Railway.

However, the United Opposition was outvoted on all of these issues from summer through fall 1926. They were forced to capitulate under threat of being expelled from the Bolshevik party. This defeat would help set the future course of the Chinese revolution.

## The United Opposition and the Central Committee

At the Central Committee's plenum in July 1926, the United Opposition strongly called for the Chinese Communists to leave the Guomindang and advocated that the CCP should form a separate and independent revolutionary movement. The plenum refused to consider these proposals. Using its power over the China policy as a club, the Central Committee roundly criticized the United Opposition. As a result of the United Opposition's first failure, Zinoviev was even expelled from the Politburo.

The United Opposition appeared formidable in July 1926: "it had well-nigh a monopoly of the party's venerated names and finest minds. The Opposition had all the brains." In its program, the United Opposition advocated adopting a Five-Year Plan to support rapid industrialization, supported greater democracy within the Bolshevik party and the government, and opposed Stalin's isolationist "Socialism in One Country." In a pattern that would become all too familiar during this period: "Stalin made fun of the Plan as insane Utopianism, though a few years later he was to put forward his own Five-Year Plan on a vastly more pretentious basis."<sup>1</sup>

Criticism of the China policy was also a major element of their platform. Radek consulted with Zinoviev and Trotsky and sent a letter in July to the Politburo expressing his concern over the China policy. As provost of the Sun Yat-sen University, Radek had a legitimate right to question the Politburo's policies, especially since he was responsible for explaining these policies to the Chinese students. This letter questioned the USSR's continued support for Chiang Kai-shek's "military dictatorship," the Guomindang's work among peasants and workers, and how best to support the leftward leaning elements of the Guomindang. Radek ended his letter by stating: "I consider it my duty to raise these questions."<sup>2</sup>

At the Central Committee plenum in July, the goals of the United Opposition included denouncing the secret diplomacy initiated by Lev Karakhan in China, calling for the return of the Tsarist concessions, and advocating greater independence of the Chinese Communists. Much of the discussion revolved around the international scene, as Trotsky accused Stalin of "national exclusiveness" and of missing many crucial opportunities to assist the world revolution. Trotsky even announced: "Let the Soviet government directly help the world revolution, for only in that manner can the Soviet government be preserved!"<sup>3</sup>

The United Opposition's failure to obtain these goals were most clearly set forth in the decision of the Central Committee to denounce the United Opposition as "opportunistic" and "capitalist":<sup>4</sup>

The plenum of the Central Committee, in approving the action of the Politburo and of the delegation of the All-Union Communist Party on the Chinese question, finds the *proposals of the Opposition (Zinoviev-Trotsky) patently opportunistic and in part openly capitulationist* on the

following points: recalling Comrade Karakhan, relinquishing control over the Chinese Eastern Railroad, and withdrawing from the Guomindang. The Central Committee holds that such a position would make sense only in the event of a total liquidation of the national revolutionary movement in China.

The plenum also accused the new United Opposition of holding “illegal conspiratorial meetings,” of reproducing and distributing “secret party documents aimed at discrediting the party line,” and of sending agents to other party organizations with “the aim of setting up underground factional groups.”<sup>5</sup>

One of the United Opposition’s primary goals in criticizing the United Front in China was to obtain greater freedom for the Chinese Communists, but to no avail. The central leadership under Bukharin and Stalin continued to support the United Front policy and insisted that it was the only way for the revolution in China to succeed. The “threads” of the United Opposition’s “factional moves” pointed to Zinoviev and he was expelled from the Central Committee’s Politburo on 23 July 1926.<sup>6</sup> This upset would prove to be merely the first of many setbacks suffered by the United Opposition during 1926 as a result of its criticism of the Comintern’s China policy.

Trotsky, in a private letter to Radek dated 30 August 1926, discussed their next move and gave Radek important advice on how to carry out future criticism on the China policy. In this letter, Trotsky first advised Radek to look at India and determine why India’s Communist Party had not united with any national-revolutionary organizations. According to Trotsky, the presence of colonial oppression alone was not sufficient to warrant a Communist party’s entry into a national revolutionary party. Instead, this decision should be based solely on the relationship of class differences in that country and whether or not there were classes in league with foreign oppression.<sup>7</sup>

In other words, Trotsky asked: “Should the [Chinese] Communist Party be doomed to remain forever within the revolutionary-democratic party as merely a propaganda circle, enlisting the aid of sympathetic individuals, or will the Communist Party soon be able to claim the leadership of the workers’ movement?” To this question Trotsky answered that “without a doubt” the situation in China demanded the second course of action, and he advised Radek to gather documentary materials to support this position.<sup>8</sup>

Trotsky also warned Radek that it was clear that the real decisions on the China policy were no longer being made within the Comintern, but in the Bolshevik party. Therefore, at the upcoming Party Conference in November 1926, Bukharin was sure to bring up the question of the Guomindang in his report on the international situation. The United Opposition should be ready to counter his arguments. Radek largely followed Trotsky’s advice. In September 1926, Radek sent a second letter of inquiry to the Politburo, requesting that it clarify its China policy so that he could present the correct interpretation in his lectures to the Chinese students at Sun Yat-sen University.<sup>9</sup>

## **The growing worldwide importance of the Chinese revolution**

During June and July of 1926, the international situation appeared favorable to the success of China's revolution. A wave of workers' strikes in Britain seemed to prove that there was an important upswing in the revolutionary tempo. In league with the revolutionaries in China, these European events might indicate that the worldwide revolution was at hand. One goal of the Soviet Union's diplomacy was to split the imperialist camp in China, by convincing Japan to break its long-time alliance with Britain. This policy depended on convincing Japanese leaders that revolutionary events in China were not aimed at Japan.

During 1926, China's importance to the world revolution was rising. If the revolution succeeded it would be as a union of the workers' movement of the colonial countries—and most especially China—and the workers' movement of the “metropol”, such as the strikers in Britain. This alliance between colonial workers and the center offered a method for disrupting the “capitalist stabilization” that had apparently taken place during the early 1920s and that had temporarily halted the expansion of the world revolution. According to this view:

The national revolutionary actions in China and the actions of the English proletariat have emphasized still more sharply and decisively the full relativity of the capitalist stabilization, and this will, without a doubt, be of great importance for evaluating the international situation.<sup>10</sup>

During the summer of 1926, both the Comintern and the Bolshevik party began to place more and more importance on the revolution in China. Labor strikes in Britain expanded to such a degree that it seemed possible that the British government might even declare war on the Soviet Union in retaliation. The Soviet leadership hoped, therefore, that a successful revolution in China would not only weaken the British empire enough so that it could not declare war, but that it would also result in a firmer alliance between the Soviet Union and China—yet another deterrent to war.

The ongoing miners' strike in Britain was especially important to the Comintern's global considerations. Because of the 1925 Locarno agreement, “England's political hegemony on the European continent” had been guaranteed.<sup>11</sup> To undermine Britain's home front, the Soviet trade unions were sending money to support the striking British miners. Sir Austen Chamberlain and his government did not take kindly to this interference. Faced with strikes at home and with a deteriorating position in China because of the successes of the Northern Expedition, the British Foreign Office issued a statement on 30 September 1926, saying that Britain was prepared to defend its interests in China, “from pirates and robbers who, with their actions, pose a threat to the lives and property of British subjects.”<sup>12</sup>

Although this warning did not identify the Soviet Union by name, the British Foreign Office was clearly trying to warn off the Soviet government

from going too far in China. The 24 September 1926 issue of the *Communist International* contained an editorial entitled “Prepare for the Imperialist Attack” and began with the words: “There is a new danger of war!” It continued: “English imperialism would lead the rabid attack on the country of the dictatorship of the proletariat.”<sup>13</sup>

Such war scares became more frequent following the beginning of the Northern Expedition during the summer of 1926. By the late fall, the Nationalist Army had moved north to the Yangtze River, had taken the strategic city of Wuhan—composed of the bordering towns of Wuchang, Hankou, and Hanyang—and was even threatening to lay siege to Shanghai, the most important British stronghold in central China. To general surprise, the united force, composed of the Nationalist Army and the Soviet military advisers, was easily able to defeat the southern warlords and had begun the long-hoped-for process of reunifying China.

The success of the Northern Expedition was of particular concern to the foreign community in China. On the one hand, a united China would be easier to work with in order to determine tariff rates and to increase trade and investment. But, on the other hand, if the new government was too strong then it could severely limit the freedom of action of the Western capitalists in the Chinese markets. Up until 1926, Western investment in China was enormous: according to a Soviet estimate appearing in Pavel Mif’s article “Character and Driving Force of the Chinese Revolution,” the West had invested 1,092,000,000 gold rubles into the railroad system alone and over a billion gold rubles into the banking system.<sup>14</sup> Westerners watched the success of the United Front with a great deal of concern, and none was more concerned than Japan, since the revolutionary situation in China threatened to upset Japanese influence in the Far East.

Japan tried to negotiate with the USSR. Soviet ambassador in Tokyo, Victor Kopp, reported that Baron Shidehara told him: “I should like to call attention to the desirability of establishing a community of views between our government and the Soviet government on all questions relating to Manchuria, the [Soviet] Maritime Province and the Kamchatka.”<sup>15</sup> Faced with the prospect of additional turmoil in China, the Japanese government hoped to confirm Japanese economic interests with the Soviet Union.

During August 1926, Japanese fears appeared to be confirmed when tensions along the Chinese Eastern Railway once more erupted. This time the dispute revolved around the seizing of railway cars by the Manchurian authorities and the enforced transfer of the railway schools, which had been set up to train railway employees in both technical and political subjects, to the Department of Education. The Soviet government strongly protested these actions in notes from 31 August 1926 and 7 September 1926, and called for the Chinese government to take action to terminate these tensions with the Soviet Union.<sup>16</sup> The Comintern further warned in September 1926 of disaster should the Japanese join the British against the Chinese revolution: “At the same time as Zhang Zuolin is carrying out their raids under the direction

of England's ally Japan, England is sending gunboats and disembarking troops into the capital of the Guomindang, into Canton.”<sup>17</sup>

It was during this period of successive war scares that the United Opposition was accused more and more frequently of being unpatriotic, and of playing into the hands of England and Japan. Although the Soviet Union had set high hopes for the national revolution in China, it was not militarily capable or politically willing to go to war on China’s behalf, especially against Britain and Japan. Such practical limitations were to have an enormous impact on the China policy.

## **The Chinese Communist Party and the United Opposition**

Following the failure of the United Opposition to change the Comintern’s China policy, the Chinese Communist Party held its third enlarged Central Committee plenum in September 1926. In line with Comintern orders, it determined that the correlation of forces within the Guomindang were now split into four factions: the right, the left, the Communists, and then the “new right” which was really a faction in the center. The Central Committee’s strategy was to unite with the left, under the leadership of Wang Jingwei, in order to influence the center, which included Chiang Kai-shek.

The period from the spring to the fall of 1926 was difficult for the Chinese Communists. The attacks made against the Communist leaders following the 20 March *Zhongshan* boat incident and the 15 May Guomindang Central Committee resolutions had also included a 7 June 1926 purge of Communist cadre from the Whampoa military academy. Such anti-Communist actions had been made possible by radical changes in the “objective political situation” such as the “retreat of the National army,” the “counter-revolutionary success of the imperialist-supported northern warlords,” Britain’s support for the most important warlord in central China, Wu Peifu, Japan’s support for Zhang Zuolin, and lastly the “taking advantage of the Chinese Eastern Railway incident to oppose the Soviet Union.”<sup>18</sup>

Besides cautioning that the Chinese Communists had to try to nullify the effects of these political events in order to avoid further attacks by the right and center, the CCP leadership also had to use its support among “workers’ associations, peasant mutual aid associations, and student societies” to oppose attacks from the right and center factions. The strategy for “uniting with the Guomindang’s left faction” in order to “struggle with the bourgeoisie for the leadership of the national movement” necessitated, on the one hand, the initiation of a more independent policy “to firmly establish their power within the workers and peasants so as to revolutionize the masses,” and on the other hand, “to organize the revolutionary tide of the petty bourgeoisie” under the left wing of the Guomindang. This would then “guarantee that the proletariats’ political party could compete for the leading role in the National Revolution.”<sup>19</sup>

Following Stalin’s and Bukharin’s victory, the CCP’s role within the United Front remained unchanged. In the developing intra-party debate between the

United Opposition and the Centrists, Trotsky became the most important advocate for allowing the Chinese Communists to work independently of the Guomindang. For example, in Trotsky's letter of 27 September 1926, entitled "The Chinese Communist Party and the Guomindang," he urged the Chinese Communists to break with the Guomindang and "fight for direct independent leadership of the awakened working class."<sup>20</sup> In particular, Trotsky warned that the Chinese Communists had been forced to make too many concessions to Chiang Kai-shek and as a result were "retreating steadily," as each "new concession only brings renewed pressure against the Communists on the part of the Guomindang forces." According to Trotsky, it was necessary to

draw the line organizationally as the necessary prerequisite for an independent policy, keeping one's eyes, not on the Left Guomindang, but above all, on the awakened workers. Only under this condition can a bloc with the Guomindang or with any of its elements be anything more than a castle of sand.<sup>21</sup>

Over Trotsky's opposing vote, however, the Guomindang was admitted into the Communist International as a "sympathizing party." Moscow also began actively to support Chiang Kai-shek's successful Northern Expedition to unite China. To reflect the rapidly increasing interest in world affairs, the *Communist International* switched from being a monthly to a weekly journal in the middle of September 1926. The total number of pages of text increased dramatically during this period and over twenty articles about China were printed between September and December of 1926 alone. China's increasing importance was reflected in an article from the first weekly issue written by the Japanese Communist Sen Katayama, who stated in September 1926: "China will stand—and this is inevitable—as the main center of the great collision between capitalism and Communism. One of these is represented by the imperialist nations, the other by the USSR."<sup>22</sup>

More and more, the world was seen as being divided into two camps, dominated on one side by capitalists and on the other by Communists. Although Great Britain was portrayed as the Soviet Union's primary opponent in the Far East, it was already clear that the United States would soon become the strongest bulwark against Communism. According to Varga:

Although, at the present moment it is the English bourgeoisie who are the main enemy of Soviet Russia and are the instigators of the struggle against Communism, in the future the final struggle between the world bourgeoisie and proletariat will take place under the leadership of the United States and the Union of Socialist Republics.<sup>23</sup>

This division of the world into two "camps" under Soviet and American leadership was later to become the single most important feature of the Cold War.

Instead of seeing these events as confirmation of the United Opposition's criticisms, the new threat of war between the two camps was used to attack Trotsky and the United Opposition. In an editorial from September 1926 entitled "Leninism or Trotskyism," the *Communist International* brought the battle within the Bolshevik party into the open by calling for the support of the international Communist movement in order to defeat the opposition in the Soviet Union. Specifically, it attempted to label Trotsky and his supporters as working in direct opposition to Leninism. Under the editorial control of Bukharin, the *Communist International* became an important medium for attacking the United Opposition. By early 1927, only pro-Centrist articles were allowed to be published in its volumes. Meanwhile, the writings of the United Opposition can only be gleaned mainly from later books and archival sources.

As the title suggests, this editorial accused Trotsky of being "openly against Lenin." The United Opposition were described as turning their backs on the revolution by not "having faith in the possibility of victory" over the new problems besetting the party. By contrast, Stalin had claimed that the first period of the New Economic Policy was the development of agriculture and that now it was necessary to develop industry so that the country could build socialism, a view that the United Opposition denied based on the fact that the Soviet Union was "technically backwards" and so therefore could not support a "completely socialist society."<sup>24</sup>

This editorial concluded that the United Opposition was trying to put a new question on the agenda—the question of whether the USSR must choose between Leninism or Trotskyism: "It can't be doubted that all of the healthy elements in the international communist movement, who have minutely explored the political and theoretical content of the disagreement, will give their firm and decisive answer: against Trotskyism—for Leninism."<sup>25</sup> The decision to denounce Trotsky publicly opened what had formerly been a private debate to a larger audience within the international Communist movement. This widening split in the ranks of the Bolshevik party inevitably served to spread confusion and distrust into an ever-widening sphere, including, most importantly, the Chinese Communist Party.

## **China and "Socialism in One Country"**

The internal debate over the policy of rapidly industrializing the Soviet Union had a direct and enormous impact on the Comintern's policies in China. Stalin's theory of "Socialism in One Country" presupposed that the most important single factor in the international Communist strategy would be the survival and growth of the Soviet Union. By contrast, the essential point of Trotsky's theory of "permanent revolution" was that international revolution would have to precede the building of socialism. The revolutionary situation in China became the battlefield over which these two theories fought.

According to Stalin, Bukharin, and their followers—in a loose coalition that was called the “Centrist” group—socialism could be built in one country and then exported abroad to other countries. With respect to China, the Centrists proposed that once socialism was built in the Soviet Union, socialist aid could be given in order to by-pass the capitalist stage of development and to bring about socialism more quickly in China. This would allow for more rapid development than would normally be possible if the Chinese revolution proceeded through the normal three-stage transition from feudalism, to capitalism, to socialism as predicted by Marx and Engels and then later agreed to in principle by Lenin. The Centrists’ reinterpretation of this aspect of Communism—that it was possible to build socialism in one country first and then have it spread outwards to other countries—would prove to have enormous implications for the USSR’s foreign policy concerns during the late 1920s.

This debate potentially had a huge impact on China. Therefore, discussion was not limited just to the Soviet Union: similar issues were being aired in China. In the 25 September 1926 issue of *Guide Weekly*, Chen Duxiu discussed the ongoing struggle in China as being between the semi-feudal, anti-Communist, faction and the democratic, pro-Communist, faction. Under the pro-Communist faction he listed the Guomindang, the national army, “politically conscious industrialists,” and then the peasants, workers, students, middle to small merchants and, of course, the Communist Party and the Communist Youth Group. The opposing faction included warlords, the bureaucracy, the landed gentry, and then smaller groups like “university professors.” Chen took a position almost diametrically opposite to Stalin. In an attempt to reassure the other members of the democratic faction that they had nothing to fear from Communism, Chen Duxiu assured them that after the national revolution there would be a democratic mass government, not a dictatorship of the proletariat or a worker and peasant government. Under this democratic government, capitalists would have full freedom to develop, since, according to Chen: “We are not Utopian socialists, we definitely do not dream of sidestepping capitalism, or of a semi-feudal society moving directly to socialism.”<sup>26</sup>

Similarly, back in Moscow, the United Opposition continued to oppose Stalin’s views. On 27 September 1926, Radek participated in a debate at the Communist Academy in Moscow in which he roundly criticized Stalin’s theory of “Socialism in One Country.” Stalin responded a few weeks later when he denounced Radek’s remarks at the Communist Academy as “un-Leninist.” As soon as the Centrists took control over the press, Radek’s articles soon afterwards disappeared from the pages of *Pravda*, *Izvestiia*, and other party-sponsored journals.<sup>27</sup>

During the fall of 1926, Radek was constantly hearing stories from his Chinese students about the increasingly tense relations between the Communists and Guomindang in China. Since the Comintern and Politburo would not respond to Radek’s inquiries about the China policy, Radek was obliged to

send Sergei Dalin to China to report on the situation. This was an especially important period, since near the end of October 1926 the capital of the Guomindang government was moved from Guangzhou further north to Wuhan. Although Radek was rebuked for this action, Dalin had already left for China and it was too late to recall him.

Throughout October 1926, the polemics heated up even more between the United Opposition and the Centrists. For example, on 22 October 1926, a *Communist International* editorial made a bold accusation when it directly linked the capitalists' anti-Communist front in China with the United Opposition, calling the United Opposition's actions "open anti-government propaganda and agitation."<sup>28</sup> Another article from the same issue claimed that "in moments when the revolutionary wave fell" Trotsky would "slip down into the side of the opposition" as he had done after the defeat of the 1905 revolution.<sup>29</sup> Finally, Trotsky's support for a more independent Chinese Communist Party even led to accusations that he himself was leading a "United Front" against the Bolshevik party. Such accusations would play an important role in the defeat of the United Opposition at the upcoming Fifteenth Party Conference.

## **The defeat of the United Opposition at the Fifteenth Party Conference**

On 29 October 1926, while the Fifteenth Party Conference was underway, the Chinese Communist leader Tan Ping-shan published an article in the *Communist International* that forcefully outlined the connection between the Comintern's United Front policy in China and the developing revolutionary movement in Europe. He emphasized that the revolution in China was an essential part of the world revolution as well as part of the world anti-capitalism movement. As such, Tan forcefully restated the comparative importance of the national independence movements to the European proletarian: "The victory of the proletariat in the advanced countries is impossible without the victory of the independence movements of the oppressed peoples in their struggle with imperialism."<sup>30</sup>

Tan concluded by also switching this equation around and stating: "The united revolutionary front is impossible without the active support of the proletariat of the advanced countries and without their struggle with imperialism in their own countries."<sup>31</sup> Statements such as these were used to attack the United Opposition, since their criticism of the Comintern's China policy could be construed as undermining international proletarian support for the Chinese revolution and thereby aiding the capitalists.

This restatement of the United Front policy proved important since it irrevocably linked revolutions in the East and West. It also emphasized that revolution in Europe was *impossible* without the victory of national independence movements, and, most importantly, the ongoing revolution in China. Once this premise was accepted then it logically followed that the Chinese

Communist Party had to continue its alliance with the Guomindang at any cost, not just for the sake of China's future evolution but for that of Europe as well. Since the Guomindang was the backbone of the national independence movement in China, this meant the Guomindang had to be left in control. It was this issue that was really under discussion at the Fifteenth Party Conference.

The article by Tan Ping-shan linking the Chinese revolution with Europe was timed to correspond with the Fifteenth Party Conference, which met from 26 October 1926 through 3 November 1926. In this forum, Stalin denounced each of the United Opposition's policy recommendations in China. The majority of the delegates voted with him, and by doing so ignored the United Opposition's cry to disband the United Front between the CCP and the Guomindang. Soon afterward, the Comintern was to follow suit.

At this conference, Stalin presented a report criticizing the United Opposition. His list particularly emphasized their mistakes on the Chinese revolution. He listed four main faults with their program, and the very first was linked to China: (1) their revolutionary "adventurism" and "putschism" in rejecting the Comintern's United Front policy; (2) their plan to put "maximum fiscal pressure" on the peasantry through raising the price of consumer goods to support the expansion of industry; (3) their struggle against the "bureaucratism of the state apparatus"; and (4) their demands for more "intra-party democracy."<sup>32</sup>

The Conference supported Stalin. Following the United Opposition's defeat, Stalin called for the party to undertake measures even more stridently combating opposition and uniting the party under his and Bukharin's authority. The following points were adopted in order to help begin this process of unifying the party:<sup>33</sup>

- 1 To take care that the achieved minimum, necessary for party unity, had already been implemented.
- 2 To conduct a decisive ideological struggle with the social democratic deviation in our party, explaining to the masses the erroneousness of the views of the opposition bloc on matters of principle and bringing to light the opportunistic content of these views no matter with what "revolutionary" phrases it covers itself.
- 3 To ensure that the opposition bloc recognizes the erroneousness of its views.
- 4 In every way possible to preserve party unity, suppressing each and every attempt to resume factionalism and to violate discipline.

The United Opposition suffered a resounding defeat at the Fifteenth Party Conference, including Trotsky's removal from the Politburo. Although the United Opposition had to submit on paper to Bolshevik party discipline, the revolutionary events in China continued to be of great interest to Trotsky, Zinoviev, and Radek. As a result, the dispute between the United Opposition

and the Centrists continued. In Moscow, in particular, the intra-party debate not only was not terminated, but soon intensified even further as the alignment of forces in China began to change.

## Conclusions

As the Chinese revolution became more and more important to the world revolution during the summer and fall of 1926, the United Opposition began openly to oppose the Comintern's policy in China. In particular, it called for greater independence for the Chinese Communists. The United Opposition's support within the hierarchy of the Bolshevik party was weak, however, and the leaders of the United Opposition had yet to become a major force. This situation would change rapidly as the very success of the Chinese revolution during spring 1927 made China the Soviet government's most important foreign policy issue.

The United Opposition's predicament was clear even before the Fifteenth Party Conference. During party meetings that took place between 1 and 8 October 1926, the United Opposition received virtually zero support: out of 50,208 party members in Moscow, the United Opposition received 171 votes and only 87 people abstained. In Leningrad, out of 34,180 party members some 325 voted for the United Opposition while 126 abstained. As a result of the "enormous defeat of the opposition it was forced to capitulate."<sup>34</sup>

The United Opposition still represented a significant danger to the Centrists, however, and it soon became clear that Stalin would use any weapon—even including the Comintern's China policy—to attack and destroy them. As one commentator from October 1926 was to conclude, the United Opposition was a new bloc that "has combined together all of the tendencies, left in words but right in action, and they have all declared war on the Leninist party and its Central Committee, and have declared war on the policies of the Communist International."<sup>35</sup> Soon, the Chinese Communists were to find that in this intra-party "war" the CCP would be little more than a pawn on the factional battlefield.

## 4 Rocky shoals ahead—the realignment of forces in the United Front

The next venue for these ongoing ideological battles over the China policy would be the Comintern's Seventh Expanded Plenum, which met during November 1926 soon after the conclusion of the Fifteenth Party Conference. One of the most important issues at the plenum was the revolution in China. Events in China were linked once again with the workers' strikes in Britain and the plenum was advised that:

It ought to co-ordinate the great events of our day, the Chinese revolution and the struggle of the English proletariat, with the problems of the world Communist movement in general. “The English strikes and China” ought to be and will be the red thread which runs through the work of the plenum.<sup>1</sup>

In this context, the United Opposition was accused of disorganizing the international support for China. According to one article from November 1926, *the times*

demand the greatest concentration of power of the Communist Parties of all countries for the support of the struggling English proletariat and the revolutionary masses of China, [while] our parties in separate countries are exposed to attempts to disorganize them from the side of small groups of “opportunists.”

For this reason, the “Expanded Plenum should not be poor in demonstrating its solidarity with the English miners, with the Chinese revolution and with the proletariat of the USSR.”<sup>2</sup>

As this chapter will show, between November 1926 and March 1927 the Chinese revolution appeared to be going as planned. However, as the threat of a possible conflict between the USSR and Britain increased, the United Opposition once again warned that the leadership of the Guomindang within the United Front was moving further and further to the right. A break seemed inevitable. Ignoring all evidence supporting such a view, the Centrists insisted on the correctness of their policies and used the apparent success of

the Chinese revolution through March 1927 to continued their attack on the United Opposition.

## The Comintern's Seventh Expanded Plenum

During the Comintern's Seventh Expanded Plenum, the United Opposition once again openly opposed the Centrists' idea of "Socialism in One Country." Zinoviev, in particular, quoted from Marx, Engels, and Lenin to try to prove that the "theory about the possibility of building socialism in one country appears to violate all 'of the traditions of Marxism and Leninism' and is a 'revision of Marxism and Leninism'." The Centrists answered this charge by pointing out that because Marx and Engels never lived in the "epoch of imperialism" they could not possibly have discussed the possibility of "Socialism in One Country."<sup>3</sup>

While Stalin and Zinoviev were quoting Marx and Lenin back and forth to each other, Trotsky attacked Bukharin. He argued against the Centrists' economic policies by claiming that the Soviet Union could be "economically" crushed by world capitalism if the revolution in the West did not succeed quickly. In response, Bukharin accused Trotsky of undue pessimism and of "over-estimating the strength of capitalistic economies and by underestimating the strength of socialist economies."<sup>4</sup>

The Comintern's evaluation of the balance of power between the Left and Right Guomindang also came under dispute. In early October 1926, an article on the Chinese revolution by the Chinese Communist Tan Ping-shan had warned of the increasing strength of the Right Guomindang, especially in Guangdong province: five of the six commissars in the provincial government were with the Right Guomindang. The foundation of the revolution was in the South, and the "South and central China were of greater importance to the revolutionary movement." It was also in southern China that the anti-imperialist movement had grown to such an extent that it not only "helped the Canton government to unify Guangdong" but also allowed the "Canton government to now occupy even Guangxi and Hunan."<sup>5</sup> Now this revolutionary base appeared on the verge of falling into the hands of the Right Guomindang.

In response to these changing circumstances, on 30 November 1926 Stalin presented a speech to the Chinese Commission of the Communist International in which he called any suggestion that the Chinese Communists leave the Guomindang "stupidity." Instead, the Chinese Communists had to increase their strength within the Guomindang and work along three paths: (1) organizing peasant committees within the Chinese countryside; (2) work with the peasants through the new apparatus of the "people's revolution power;" and (3) work within the revolutionary army.<sup>6</sup>

However, Stalin's lack of in-depth knowledge concerning the Chinese situation was highlighted by a question from the floor: Should the Chinese Communists orient their policies on the left or on the center Guomindang?

Ignoring months of discussion about what form the United Front with the Guomindang should take, including most recently the article by Tan Ping-shan, Stalin responded: “Strange question. I think that the Chinese Communists ought to orient themselves towards the proletariat and ought to orient the leaders of the liberation movement in China towards the revolution. Only then would the question be correct.”<sup>7</sup> Such a response, while perhaps appearing proper in terms of Marxist–Leninist ideology, ignored the realities of the United Front. Stalin apparently did not realize, or at the very least did not appreciate, the true intricacies of the Chinese situation.

Following Stalin’s direction, the plenum’s final program optimistically stated that the world revolutionary movement was now on a “rising revolutionary wave” and that it would “break through the imperialist front at its weakest points” in China. The revolution was shifting to a new stage in which a bloc between the “proletariat, peasantry and urban petty bourgeoisie” would serve as the backbone of the revolution. As a result, the agrarian revolution in China was being brought “to the center of the program of the national-liberation movement.”<sup>8</sup>

In order to secure this new bloc, the CCP had to increase its influence within the Guangzhou government and within the People’s Army, so as to serve as a “stronghold” of the revolution. Although the Chinese proletariat was “young” and “weak in numbers,” the CCP could succeed by gaining the support of the international proletariat, and in this way the national revolutionary movement in China could indeed take the “non-capitalistic path of development” and in the process could deliver the “mortal wound to imperialism in the East.”<sup>9</sup>

Based on Stalin’s and Bukharin’s arguments, the Comintern plenum ordered the Central Committee of the Chinese Communist Party to leave Guangzhou and relocate further to the north to the “political center” of the country in Hankou. It also ordered the CCP to send experienced members to the major revolutionary centers, reorganize and strengthen the central governing body, and lastly, increase the size of the party.<sup>10</sup> All of these actions had to be accomplished, however, within the framework of what was clearly becoming a progressively Right Guomindang-dominated United Front.

## The Comintern directives and the Chinese Communist Party

On 10 December 1926, the *Communist International* called for the beginning of a “new phase” in China in which “the struggle for hegemony between the proletariat and the bourgeoisie would determine the further direction of the revolution.” Winning hegemony meant continuing the United Front policy. Although Chinese workers had played an important role in the Shanghai strikes of 1925, in the sixteen-month-long Hong Kong strike, and in helping to make Guangzhou its revolutionary base, the Chinese proletariat “have not yet played the role of the hegemony of the revolution.” The new goal of the CCP must be to win over the urban petty bourgeoisie to the camp of the proletariat and the peasants by “winning for itself an influential position in

the Guomindang, in the Canton government and in the Canton army. These tasks are fully possible.”<sup>11</sup>

This was a daunting task. Chinese Communist leaders like Tan Ping-shan pointed to the difficulties inherent in the Comintern’s directives, since the CCP was still very small and had serious limitations to overcome. One of the most important drawbacks was their limited theoretical knowledge. To overcome this flaw, Tan Ping-shan asked that more “books and brochures on the theory, tactics, and history of the proletariat movement be translated into Chinese.” He also warned of major organizational flaws, such as poor communications from the top to the bottom of the party and an anarchistic tendency for the Communists in Beijing, Shanghai, and Guangzhou to act on their own.<sup>12</sup>

Although the Comintern theorists in Moscow claimed that these orders were all “fully possible,” the Chinese Communists clearly did not agree with them. The tasks assigned to the Guangzhou Communists—who had been made responsible by the Comintern for single-handedly winning over both the government and army—were particularly large. At an extraordinary meeting of the Central Committee of the CCP held on 13 December 1926, the decisions of the Comintern were discussed. One Communist from Guangzhou in desperation asked the other delegates: “On 20 March 1926, the Guomindang died and since 15 May it has been rotting. Why are we still holding in our hands this putrid corpse?”<sup>13</sup>

In January 1927, the journal *Bolshevik*, whose editors included “Centrists” like Bukharin and Molotov, was created to overcome—in part at least—the Chinese Communists’ lack of theoretical knowledge. The first issue’s lead article was entitled: “The Immediate Problems of the International Revolution.” This article discussed the Chinese revolution in great detail, and in particular theorized that the international revolution had reached a new stage because of two factors: “The huge dislocation in the English working class” and the “historical importance of the expanding and maturing Chinese revolution.”<sup>14</sup>

According to the editorial staff of this journal, the defeat of the United Opposition was an essential prerequisite to victory in China. In fact, at the Seventh Enlarged Plenum of the Comintern: “The defeat of the opposition in all sections, in all of the organizations of the Comintern, greatly strengthened and hardened the Leninist unity of the Comintern.” This was especially important, since the situation in China was reaching a crucial stage as “China is now experiencing a turning point in its historical development.”<sup>15</sup>

The main problem that the Chinese Communists now faced was which revolutionary group in China was going to take control of the anti-imperialistic revolutionary movement as a whole. During the first stage of the revolutionary movement the “bourgeoisie and the intelligentsia” were stronger, but now the “growth of the workers’ movement has advanced the proletariat in the capacity of an independent, first-class power.” The editorial predicted that “it is therefore now unavoidable” that there will be “several serious regroupings within the nationalist movement” and that this would result in a “struggle between the bourgeoisie and the proletariat for hegemony.”<sup>16</sup>

The Centrists offered a perceptive warning to the Chinese Communist leaders; it was regrettable that the Centrists did not listen to such warnings and change their policies:

Of course, it is impossible to evaluate the exceptional danger that the bourgeoisie will try to secure the key posts and positions, make a number of half concessions to the peasantry, while at the same time suppressing the large-scale peasant and workers' movement, and, together with them, make a compromise with foreign capitalism. It is impossible not to see the full seriousness of this danger: this path of development—or rather this path to the liquidation of the Chinese revolution—would signify the extraordinary weakness of the revolutionary powers and the extraordinary success of the capitalist stabilization.

In order for the CCP to avoid this fate, it was “inevitable” that a “large part of the Chinese bourgeoisie” would have to “withdraw from the revolution.”<sup>17</sup>

But the big question was: When should the bourgeoisie withdraw? Before the bourgeoisie could be forced out of the leadership role, the agrarian revolution in China would have to be extended by supporting and organizing the mass peasant movement. Then it would be possible to form a revolutionary union of the “proletariat, peasants and the numerous layers of the urban petty bourgeoisie.” It would be this new union that would serve as the central force in the “next epoch of the Chinese revolution.”<sup>18</sup>

In the meantime, the Chinese Communists were warned that: “The danger of the weakening of the anti-imperialist front is at all times extraordinarily real.” To avoid a breakdown of the anti-imperialist front was a problem of maneuvering, and this maneuvering was necessarily both “intricate and difficult.” It called for the CCP “to gain and secure their hegemony, in accordance with the regrouping of the revolutionary forces, right in front of the still not victorious main enemy—imperialism and its militaristic agents.” The only real advice that the editorial offered was that: “In these conditions it is necessary that caution be harmonized with decisive and clearly recognized goals.”<sup>19</sup>

The final section of this lengthy editorial tied the theory of “Socialism in One Country” to the Chinese revolution by offering China the prospect of a “non-capitalistic evolution” based on the successful construction of socialism in the Soviet Union. The editorial promised that:

If the USSR has sufficient internal strength for the construction of socialism, then it will be able to serve and support the victorious proletariat of China by moving the economic development of their country, past capitalism, to a gradual socialist reorganization.<sup>20</sup>

Although this promise paralleled Lenin's earlier goal of helping less developed countries form Soviet governments and work towards Communism by

stages, it differed by presupposing that the Soviet government would need to first build socialism within the USSR and only then help other countries.<sup>21</sup>

The editorial concluded by attacking the United Opposition and claiming that a parting of the roads had been reached:

If the USSR is able to build and builds socialism, it will then be the center of the international revolution, the leading vanguard of the world proletariat; if the USSR devotes itself to ‘national-reformist’ policies, then there is no reason to even think about the world revolution, or about supporting the proletariat of China.

By reaffirming the USSR’s support for the world revolution—but only in the context that socialist construction of the Soviet Union had to take place first—then this “struggle for socialism within the USSR is inseparable from the real struggle for the world proletarian revolution.”<sup>22</sup>

This editorial from the *Bolshevik* helped to clarify for the Chinese Communist leadership a major ideological difference between the Centrists and the United Opposition. According to the United Opposition, world revolution would have to precede the construction of socialism. By contrast, according to the Centrists, world revolution could be best served if the USSR was a major industrial power; only after completing industrialization could the Soviet Union help undeveloped countries—like China—to become industrialized by by-passing capitalism altogether and by utilizing a uniquely socialist path of development. What would soon became all too evident to the Chinese Communists, however, was that what this really meant in practice was that the needs of the Soviet Union would always come before the needs of China.

## **China and the USSR’s security dilemma**

As the revolutionary movement in China rapidly developed, this situation created a security dilemma for the Soviet government. On the one hand, the USSR was committed to supporting the United Front under the leadership of the Guomindang. But on the other hand, it wanted to retain the special rights and privileges it had regained by means of its secret agreements with Beijing, Zhang Zuolin, and Japan. These included the Soviet government’s majority control over the Chinese Eastern Railway and its continued domination of Outer Mongolia. As the Northern Expedition moved northward and began to achieve success, including the prospect of reuniting North and South, these two conflicting goals began to create new tensions between the USSR and China.

When Chicherin made a press statement in Berlin on 6 December 1926, he referred to Sino-Soviet relations, in particular the Russian concession in northern Manchuria:<sup>23</sup>

The historical significance of the surprisingly rapid development of Chinese democracy, spread by the Guomindang, is clear to everybody.

No matter what the speed of events in the future, South China of today will in any case be the Chinese republic of tomorrow. The Soviet Government has not interfered in Chinese affairs, but it is friendly towards the Canton Government and the successes of our friends give us joy. Zhang Zuolin may try to infringe [on] our rights on the Chinese Eastern Railway but he cannot hold back the historical development of China, and we are not disposed to cede our rights.

Chicherin's attempts to deny that the Soviet government was interfering in Chinese affairs overlooked completely the Bolsheviks' control over the Comintern's China policy; in particular, the CCP had only just recently been ordered to take a leading role in the United Front. Moreover, his insistence that the USSR was "not disposed to cede our rights" in Manchuria proved that Chinese concern over Soviet "Red Imperialism" were justified.

By the beginning of 1927 the Chinese revolution was considered to be of paramount importance to the USSR, since it promised to expand the world revolution not only throughout Asia, but might even deliver the "fatal blow" to the capitalist countries of Europe as well. Even though the Soviet government was hoping the Chinese revolution could ignite the world revolution, Stalin was clearly not willing to return the USSR's territorial concessions in Manchuria to help the Chinese Communists achieve this task. As the United Opposition had warned, this decision was to prove fatal.

The Soviet leadership's intense interest in the Chinese revolution is best reflected by the sheer quantity of material that addressed the future of the Chinese revolution. The journal *Communist International* is a prime example. During 1927 a total of 75 articles were published discussing China. This was out of 289 articles total—or over 25 percent. Of even greater importance was the fact that 31 of the 51 editorials of the editorial board were about China—or over 60 percent. One journal, entitled *Materials on the Chinese Revolution* and published by the Sun Yat-sen University, was devoted fully to China. In addition, the daily Soviet press, which included *Pravda* and *Izvestia*, often had several articles every day giving updates and editorial opinion on the Chinese revolution. When one considers how important Western Europe had traditionally been to the Comintern's international strategy, this new emphasis on Asia and especially on China, a semi-colonial country, was an especially important shift.

In the middle of January 1927, Bukharin delivered a talk to a student congress at the Communist University of Toilers of the East in honor of Comrade Stalin and also at the Communist University of Toilers of the East in honor of Sun Yat-sen; by doing so, he not only took the battle to Radek's court, but he was perhaps trying to equate Stalin's and Sun's leading roles in the Chinese revolution. During his talk, Bukharin repeated the editorial in the *Bolshevik* by calling for a non-capitalist road of development for China. He particularly emphasized to his student audience the special importance of the Chinese revolution to other colonial and semi-colonial countries, such as

Indochina, the Dutch Indies, and India. Bukharin emphasized the size of the populations involved: 430 million in China, 120 million in the Soviet Union, perhaps another 200 million in India. If these countries were eventually united in a common struggle against capitalism they would represent substantially more than half of the world's population.<sup>24</sup>

At almost the same time, Pavel Mif, in the introductory issue of *Bolshevik*, had also outlined the importance of the revolution in China, emphasizing its large population, territory, and the special nature of its colonial status. Mif calculated that the united populations of India and China totaled almost 700 million people, or one-half of the population of the whole planet, while China and the Soviet Union together accounted for one-sixth of the world's land mass. Instead of being a source of tension, he stated that the mutual border between the USSR and China was an advantage, because it stretched for thousands of miles between the two countries and not a single other country could ever construct a barrier which would keep them apart.

Thanks to the competition among the imperialist nations, China could successfully use its relations with the USSR to play one imperialist country off against another and in that way gain concessions from the imperialist powers. In an article called "Character and Driving Force of the Chinese Revolution," Mif discussed how the bourgeoisie in China could also be directed against the interests of the foreign imperialists. For example, the pro-Japanese bourgeoisie could be used against the British, and the pro-American bourgeoisie against the Japanese.<sup>25</sup> But Mif was quick to add that this policy did not "change our basic conclusion, that the Chinese revolution cannot be victorious under the domination and leadership of the Chinese bourgeoisie."<sup>26</sup>

Mif further acknowledged that in spite of the fact that the landowners and gentry were now attacking the peasant unions, these unions were still growing quickly and that there were now over one million members, 600,000 of them in Guangdong alone. Still, there were many problems that had to be faced and Mif listed four of these:<sup>27</sup>

Firstly, the unmasking of the half-hearted, appeasement-minded bourgeoisie and isolating them from exerting influence over the proletariat and the petty bourgeoisie of the cities and countryside;

Secondly, the whole-hearted struggle for hegemony in the independence movement, by drawing to their side all of the truly revolutionary elements of the bourgeois democracy and especially the peasants; the struggle for the dissemination of their ideological-political leadership over all military forces of the revolution;

Thirdly, the consistent implementation of the democratic reforms, the full liquidation of the imperialist domination, to facilitate the further organization of their strength and the development of the class struggle so that in their turn they should accelerate the transition of the revolution to a new, higher stage of its development;

Fourthly, the establishment of a close union with the international proletarian movement and especially with its stronghold, the Union of the Soviet Socialist Republic.

The fourth point was arguably the most important to Mif, since it reaffirmed Stalin's "Socialism in One Country" as emphasizing that the Soviet Union was the "stronghold" of the revolution and thus of greater importance to China than any other country.

More to the point, Mif tacitly reconfirmed that in the event that the USSR was threatened by outside forces, its highest priority would not be to help the Chinese Communists but would be the defense of the Soviet Union. In this regard, Mif was forced to admit that the unfavorable balance between the proletariat and bourgeoisie in China was worsening, and that ever since the 20 March 1926 coup by Chiang Kai-shek the "floodgates of reaction" had been opened in many places in China.<sup>28</sup> Soviet concerns over its own security vulnerabilities led directly to a new period of war scares.

## The new war scare

As the Chinese revolution intensified, so did the USSR's security concerns. Only a few weeks later, in late January 1927, an article appeared in the *Communist International* pointing out that in China "the position is also becoming extraordinarily strained; English imperialism there was forced to suffer a great deal of humiliation [when they] pulled down the flag at the English concession at Hankou." Not only did the Soviet Union appear to some to be on the verge of war, but that Great Britain would most likely organize a military intervention against the USSR: "The primary source for the fury of English imperialism against the Soviet Union—the revolutionization of the English proletariat and the Chinese revolution, the victory of which would inflict the death blow to the colonial power of England."<sup>29</sup>

In fact, to some British commentators it appeared that the two countries were already fighting over China. One 11 January 1927 editorial printed in the *North China Herald* entitled "Soviet Influence in China" stated that the Soviet Union and Great Britain were at war:

All Soviet Russia's activities have been spent on an attack on Great Britain in China. It has been and is a war between Soviet Russia and the British Empire. Unfortunately, the weapons used are the Chinese people; the scene of the conflict is China; the retaliation, the reprisal must be against China.<sup>30</sup>

The British government attempted to counter the USSR. On 29 January 1927, Austen Chamberlain tried to improve Britain's relations with China by agreeing to allow it to raise tariffs on foreign goods, eliminating extraterritoriality, and eliminating the "quasi-independent status of foreign concessions."<sup>31</sup> This offer was considered a major breakthrough by the Chinese Nationalists. Interestingly,

they were also exactly the very rights and privileges that the Soviet diplomats, like Karakhan, had been able to retain through using secret diplomacy, and that the Central Committee had so recently voted to retain when they defeated the United Opposition.

Soon afterwards, an agreement was reached on 29–30 January 1927 concerning the British concessions at Hankou and Jiujiang. The text of the draft treaty included British promises to use Chinese courts, recognize China's national laws, use Chinese civil, commercial, and penal codes in British courts in China, pay Chinese taxes, place the foreign concessions under Chinese authorities, make British missionaries subject to Chinese law, and prohibit British missionaries from buying land in China. It looked as though this agreement would be signed, granting China equal status in almost all matters, but at the last minute the Nationalists' Foreign Minister, Eugene Chen, refused to sign because of new naval concentrations in Shanghai.

Although it is difficult to know for sure, Chen took his orders from Borodin, and the last thing the Comintern wanted was a peaceful resolution of the conflict. A Sino-British agreement might halt the revolution in its tracks. Therefore, it was in the Soviet Union's interest to make sure that this agreement was not signed.

The British Colonial Secretary, Leopold Amery, was outraged. He claimed that the Chinese would never have turned down the agreement if they had been thinking of "Chinese rights only." Instead, the treaty was rejected because the forces behind the Chinese government—referring to the USSR—were not interested "in Chinese welfare, but in world revolution and the destruction of the British Empire."<sup>32</sup>

The British were particularly upset because on 4 June 1923, the Soviet government had officially agreed that it would "not support with funds or in any other form persons or bodies or agencies or institutions whose aim is to spread discontent or to foment rebellion in any part of the British Empire."<sup>33</sup> The Comintern's actions in China appeared to break this agreement.

Foreign Minister Litvinov immediately responded to Amery's accusation in early February 1927 by denying that the Soviet Union was hindering a peaceful Anglo-Chinese agreement.<sup>34</sup> However, the parallel—but at the same time highly contradictory—policies adopted by the Soviet government and the Communist International were now becoming more clear. I.D. Levin discussed in "The British Workers' Movement and China" how, under orders from the Comintern, the British Communist Party released a manifesto on 21 January 1927, calling on the British government to keep its "hands off of China."<sup>35</sup>

Slogans supporting China were also adopted by a British workers' conference, held in London on 12 February 1927. Composed of 587 delegates representing 216 of Britain's most influential leftist organizations, this group passed the following pro-Chinese resolutions:<sup>36</sup>

- 1 The imposition of a trade union embargo on the manufacture of all military supplies and a strict embargo on the transportation of weapons, supplies and troops with a view of the imperialist attack in China.
- 2 The immediate declaration of the full sovereignty and independence of China.
- 3 Recognition of the Cantonese government as the national government of China.
- 4 The renunciation of the privilege of extraterritoriality, which was granted recently to the English subjects in China.
- 5 Negotiations with the Cantonese government about deciding the new treaties to replace the existing unequal treaties.
- 6 The immediate evacuation of all military forces from Chinese territory and warships from Chinese waters.
- 7 The establishment of close cooperation between the British and Chinese workers' movement and trade unions, and also the dispatch to China of a general advisory delegation from the trade unions.

Faced with this domestic challenge, the British government could not stand idly by. As the situation worsened in China, London authorized sending additional troops and ships. Since fall 1926, there had been a general realization in Britain that the government had to be willing to use military force to oppose the Soviet Union's actions in China. As early as 7 December 1926, Ramsay MacDonald told the *Daily Herald* that Britain was going to follow a "new course" in China. Later, he followed this up by releasing a 4,000-word statement entitled "Situation in China" that stated that Great Britain would be willing to send naval reinforcements to China.<sup>37</sup>

On 4 February 1927, the *Communist International* responded to these moves by claiming that the imperialist countries were preparing for "military intervention against the Chinese people" and that the 58 warships and some 5,000 troops in Shanghai were only being restrained from openly moving against the revolution because of the lack of agreement among the imperialist powers.<sup>38</sup>

In a press statement by Foreign Minister Litvinov, he was quick to distance the Soviet Union from revolutionary events in China. Although admitting that the Soviet government was sympathetic to the liberation movement in China, he called the British charge that it was the Soviet agents' "machinations" that had brought about this movement, a "ludicrous fable" and an attempt to make the Soviet government a "scapegoat."<sup>39</sup>

But, in the middle of February 1927, one *Communist International* article triumphantly described the revolutionary situation in very different terms: "The Chinese revolution is taking a central position, around which and through which are being prepared decisive battles between the imperialistic bourgeoisie and the international proletariat."<sup>40</sup> Another editorial accused Chamberlain and the British cabinet of agreeing to "form a United Front to struggle against the USSR and China" and so called for the "mobilization of

all of the workers' movement to defend the USSR and for active help to China against the frenzied reaction in England.”<sup>41</sup>

As shown by these sources, the Comintern was clearly feeding the revolutionary fires in China. At the same time, the Soviet government was trying to protect itself from retribution by denying any direct involvement. These opposing policies would soon spell disaster for the Chinese Communists.

## **The return of the United Opposition**

The war scare with Britain brought the United Opposition out of the wood-work, once again opening debate on the China policy. During 1926, Radek had assigned Sergei Dalin the task of evaluating the revolutionary situation in China. When he returned to Moscow in February 1927, Dalin described “the persecution of Communists, the dissolution of peasant and worker organizations, and the general rightist trend of Guomindang policy.” He also warned about the “probable defection of Chiang Kai-shek to the camp of the counter-revolution.”<sup>42</sup> Events in China were rapidly growing worse. The strains in the United Front would not wait for the Soviet Union to finish building socialism. This forced Trotsky to take the lead once again in demanding greater independence for the Chinese Communist Party.

Following Dalin’s return, Radek realized that his periodic reports on China had not been published in full by the Soviet press; other observers critical of the Comintern’s policy in China were also having censorship problems. In addition, Dalin’s letters to Radek had apparently been intercepted by the Soviet government and at least one letter was confiscated.<sup>43</sup>

Dalin’s pessimistic observations on the situation in China, and his subsequent difficulty in getting his reports published “convinced Radek that the United Opposition should make China a central issue in its struggle with the Stalinist leadership.” It was at this time that Radek decided that “the Comintern was out to preserve its ties with the Guomindang at any price” and he wrote an article during February 1927 in which he rebuked the Guomindang for not carrying out social reforms in the areas under their control. He also reminded the Guomindang leaders about the importance of the Communist agitation in the success of the Northern Expedition during 1926.<sup>44</sup>

On 21 February 1927, Trotsky backed Radek when he presented a memorandum during the Central Committee’s plenum that called for greater discussion of the Comintern policies. In particular, he called for more openness in the Soviet press:

We sometimes look at events in Germany, England, China, etc., over the heads of our working class. This bad habit is expressed in our press, which offers the working class only bits and pieces of world developments, primarily those of a celebratory nature. Our working class has felt the experience of the German, English, and Chinese events very

deeply and the deposits that remain in the workers' consciousness from those events cannot be overcome merely by empty sloganizing.

Trotsky advocated, in particular, a clearer appraisal of the international situation and reminded the other Bolshevik leaders that "the policy of closing one's eyes to what is happening is not our policy."<sup>45</sup>

But in the 25 February 1927 issue of *Communist International* a Centrist supporter, A. Martinov, claimed that the United Opposition was wrong to say that the Guomindang had lost its usefulness and that it was time to dissolve the United Front. According to Martinov, the situation in China was not as dangerous as the United Opposition tried to make it seem. The United Opposition was giving dangerous advice, therefore, especially considering that the Guomindang had rapidly grown in size in the previous months and that the new members mainly strengthened the left wing of the Guomindang party—those who were sympathetic to the Communist Party.

Specifically, Martinov addressed those who repeated that the Guangzhou Communists had gone so far as to claim that "As regards the left wing, generally speaking, it does not exist." To this, Martinov strongly disagreed and concluded by emphasizing the "prominent role of the Communists in the Chinese revolution" and that the strategic plan "outlined by the seventh plenum of the Comintern" could be implemented as long as the CCP would continue to work "with all of their energy" in order to make it work.<sup>46</sup>

Martinov further reminded his readers of the growing strength of the left wing of the Guomindang. During the Guomindang Congress in January 1926, out of 278 delegates, 168 supported the left, 65 supported the center, and only 45 supported the right. He further claimed that out of 250,000 Guomindang party members, 150,000 were leftists while only 30,000 were part of the center and the right.<sup>47</sup> Therefore, the alignment between the left and the right favored the Comintern's policies.

As the revolution in China heated up, it became more and more intertwined with the foreign policy of the Soviet Union. As a result, the Politburo of the Bolshevik party began to direct the course of the Chinese revolution rather than the Comintern. Responding to increased tension in February 1927 between the Left Guomindang in Hankou and the Right Guomindang in Nanjing, the Central Committee of the Bolshevik party directly announced the following changes in the China policy on 3 March 1927:<sup>48</sup>

- 1 at the present time, in connection with the regrouping of class forces and concentration of the imperialist armies, the Chinese revolution is passing through a critical period, and it can achieve further victories only by resolutely adopting the course of developing the mass movement;
- 2 it is necessary to adopt the course of arming the workers and peasants and converting the peasant committees in the localities into actual organs of governmental authority equipped for armed self-defense;

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3 the Communist Party should not cover up the treacherous and reactionary policy of the Right Guomindang, and should mobilize the masses around the Guomindang and the Chinese Communist Party with a view to exposing the Rights.

These three points took for granted, however, that the central body of the Guomindang was not sympathetic to the Right Guomindang, which was patently untrue. But Stalin refused to consider letting the CCP increase its independence or leave the Guomindang.

In response to this announcement, Radek wrote a letter to Trotsky on 3 March 1927, in which he expressed his growing concern over the situation in China. Radek noted that while the Northern Expedition had “captured the imagination of the Chinese masses,” they did not realize that the Guomindang leadership was shifting to the right.<sup>49</sup> Since the Communists did not have a proper organization to harness the “millions of organized workers, and the tens of millions engaged in the revolution struggle,” the whole movement was taking place under the banner of the Guomindang, at the same time as the core leaders of the Guomindang were moving more and more to the right.<sup>50</sup>

This situation was exacerbated by the fact that the CCP was still illegal, not only in the areas controlled by warlords but also in regions controlled by the Guomindang, which necessitated the CCP leaving the Guomindang and forming a new bloc—an independent Communist Party and the Guomindang. Since there was still not a grass-roots demand for a “separate class party of the proletariat and the poor peasantry” it was not the time to announce this new bloc publicly. But the Chinese Communists should prepare for this departure by openly criticizing all steps which the Guomindang government was taking against the interests of the “workers, peasants, and the national revolution.” Radek further warned that as the Chinese revolution changed from a bloc of only the bourgeoisie, peasants, and proletariat to a bloc of the proletariat and peasants, the most important problem was to avoid pushing the petty bourgeoisie into an alliance with the merchants. Radek predicted that if this happened “It could signify the defeat of the Chinese revolution in a few years.”<sup>51</sup>

Trotsky responded to Radek’s letter on the very next day, 4 March 1927. At this time, he took a much more radical stance on the issue of the CCP leaving the Guomindang, stating that “in order to facilitate in the masses an understanding of the treacherous policies of the Guomindang, it is necessary to have an absolutely independent party, which although small, is critical, elucidatory, and accusatory.” This meant that the Chinese proletariat had to not only “transcend” Sun Yat-sen, they had to “openly struggle with Sun Yat-senism.” The CCP could not remain in the United Front one day longer, and Trotsky outlined five points to bring about this split:<sup>52</sup>

- 1 We must recognize, that the further stay of the Communist Party in the Guomindang threatens disastrous consequences for the proletariat and

the revolution and, above all, threatens the absolute Menshevik degeneration of the Chinese Communist Party.

- 2 We must recognize, that if there is to be a leadership of the Chinese proletariat, a systematic struggle for influence in the professional unions, and finally, a leadership of the proletarian struggle for influence over the peasant class, they must be completely independent, that is to be really a Communist/ Bolshevik party.
- 3 The question about the form and method of coordinating actions of the Communist Party with the Guomindang should be completely and entirely subordinated to the demand for an independent party.
- 4 All of the genuinely revolutionary elements of the Chinese Communist Party must advance the program for action indicated above, demanding that their Central Committee put before the Guomindang and the working masses—in its full scope and unequivocally—the question concerning the reconsideration of organizational relations. Simultaneously, the Communists must everywhere “emerge from underground activity,” that is, to actually begin to work as an independent party.
- 5 A Congress of the Chinese Communist Party must be prepared under the call for the organizational independence of the Chinese Communist Party and the complete independence of its class politics and on the basis of a merciless struggle of its Bolshevik elements against the Menshevik elements within the party itself.

Trotsky was convinced that the CCP had to be saved from its “Menshevik degeneration.” His call for a struggle between the “Bolsheviks” and the “Mensheviks” within the CCP harkened back to the factional struggles that had existed in the Russian Social Democratic movement before the 1917 October Revolution. Trotsky even suggested that if the CCP was unwilling to leave the United Front then it would be necessary to organize the revolution elements in China to build a “Bolshevik party” that would be outside of not only the Guomindang party, but outside of the present Chinese Communist Party as well.<sup>53</sup>

## Conclusions

Ignoring the United Opposition’s many warnings of the dangers inherent in the United Front, the Politburo’s continued support for this policy was shown in a speech given by Kalinin, and then later reprinted in *Izvestia* on 6 March 1927, in which he reaffirmed that “all” of the classes in China looked upon the Guangzhou government as the “national government of the whole of China.”<sup>54</sup> Therefore, the Politburo continued to insist that the Guomindang was under the control of the workers, peasants, and petty bourgeoisie. An editorial in the 9 March 1927 *Pravda* openly “indicted the [United] Opposition for believing that the bourgeoisie stands at the head of the Guomindang and the national government and is preparing treason.”<sup>55</sup>

On 11 March 1927, the *Communist International* once again emphasized the importance of China by tying the future of the Chinese revolution firmly to the fate of the USSR: “The attention of the international workers’ class was concentrated during the last year on the three basic columns of the world revolution—the Soviet Union, the emancipation of China, and the English proletariat.” In fact, the Chinese revolution was such a major catalyst that the Comintern’s editorial staff believed that its impact in Europe was crucial:

The Chinese revolution is growing more and more into an object of struggle between the European proletariat and the European bourgeoisie. The collapse of the influence of British influence in China, in turn, appears to be one of the most important reasons for the new strained relations between England and the Soviet Union.<sup>56</sup>

This diplomatic relationship was circular: as the Soviet Union helped to intensify the Chinese revolution on its eastern border, the British government reacted by exerting greater pressure on the USSR’s western borders. This vicious circle might even lead to war. Therefore, the Comintern and the Centrist Bolshevik leaders realized that this threatening state of affairs necessitated immediate action on the part of the international workers’ movement:

The defense of the Chinese revolution from intervention and support for the struggle of the Chinese proletariat for its hegemony in this revolution and for the non-capitalist development of China, the defense of the Soviet Union from intervention, the mobilization of the worker class against war danger in the East and in Western Europe, the correctness of the Bolshevik propaganda and the organization of genuine-revolutionary practical work in these questions.<sup>57</sup>

Instead of backing away from the oncoming crisis, therefore, the Centrists appeared to welcome it. By contrast, George Murphy, a member of the British Communist Party, wrote in the *Communist International* during early March 1927 that Britain faced two questions: “War with China and the threat of a break in relations with the USSR.” Murphy warned that as a result of the Northern Expedition’s taking Hankou, the British government had decided to send ships and troops to China. Its goal would be to “strengthen the right wing of the Guomindang and reach some kind of a compromise between the Guomindang and the British government for the liquidation of the Chinese revolution.”<sup>58</sup> As will be discussed in greater detail below, the Centrists ignored this timely warning, even though it all too soon was proven to be 100 percent accurate.

## 5 Chiang's April 1927 purge and the United Front

On 7 March 1927, Chiang Kai-shek gave a speech in which he sent a clear warning to the Soviet government that they should not try to exert control over the Chinese revolution. Referring to Sun Yat-sen's pro-Soviet policy, Chiang said:

Our President wanted freedom and equality, and as Soviet Russia was willing to treat us on equal footing, it is natural that we should make her our ally. So long as Russia deals with us in the same spirit, we shall not forsake the pro-Soviet policy.

But Chiang further warned his Soviet advisers not to overstep their authority:

We have made a friend who is true to the last, and this we have in Soviet Russia. It is not her policy to tyrannize over us, and though her representatives have acted otherwise, insulting our every movement, I am convinced that it has naught to do with Russia, but are the individual actions of these representatives.<sup>1</sup>

In response to Chiang's veiled threat to break with the USSR, the Guomindang's Central Executive Committee called a meeting in Hankou. On 13 March 1927, it announced that Chiang Kai-shek had been stripped of his chairmanships of the Political Council, the Standing Committee, and the Military Council. His only remaining official post was as the Military Commander of the Expeditionary Forces. Chiang's demotion was seen as a complete victory for the Chinese Communist Party, since many of their members were elected to top positions within the Guomindang. Meanwhile, influential Left Guomindang leaders such as Sun Fo, Eugene Chen, and T.V. Soong also gained power.

To many leaders in the USSR, these events in March 1927 appeared to herald the victory of the Chinese Communist Party and the Left Guomindang. By contrast, the dire warnings of the United Opposition now appeared overblown. However, the CCP's and the Left Guomindang's gains were soon challenged by the Right Guomindang, which denounced the Central Executive

Committee's decisions, promoted instead a more pro-British policy, and agitated for the "discharge of comrade Borodin."<sup>2</sup> It was in the midst of these chaotic events that Chiang Kai-shek staged a second coup, only this time one that succeeded in ousting the Communists and his Soviet advisers from the United Front. Using his control over the Nationalist Army, Chiang Kai-shek seized the bulk of the Guomindang governmental organs; the Chinese revolution was now firmly in Chiang's hands.

## **Bad news from China**

Following Chiang Kai-shek's demotion, it appeared that the Centrists had been right all along and that the CCP and the Left Guomindang would soon take charge of the Chinese revolution. However, a letter critical of the China policy was written on 17 March 1927 by three Comintern advisers in Shanghai—N. Nassonov, N. Fokine, and A. Albrecht—and sent to Moscow. This letter shed a much less positive light on events taking place in China, as these three authors claimed that a "crisis" existed in the CCP that might result in "grave consequences for the party as well as for the Chinese revolution."<sup>3</sup>

These three Comintern specialists blamed the crisis on a rightward leaning of the CCP, supported by the Comintern's main China specialist, Voitinsky. To support their claim that the CCP would lead the "party and the working class only to defeat and capitulation," the authors outlined the most important changes in the situation in China since November 1926 as follows:<sup>4</sup>

- 1 The National Revolutionary Army has won a decisive victory by defeating [the warlord] Sun Chuan Fang;
- 2 In connection with this victory, a certain flirting of the imperialists with the National government and the Right Guomindang has begun;
- 3 The mass movement has embraced every new strata and has swung to a height never before attained;
- 4 The accentuated inner contradictions have led to an acute conflict between the Left and the Right Guomindang.

Instead of taking a firm stand on these issues, the authors claimed that the CCP "was silent, hoping to liquidate the conflict by all sorts of combinations, agreements and dickering."<sup>5</sup> The Communists' organizational failures were further evidenced by the fact that the workers' occupation of the British concessions in Hankou was not even orchestrated by the Communists. Instead, it was a "spontaneous act of the masses" which helped to strengthen the Left Guomindang but which was not used by the CCP to strengthen its own position.<sup>6</sup>

The three Comintern advisers further accused Chinese Communists and the head of the Soviet advisers, Borodin, of making no response to an anti-Communist "pogrom" in the Guomindang that started on 21 February 1927. In particular, they stated that if the Chinese Communists had supported

the Shanghai workers' uprisings of 19–24 February 1927, the CCP might have secured Shanghai for itself as a bastion for the workers' movement. Meanwhile, Borodin and the Communists also stayed clear of the debate in the Guomindang over whether to make Nanjing or Hankou the new capital, and as a result the conservative elements in the Guomindang increased their power in Guangzhou once the more liberal Left Guomindang government moved to the new capital in Hankou. Finally, Borodin and the Chinese Communists supported Chiang Kai-shek's military march on Shanghai, which these three believed could only strengthen Chiang Kai-shek if he were successful.<sup>7</sup>

The three Comintern authors also criticized the Chinese Communist Party leadership for being "a small circle of intellectuals" who didn't understand how to run a workers' party with 30,000 members. This intellectual spirit meant that they were not in tune with the workers and that consequently "all mass movements take place spontaneously, without the party and outside of it." As a result "the party creeps along at the tail of events," and is "in no position to direct them."<sup>8</sup>

Finally, this letter openly criticized the United Front policy, claiming that the CCP was so committed to retaining good relations with the Guomindang that it ignored many chances to strengthen the agrarian revolution, the workers' movement, and revolutionary desires in the national army. By trusting the leaders of the Guomindang and of the Nationalist Army, the Chinese Communists did not do enough to build a grass-roots base within the countryside, in the labor unions, or in the military. While Voitinsky was trying to "fish" for leaders of the Left Guomindang from above, therefore, a far better strategy would have been to support an increase in the mass movement of workers and peasants from below. It was this strategy that led the three authors to call the leaders of the Chinese revolution Menshevik:<sup>9</sup>

The leading circle of the party does not understand the mass movement; still more, it is afraid of it, it considers it as something out of place, at any rate, as an untimely phenomena that hampers the united front with the bourgeoisie. It therefore subordinates the interests of the working class and the peasantry to the interests of the bourgeoisie and trots along at the heels of the bourgeoisie; therefore, on the one hand, it curbs the mass movement, and, on the other hand, enters into all sorts of combinations at the top, sinking into bargaining over crumbs, and to horse-trading which, under revolutionary conditions, are equivalent to Menshevism.

This criticism was openly dismissive of the Chinese Communists' actions and especially of the CCP decision to follow behind the bourgeoisie instead of leading it.

But these three Comintern advisers did not merely blame the Chinese Communists, they also directed their criticism at the Comintern and its representatives. They openly called for the removal of Voitinsky as the

representative of the Communist International in China. When listing his faults they included:

Despite the fact that he saw many shortcomings in the party, which were to be explained simply by ailments of growth (for example, its narrow “circle” character, its organization formlessness thanks to which decisions adopted by the party remain on paper), he not only made no attempt to correct them, but sanctified them by reference to “specific Chinese conditions.” He sent Moscow bastardized information, held back material, and concealed the real situation in the party from the E.C.C.I. [Comintern].<sup>10</sup>

In order to resolve this situation the three called for the CCP to become more independent and to stop being such an “underground” party. If the right wing of the CCP was to be eliminated and “fresh air” in the form of new worker members let into the party leadership, then these three men were sure that Chen Duxiu could be an effective leader. Finally, they called for the Comintern to “once more confirm and concretize the tactical line present in the Plenum resolution,” and for the Bolshevik leaders to “accord China more attention than they have up to now.”<sup>11</sup>

## Ongoing China debates in Moscow

At the same time as the dispatch of this critical letter from China, Radek appeared at the Communist Academy on 18 March 1927. He was participating in a debate with Comintern specialists on the course of action that should be taken in China. Radek’s comments followed, to a large degree, his earlier exchange of letters with Trotsky. In particular, Radek emphasized the points that Trotsky had made to him in his letter from 4 March 1927. According to Vuyo Vuyovitch, Radek had originally touched on the issue of the Chinese revolution in a series of lectures in January 1927 at Sverdlov University. Radek now undertook to debate these questions at the Communist Academy only because “the course of events was so rapid and the dangerous mistakes had accumulated to such an extent, that after the Hankou crisis, comrade Radek considered it his duty to raise these questions openly.”<sup>12</sup>

Radek proposed a new Comintern policy for China that was completely different from his former advocacy of a United Front with the Guomindang. Although he still thought that the Chinese Communists should not try to take full control of the Guomindang all by themselves, he did propose that they “join with the Left Guomindang in wresting control of that organization from Chiang Kai-shek and the Right.”<sup>13</sup> According to Vuyovitch, Radek argued:<sup>14</sup>

The conclusive fate of the Chinese revolution will be decided in Hankou and not in Shanghai. Not the immediate military successes are decisive

for the progress of the revolution but the issue of the class struggle inside the national revolutionary movement. Chiang Kai-shek's generals are shooting the workers and peasants almost everywhere and are mobilizing for the decisive struggle. The Left Guomindang and the Communist Party have to muster the courage and the necessary forces to drive away the right wing and to take over the leadership of the movement. To this end, the workers and peasants must be armed immediately, workers' and peasants' detachments must be formed in the army, the agrarian revolution must be consummated, the social questions must be solved by fulfilling the demands of the workers and above all the organizational independence of the Communist Party must be established, for this independence does not exist in reality and we must fight for the achievement of real homogeneity in the national-revolutionary movement.

Radek also reportedly predicted that: "Chiang Kai-shek would, at the first opportunity, turn on the Chinese Communists and betray the Chinese Revolution."<sup>15</sup>

Meanwhile, a *Communist International* editorial from 18 March 1927 directly contradicted Radek's pessimistic view. It claimed that the situation in China was favorable to the Communists. Responding to an earlier accusation by a Guangzhou Communist that the Guomindang was a "putrid corpse," this editorial admitted that the "danger of a break between the Guomindang and the Chinese Communist Party may arise" but then further argued:

But this danger can be prevented if we don't look at the Guomindang as if it were a putrid corpse. The leadership of the Guomindang is now painfully deficient of revolutionary worker-peasant blood. The Chinese Communist Party should render assistance with an influx of blood, and then the situation will radically change.

In addition, the CCP should carry out "a radical program of government reforms" and the granting of basic democratic rights such as the right to labor unions, the eight-hour work day, etc. Finally, more energetic action had to be taken in the provinces and in the countryside to form "revolutionary peasant committees."<sup>16</sup>

At almost the same time, Mao Zedong's February 1927 article, entitled "The Peasant Movement in Hunan," was translated into Russian and reprinted in Moscow during March in the second issue of *Revolutionary East*. Mao's article had a significant impact on the discussions in Moscow about whether the agrarian revolution should be carried out immediately or not. In his essay, Mao recounted his journey through the Chinese countryside between 4 January and 5 February 1927, when he discovered that there were more than two million members in the peasant unions in Hunan. The peasants in the unions could actually lead a much larger number of peasants in

the agrarian revolution, and Mao estimated that this number could be in the “tens of millions.”<sup>17</sup>

Such optimistic statistics were eagerly quoted by Stalin and the other Centrists. They argued that China was ready for an agrarian revolution. In this regard, it is important to note that only three months later, Chen Duxiu claimed that the number of peasants in the peasant unions in Hunan was over five million. This figure represented almost a three-fold increase in as many months. Although it is difficult to know for sure, it would almost seem that Moscow’s interest in hearing of large numbers of organized peasants resulted in exaggerated reports. In addition, the interest in and reliability of these peasants in supporting revolution was questionable.

It was in this setting that Shanghai fell to the Nationalist Army on 21 March 1927. This victory was hailed as proof of the correctness of the Comintern’s United Front policy. The British imperial holdings in China seem to be on the verge of crumbling. The prestigious *Westminster Gazette* ran an editorial advising that Britain come to an agreement with the Nationalists as soon as possible. The British government’s decision to return the Hankou concession to China was widely seen as a sign of its willingness to compromise.

As the news of these events spread to Moscow, the students at Sun Yat-sen University cried with happiness and “embraced one another with joy and excitement.” The Chinese students led thousands of Russian workers in a demonstration through the streets of Moscow to the Comintern building near Red Square, where Radek reportedly addressed the crowd:

Shanghai is now in the hands of the Chinese, but when the revolutionary army marched into Shanghai they could still see the barbed wire set up by the British soldiers! The revolution in China is still in its embryonic stage; the counterrevolutionary forces have not been driven out. The troops of Zhang Zuolin still threaten Wuhan. But the Chinese Revolutionary Movement is growing stronger every day, and no doubt it will be able to conquer all the obstacles and difficulties that lie in its future. The workers of Moscow received the news of the taking of Shanghai only this morning [March 21] at 10 a.m.; already they are streaming to you in celebrating this great victory. Moreover, they adopted resolutions extending greetings and brotherly love to the Shanghai revolutionary proletariat. Let the imperialists be aware that in case of necessity, the proletariat of Soviet Russia will not hesitate to support the Chinese Revolutionary Movement.<sup>18</sup>

According to Yueh Sheng, a young Chinese student at the Sun Yat-sen University, the Chinese students’ status rose dramatically after the victory in Shanghai. Russian girls crowded around Chinese students at theaters and the more daring ones “offered themselves as loving wives and asked to be taken back to China.”<sup>19</sup>

A *Communist International* editorial proclaimed the taking of Shanghai as the most important success of the Chinese revolution. Shanghai's population of two million—an estimated 450,000 of whom were workers—made it a perfect proletariat base as well as a “stronger material and financial base for the revolution.” Directing an attack at the United Opposition, it opposed

the ultra-leftists and skeptics who want, although they do not always openly say this, for the Communists to leave the Guomindang, so that they, by not being in the government, can prepare for its overthrow. The Chinese Communists, understanding that this would only bring about a union of the petty bourgeoisie with the large bourgeoisie in a single bloc against the Communists, and that this would only bring about the ruin of the revolution, have taken another path, a path which was outlined by the Seventh Plenum of the Comintern, a path of winning a strong position both in the Guomindang and in the government.<sup>20</sup>

Finally, this editorial observed: “We see that the Communists and the workers were actually able to win for themselves a leading role in the revolution, without breaking apart the United Front with the petty bourgeoisie and the peasantry.” With this success in Shanghai, the editorial board of the *Communist International* called for the revolution to expand to the fullest extent possible.<sup>21</sup> M.N. Roy, one of the Comintern advisers in China, later reported that the attitude of the Comintern representatives in China was that it was not yet time to accentuate the class struggle. For the sake of national unity, the “nationalist bourgeoisie should be helped to lead the revolution.”<sup>22</sup>

## **The threat of foreign intervention**

The Nationalist Army massacre of innocent foreigners in Nanjing in late March 1927 provoked foreign intervention. In retaliation for this outrage, British, US, French, Italian, and Japanese warships bombarded Nanjing on 24 March 1927. This action helped drive a wedge between Chiang Kai-shek and the Left Guomindang-dominated government in Hankou, as Chiang agreed to punish the Nationalist soldiers in Nanjing while the Chinese Communists, in particular, called for even more radical actions against foreigners. As these differences widened, the Comintern's China policy was also hotly disputed.

Following foreign intervention, the Soviet government called on all workers' organizations around the world to prevent a new war by demanding the recall of troops from China. It also accused the foreigners of supporting the warlord government in Beijing, calling the bombardment of Nanjing “intervention in the internal struggle in China [that] cannot be considered otherwise than active assistance for the Northerners with a view to giving them the possibility of forcing their way through the encircling Nationalist troops.”<sup>23</sup>

On 1 April 1927, the Comintern advocated intensifying the Chinese revolution:

On the one side, it will hasten the danger of intervention, which actually has already begun. At this threatening moment, by demanding great exertions of revolutionary energy, the Chinese proletariat ought to and will be able to win for themselves hegemony in the revolution. At this terrible moment, the international proletariat should collect all of its strength, so as to deliver a blow from the rear at rapacious imperialism.<sup>24</sup>

Meanwhile, Trotsky wrote a personal letter on 29 March 1927 that presented his views. Instead of seeing only two opposing camps in China—the imperialists and militarists in one camp and the workers, bourgeoisie, students, etc., in the other—Trotsky divided the Chinese revolution into three camps—the “reactionaries, the liberal bourgeoisie, and the proletariat”—and each of these camps was fighting for influence over the petty bourgeoisie and the peasantry.<sup>25</sup>

According to Trotsky, if only two camps existed in China then the question of which group had just taken Shanghai was self-evident, but if three camps existed in China then this question became more important. While the Centrists were supporting the two-camp concept based on the analysis that the revolution in China was a bourgeois-national revolution, Trotsky believed that the three camps in China showed that the revolution had moved beyond this stage and was already moving toward a socialist revolution.

In fact, if the Chinese revolution was ready for a socialist revolution, Trotsky asked, then why weren’t slogans for the formation of soviets—*soviet* is council in Russian—already being promoted in China? Quite simply, Trotsky answered, because the Chinese Communist Party was “bound hand and foot” in its alliance with the Guomindang. The CCP could only succeed if it openly struggled for influence over the workers in the name of Marxism—not in the name of Sun Yat-senism as before—and by working through the workers it could extend its influence among the peasants. The organization required to coordinate all of the revolutionary groups in both the urban and rural areas was soviets of workers and peasants. Therefore, Trotsky strongly called for forming soviets in China.<sup>26</sup>

Trotsky also addressed the recent claims that China could develop along a “non-capitalist path”—a theory that had first been presented by Stalin and Bukharin in January of that year. Socialist development, Trotsky thought, could only be discussed in the “perspective of the development of the world revolution” and anyone who thought “that *present-day* China, based on its *present* technical and economic foundation, and under its *own* power, was capable of leaping over the capitalist phase” was an “ignoramus.” Even the thought that China could make use of a non-capitalist path of development was merely an “evil caricature of the theory of socialism in one country” and was “verging on the absurd.”<sup>27</sup>

Trotsky’s linking of the policy of “Socialism in One Country” in the Soviet Union and the revolutionary situation in China was very important, since if the revolution in China was indeed a socialist revolution then the USSR did

not need to wait for “Socialism in One Country” but instead could forge ahead with the world revolution. Conversely, only by relegating the events in China to a continuation of the national–bourgeois revolution could those who supported “Socialism in One Country” for the USSR prove that it was an indispensable stage. In a tacit confirmation of Trotsky’s views, on 31 March 1927 the Comintern warned the CCP not to come into open conflict with the Guomindang, but instead to hide their weapons.

On 1 April, Wang Jingwei, one of the more left-wing Guomindang leaders, returned from Europe via Moscow. He worked diligently to try to shore up the United Front. Wang held meetings both with Chiang Kai-shek and with Chen Duxiu. On 5 April, he even signed a joint manifesto with Chen Duxiu calling for unity and support of the Three People’s Principles. In this published manifesto, Chen reiterated that the CCP “firmly recognized the need for making the Guomindang Party and the Guomindang’s Three People’s Principles the center of the Chinese Revolution.” Chen also conceded that what China needed was a “democracy composed of all oppressed classes,” not some kind of “dictatorship of the proletariat.”<sup>28</sup> Wang Jingwei also reportedly convinced both sides to wait until the Fourth Plenum of the Guomindang’s Central Executive Committee, which was planned to begin on 15 April in Nanjing, to iron out all of their differences.<sup>29</sup>

Beginning in early April, Stalin claimed that the Chinese Communists needed the Right Guomindang, because of capable military leaders like Chiang Kai-shek.<sup>30</sup> On 6 April, Stalin also specifically responded to criticism of the China policy and lashed out at Radek, accusing him of not understanding the Chinese revolution. According to Vuyovitch, Stalin thought that the

principal task consisted of triumphing over the militarists of the North; to break with the Right prematurely would signify the destruction of the revolution. We need not hurry, we need not insist, for the big bourgeoisie is obedient, and we are utilizing them.<sup>31</sup>

After criticizing Radek for thinking that the tempo of the Chinese revolution was progressing too quickly, Stalin claimed that this was what had led Radek to formulate his false revolutionary slogans of: “Break with the Right Guomindang, drive away the Right.” Stalin then asked why Radek wanted to break with the Right Guomindang: “Why drive away the Right, when we have the majority and when the Right listens to us?” Stalin continued:<sup>32</sup>

The peasant needs an old worn-out jade as long as she is necessary. He does not drive her away. So it is with us. When the Right is of no more use to us, we will drive it away. At present, we need the Right. It has capable people, who still direct the army and lead it against the imperialists. Chiang Kai-shek has perhaps no sympathy for the revolution, but he is leading the army and cannot do otherwise than lead it against the imperialists.

Besides this, the people of the Right have relations with the generals of Zhang Zuolin and understand very well how to demoralize them to induce them to pass over to the side of the revolution, bag and baggage, without striking a blow. Also, they have connections with the rich merchants and can raise money from them. So they are to be utilized to the end, squeezed out like a lemon and then flung away.

Only days after Stalin made this statement in Moscow, Chiang Kai-shek led the coup in Shanghai on 12 April 1927, which resulted in the massacre of thousands of Communists and which began a general purge of the Chinese Communist Party from the Guomindang party. Evidently, the text of Stalin's speech supporting Chiang Kai-shek was "in type, on the way to the pages of the *Pravda*" newspaper, but: "The speech was never printed."<sup>33</sup> If this speech had come out in print, then the task of the United Opposition in fighting the Centrists would have been made easier.

### **Chiang Kai-shek's 12 April 1927 coup**

On 12 April 1927, only three days before the planned Central Committee meeting in Nanjing was supposed to overthrow him, Chiang Kai-shek initiated a purge of the Chinese Communists. Events leading up to this coup included the dispute between the Left and Right Guomindang over control of Nanjing. The Second and Sixth armies of the National Revolutionary Army were the first to enter Nanjing in late March, and many of the officers of these armies supported the Communists. The Left Guomindang government in Hankou quickly set up a Committee of Political Affairs to control the Nanjing area. While six of the ten committee members were Communists, the head of the committee was Ch'en Ch'ien, the commander of the Sixth Army and an opponent of Chiang Kai-shek. Faced with this growing threat to his power, Chiang struck first, taking control over Nanjing even while rounding up Communists and their followers in Shanghai.

On 1 April 1927, Borodin participated in the eighth meeting of the Guomindang's Central Committee's Political Commission to discuss how best to take and retain power in Nanjing. According to Borodin, the British and the Americans would probably intervene in China, but Japan was still undecided because of the USSR's position in Manchuria. The most important goal was to try to separate Japan from the other countries. The Japanese people were afraid of two things: (1) that a successful revolution in China would hurt their economy; and (2) that events in China might lead to a war in the Pacific. To resolve this situation Borodin suggested that the Nationalist government should talk with some "world-famous Japanese financiers" and convince them to telegraph reassuring messages back to Japan so that the Japanese government would not support intervention.<sup>34</sup>

The Hankou government planned to take control over Nanjing. On 6 April, Chiang Kai-shek ordered the Second and Sixth Armies to march northwards;

since Ch'en Ch'ien was still in Hankou, and his telegrams ordering a halt to this operation were intercepted by Chiang's supporters, the Second and Sixth Armies complied. In a meeting on 7 April, Borodin recommended that the leftward-leaning Nationalist government in Hankou quickly move to Nanjing. But he was too late, as Chiang Kai-shek personally entered Nanjing on 9 April and took control.<sup>35</sup>

Chiang's decision to stage a coup was preceded by a raid orchestrated by Zhang Zuolin against the Soviet embassy in Beijing on 6 April. The raid followed the arrest of a Soviet embassy messenger in late March who was caught carrying over forty letters concerning "secret meetings and alleged conspiracy."<sup>36</sup> The Dutch ambassador, W.J. Oudendijk, acting on behalf of the foreign diplomatic corps, gave the Beijing government permission to violate the extraterritorial rights of the Soviet embassy. Although the Soviet chargé d'affaires protested immediately to the Chinese Foreign Office, and Litvinov protested to the Chinese chargé d'affaires in Moscow on 9 April, the police found documents allegedly proving that the Soviet embassy was carrying out policies contrary to Chinese sovereignty. Copies of selected documents referring to Comintern plans to usurp the Guomindang may have even found their way to Chiang Kai-shek.<sup>37</sup>

The Soviet government responded immediately by protesting the Beijing government's action as illegal. Foreign Minister Litvinov accused the foreign powers of provoking a "new world war," but then announced that the Soviet government would not let itself be provoked.<sup>38</sup> Even so, there was a report on 6 April 1927 in the *Daily Telegraph* that the Red Army in Siberia had been mobilized for a possible invasion into Manchuria to take control of the Chinese Eastern Railway.<sup>39</sup>

Faced with these revelations, tensions between the Left Guomindang in Hankou and the Right Guomindang in Nanjing and Shanghai increased. Chiang Kai-shek demanded that the Comintern recall Borodin. Meanwhile, the Political Bureau in Hankou responded by stripping Chiang of his last official title as Commander of the Expeditionary Forces. Ignoring this decision, Chiang ordered the disarming of all militia in Shanghai who were not members of the Nationalist Army. On 9 April, reports circulated that Chiang's troops were taking action against Communists in Shanghai. This was denounced as the "first definite attack on the Communist Party in the Shanghai area."<sup>40</sup> On 12 April, the repression increased into a full-blown purge. Thereafter, by 18 April, Chiang Kai-shek had established a new, anti-Communist, national government in Nanjing.

Condemnation of Chiang Kai-shek was widespread and vociferous throughout the USSR. The Chinese students in Moscow were particularly stunned by the news. They sent a telegram to the Nationalist government denouncing Chiang Kai-shek and his supporters for betraying the revolution, massacring the Shanghai revolutionary workers, and for becoming "lackeys of the Imperialists."<sup>41</sup> Even Chiang Kai-shek's own son, Chiang Ching-kuo, made a public statement calling his father an "enemy of the Chinese working

masses” and so, therefore, his enemy.<sup>42</sup> A huge effigy and full-length portrait of Chiang Kai-shek had already been prepared for May Day by the Moscow Preparatory Committee and by the students at the Sun Yat-sen University, and they were burned after news of the coup reached Moscow.<sup>43</sup>

The dire warnings of the United Opposition came to life during the midst of the anti-Communist purges. Their worst fears, as casually dismissed in the introductory issue of the *Bolshevik* editorial in January, were suddenly realized as “the bourgeoisie” working with the “foreign capitalists” began to suppress the “large-scale peasant and workers’ movement.” Just as the United Opposition had been warning, this soon led down the “path to the liquidation of the Chinese revolution.”<sup>44</sup> Also, just a month before, George Murphy, the British Communist Party member, had accurately warned that the British government would try to “strengthen the right wing of the Guomindang and reach some kind of a compromise between the Guomindang and the British government for the liquidation of the Chinese revolution.”<sup>45</sup>

The Centrist members of the Politburo and the Comintern could not claim that they had not been warned. Just a few days before Chiang’s purge, Radek had “predicted a fatal breakdown in the Communist–Nationalist coalition, and gave warning that the workers were in grave danger from Chiang’s machine-guns.” Meanwhile, Stalin, who was responding to Radek’s dire prediction, was so “irritated by the criticisms of the Opposition, [that he] himself guaranteed Chiang Kai-shek’s fidelity to Sun Yat-sen’s *Testament* and the Soviet alliance, before a large audience of ‘active’ militants.”<sup>46</sup>

In a response that would become all too characteristic as the hallmark of Stalinism, however, the Centrists quickly found Communist scapegoats in China to pin this failure on, as well as twisting the truth 180 degrees so as to blame the United Opposition for undermining the long-term prospects of the Chinese revolution.

## **Centrist criticism of the United Opposition**

The failure of the United Front policy in China should have destroyed the legitimacy of the Politburo and the Comintern leadership, but it did not. The United Opposition should have assumed power as a result, but this also did not happen. In fact, the Comintern and the Politburo immediately blamed the disaster on the CCP; soon after the disastrous April coup Chen Duxiu was removed from his post as general-secretary of the CCP. In addition, the Centrists blamed the United Opposition—and especially Trotsky—for undermining international support for the United Front. Thus, following Chiang’s purge, against all rhyme or reason the Centrists were able to increase their control over the formation and execution of the China policy.

Following Chiang’s 12 April coup, the Comintern immediately criticized the Chinese Communists for their “opportunist line” and called Chen Duxiu himself an “opportunist.”<sup>47</sup> Later, Chen and Trotsky were linked even more closely in the official criticism and those who opposed the Comintern line

were referred to as “Trotskyists and Chen Duxiu-ists.”<sup>48</sup> Even Trotsky, who had previously criticized Chen Duxiu for his blind obedience to Comintern orders, now agreed that Chen became the main target because he refused

to play the role of a silent scapegoat ... All the hounds of the Comintern were let loose upon him, not for mistakes fatal to the revolution, but because he would not agree to deceive the workers and to be a cover for Stalin.<sup>49</sup>

The Comintern’s initial response to the 12 April disaster was in the form of an editorial published in the 15 April 1927 *Communist International*. The full extent of the purge was evidently not yet known in Moscow, as the editorial did not even mention Chiang Kai-shek’s role in the coup but only blamed the “black hand of British imperialism.” The Chinese revolution was characterized as a “challenge” to all imperialist powers, but was especially a challenge to the British empire. The Comintern further condemned the raids on the Soviet embassy in Beijing as an indication that the “bloody intervention in China went hand in hand with the preparation of military action against the Soviet Union.” The previous revolutionary slogan: “Hands off of China!” was now updated to include the USSR: “Hands off of China and the Soviet Union!”<sup>50</sup>

The first official response by the Soviet government was an 18 April speech to the Fourth Soviet Congress by Rykov, Chairman of the Council of People’s Commissars. Rykov also blamed foreign intervention for the recent failure in China. He confirmed that the “chief nodal points in international affairs today” are China and the USSR, which jointly accounted for “one-third of the world population.” But more importantly, the conflict in China was now the “focus of colonial policy” and the outcome of the Chinese revolution would decide the “future of imperialism.” Likewise, the situation in the USSR was important because its economic recovery showed the “victory of the socialist organization of society” and so made the USSR a tangible threat to the imperialists.<sup>51</sup>

China was identified as one reason, if not the main reason, for the current tension between the Soviet Union and England. Ignoring reams of documentary evidence to the contrary, Rykov denied direct Soviet involvement in China:

It is regarded as our fault that the Soviet citizen, Borodin, is taking a hand in Chinese affairs. The intrigues against the English are attributed to the activity of this Borodin. I must state that Borodin is not our representative in China, has received no authorization from the Soviet Government, and therefore our Government is not responsible for Borodin’s actions.

If the raid on the Soviet embassy in Beijing was intended to push the USSR into declaring war on China, Rykov emphasized, the Soviet government would refuse to do it.<sup>52</sup>

But Rykov did warn that the situation in China could still lead to a world war if the imperialist countries had to face the millions of Chinese who had already

joined the national liberation movement. He listed the military assets of the imperialists as follows: "Naval units: British, 80; American, 55; Japanese, 12; French, 13; Italian, 12; and one Spanish—in all 173 warships" and land forces which added up to "15 battalions, 1 division, and 3 brigades, and in addition 3 artillery detachments." Rykov still felt confident enough to predict in mid-April that the Chinese revolution was of such strength "that it is scarcely conceivable that it can be restrained by armed detachments or even by entire armies."<sup>53</sup>

But the real keystone in Asia was Japan, and the preservation of peace in the Far East, according to Rykov at least, "depends in a large degree on Japan." Even though he warned that Japan was strengthening her armed forces in both South and North China, Rykov advocated even further rapprochement between the Soviet and Japanese governments. In fact, he talked optimistically about completing negotiations on a new fisheries' agreement soon, and stated uncategorically that "there is no obstacle in the interests which both these States have in Manchuria."<sup>54</sup>

Without saying it directly, Rykov confirmed in his speech that even after Chiang's coup the Soviet foreign policy in the Far East would continue to be based on retention of the former Tsarist concessions in Manchuria. At all costs, the USSR would try to avoid open conflict with Japan. But, by denying direct involvement with the national liberation movement in China and by insisting that the Soviet Union would not be provoked into war on behalf of their Chinese allies, the Soviet government was in fact condemning the CCP to a one-sided battle against the combined forces of Chiang Kai-shek, the Right Guomindang, and the foreign powers. This decision undermined all of the USSR's prior promises of revolutionary support, an event which had a lasting impact on China's Communist leaders.<sup>55</sup>

Rykov's decision not to support a war over China was in large part due to the USSR's military weakness. On 25 April 1927, the Soviet military commander, K.Y. Voroshilov, reported that the

Red Army is very weak in modern heavy technical equipment, that the Red Air force is small and not independent of foreign technical resources, that the existing "territorial-militia" apparatus is not yet able to train the available annual quota, and, in particular, that transport in the Soviet Union is already overtaxed and would in time of war be a factor greatly impeding all major military operations.<sup>56</sup>

Even if the Soviet government had wanted to intervene in China, therefore, it appeared to many that it was simply too weak to do so.

## Conclusions

Between November 1926 and April 1927, the Chinese revolution had passed through a rapid period of development, confrontation, and defeat. For a short time in March 1927, it appeared that the Left Guomindang-dominated

Central Executive Committee had succeeded in limiting Chiang Kai-shek's power. Chiang's demotion was widely portrayed in Moscow as a victory for the Chinese Communist Party and Left Guomindang. But the high expectations for the Chinese revolution expressed by the Seventh Plenum of the Communist International during November 1926 had proved to be short-lived.

Following Chiang Kai-shek's 12 April purge, it became clear that the Communists had lost their chance to take a leading role in the Chinese revolution. Instead, by hiding their weapons and remaining passive, they forfeited what might have been their best opportunity to assume prominence over the revolution. To a large degree, this defeat must be attributed to the Centrists' insistence that all CCP's requests to withdraw from the United Front were misguided, and that the Centrists' policies were absolutely correct; this uncompromising attitude, in turn, was based on the Centrists' ongoing factional battles with the United Opposition.

By relying mainly on his control over the Nationalist Army, Chiang Kai-shek succeeded during April 1927 in seizing control over the bulk of the Guomindang governing organs. Arrests and executions of Chinese Communists and CCP sympathizers followed in tandem. What soon became clear to the leaders of the CCP was that—all Soviet promises to the contrary—the Chinese Communists could not expect the Soviet government to intervene in China on their behalf. In fact, the Comintern condemned the CCP to fight alone in an ideological and actual battle, armed with little more than slogans, which was a fate that the CCP's leaders had time after time attempted to avoid. As the next chapter will discuss, the failure of the Comintern's China policy quickly led to a new and even more bitter round of factional infighting between the United Opposition and the Centrists.

## 6 The United Opposition's spring 1927 campaign against the Centrists

As a result of Chiang's April coup, the debate erupted anew among the major leaders of the Bolshevik party over the proper course to pursue in China. This debate lasted from the middle of April to the end of May when the Executive Committee of the Communist International held its Eighth Plenum. The various opinions expressed by Radek, Zinoviev, and Trotsky once again clashed with Bukharin and Stalin. As before, the main issue under dispute was the United Front policy, with Trotsky arguing for a complete break and the immediate creation of revolutionary soviets, while the Centrists supported the continuation of the United Front between the Chinese Communist Party and the Left Guomindang.

Even though thousands of Communists and Communist sympathizers had been killed in China, and even though Chiang Kai-shek appeared to be in full control over the Nationalist Army, the Hankou government—made up of Communists and their Left Guomindang allies under the leadership of Wang Jingwei—was still proclaimed by the Centrists as a viable revolutionary alternative. By contrast, the United Opposition warned that this new “United Front” would also inevitably break apart, to the further detriment of the Chinese Communists and the Chinese revolutionary movement.

Once again, the Centrists defeated the United Opposition; following orders from the Politburo, the Comintern ordered the continuation of the United Front policy, only this time between the CCP and the Left Guomindang. When recalling these events many years later, Trotsky would claim of this period: “The arguments of the Opposition were never refuted.”<sup>1</sup> As this chapter will attempt to show, Stalin and Bukharin did not have to refute the United Opposition, since Radek, Zinoviev, and Trotsky presented different—and often wildly contradictory—programs for how to resolve the crisis in China. Faced with the very disunity of the “United” Opposition, the Centrists continued to monopolize control over the China policy.

The factional debates that erupted after Chiang's April purge of the Chinese Communist Party from the United Front not only had an immediate impact on the formulation of a new Comintern China policy, therefore, but the various views expressed during this period would resurface from time to time during debates held later during 1927. In particular, many of the

disjointed and chaotic opinions expressed by Radek, Zinoviev, and Trotsky during this period would later be cited by Stalin and Bukharin to discredit, condemn, and eventually expel the leaders of the United Opposition from the Bolshevik party.

## Politburo attempts to save the United Front

Even after Chiang's purge had started, the Comintern worked hard to retain the United Front. To reject it would have confirmed the warnings of the United Opposition and thereby undermined the Centrists. Therefore, on 13 April, the day after the massacre of Shanghai workers began, M.N. Roy telegraphed Chiang Kai-shek and pleaded with him not to break up the united revolutionary forces.<sup>2</sup> Throughout the spring, the Comintern tried to salvage what it could from the deteriorating situation in China.

The first *Communist International* editorial to address Chiang Kai-shek's coup appeared on 22 April 1927. By this time the Comintern had received sufficient information about events in China to be able to accuse Chiang Kai-shek for his leading role in the counter-revolutionary crackdown. Although the Comintern's actual knowledge of what had transpired in China was limited, they claimed to be all-knowing when it came to the theoretical understanding of the Chinese revolution. By referring back to the decisions of the Seventh Plenum of the Executive Committee of the Comintern from December 1926, the editorial suggested that: "The Chinese big bourgeoisie's crossing-over into the counter-revolutionary camp was predicted by the Comintern."<sup>3</sup>

Claiming that the "majority" of the Guomindang and members of the old Nationalist government were still in the Communists' camp, the counter-revolutionary coup merely signaled that the third stage of the Chinese revolution had already begun. In this third stage the proletariat, peasants, and urban middle bourgeoisie would carry on the revolution without the upper bourgeoisie. As later events would show, this theoretical framework suggested that the advent of urban rebellions—such as the upcoming 1 August 1927 Nanchang Uprising—were both timely and necessary. If there were no urban uprisings, then clearly the third stage had not been reached.

The 15 April 1927 issue of *Bolshevik*, the Centrist-controlled journal of the Bolshevik party, supported the Comintern's position and attempted to make excuses for its recent failures. The lead editorial pointed out that in China there were only three million proletariat, or only one for every 130 people, as compared to one for every 30 people in Russia during 1917. This meant that the "problem of leadership of the Chinese Communists was much more difficult and complex than for the Russian Bolsheviks in 1917." It applauded the Comintern's policy by claiming that it had foreseen Chiang's action: "We see, that the Comintern had predicted the *inevitability of differentiation* of the united national anti-imperialistic movement, which aggravated the class struggle and rupture and straightforward *elimination* of the bourgeoisie from the revolution."<sup>4</sup>

This *Bolshevik* editorial also printed what it claimed were the Comintern directives that had been given to the CCP following the Seventh Plenum in December 1926, including the obviously false assertion that: “The Chinese Communist Party, which came out against the policies of Chiang Kai-shek, was completely supported by the Comintern.” In addition, it now stated that the Comintern had ordered the CCP to: “Arm the workers and create local organs of the peasant self-defense.” Finally, it concluded that it warned the CCP: “Not to yield to the provocations of the imperialists and those who have deserted to them, to strive not to adopt armed warfare at a time, when it is profitable to the enemy, or unprofitable to the proletariat.”<sup>5</sup> These points all appear to substantiate that the Bolshevik leaders were right from the very beginning. Their validity is suspect, therefore, especially the final point, which not only can be read as critical of the United Opposition but could be used to justify Comintern orders to the CCP to hide their weapons and to put up little resistance to the Guomindang forces during the coup.

As this and several other *Communist International* editorials presented it, the Seventh Plenum had resolutely rejected the proposal that the Chinese Communist Party leave the Guomindang and had endorsed working with the left wing of the Guomindang. By strengthening the worker-peasant base of this alliance and by using the Left Guomindang’s connections in the government and military it was “possible for the Chinese Communist Party to move the revolution forward not only from below, but from above.”<sup>6</sup> According to this view, to withdraw from the Guomindang prematurely would simply have withdrawn the CCP from political life in China, isolated it from the masses, given the right elements of the Guomindang full power, and, finally, paralleled the wishes of the Western press.<sup>7</sup>

Much of the post-coup analysis was directed against the United Opposition. Referring to “left boycottists,” one such editorial from 22 April 1927 stated:

We can see that the Chinese Communist Party’s method of struggling for the hegemony of the proletariat in the nationalist movement, a method recommended by the Comintern, has already begun to achieve important fruits, which now, of course, are temporarily being frustrated in those provinces where the counter-revolution has triumphed. If the Chinese Communists had listened to the advice of the left boycottists, then in the critical moment of the regrouping of power they would have found themselves isolated and completely powerless.<sup>8</sup>

Ignoring the destruction Chiang had already wreaked on the CCP, another editorial concluded: “But the proletarian movement, in defiance of the reformists and their masters, is now still able and should stop the executioner’s hand, if it now begins to organize a war against war.”<sup>9</sup>

The Politburo quickly issued a new strategy for China by means of a 21 April 1927 article entitled “Questions of the Chinese Revolution.” As might be expected, the United Opposition did not fare much better in this report

than it had before 12 April. Trotsky had been removed from the Politburo in October 1926, and not a single member of the United Opposition remained in that body. Within the Politburo, a three-man sub-committee was selected to write this report that included only Stalin, Bukharin, and Molotov. These three helped to compose Stalin's thesis explaining the recent failure in China, and then it was published in the name of the Central Committee in late April. Stalin thereby guaranteed that only his proposals would be accepted.

According to this report, the Chinese revolution was now shown to have two possible outcomes: either the national bourgeoisie would join with the imperialists to smash the proletariat and establish capitalism—which was essentially what the United Opposition had warned might happen in China before the 12 April coup—or the proletariat would consolidate its leadership over the “vast masses of the working people in town and country” and then after securing the bourgeois-democratic victory, they would “gradually convert it into a socialist revolution.” The Politburo favored the latter, and was clearly backpedaling when it warned the Chinese Communist Party that “the Chinese revolution will encounter far greater difficulties than did the revolution in Russia, and that the desertions and betrayals in the course of the revolution will be incomparably more numerous than during the Civil War in the USSR.” In an attempt to downplay the seriousness of the Chinese Communists’ defeat, however, the Politburo then stated that its directive from 3 March 1927 had been “the only correct one,” and so the Comintern was not responsible for the debacle in China. Instead, events in China indicated a “swing” from the “revolution of an *all-national* united front and towards a revolution of the vast masses of the *workers and peasants*, towards an *agrarian* revolution.”<sup>10</sup>

As before, the Politburo refused to consider dissolving the United Front with the Guomindang, as Trotsky had advocated in his 4 March 1927 letter to Radek. To adopt this proposal would be “deserting the battlefield and abandoning its allies in the Guomindang … and surrendering the banner of the Guomindang, the most popular banner in China, to the Guomindang Rights.” By advocating such a break, Stalin stated, “the opposition is playing into the hands of the enemies of the Chinese revolution.”<sup>11</sup>

The Politburo’s new strategy was to work toward the elimination of the Right Guomindang, and concentrate “all power in the country in the hands of a *revolutionary* Guomindang, a Guomindang without its Right elements, a Guomindang that is a bloc between the Guomindang Lefts and the Communists.” To do this the Chinese Communists were given the duty of developing the revolutionary movement and of extending the mass organizations, such as “revolutionary peasant committees, workers’ trade unions and other mass revolutionary organizations,” but only as a prerequisite to the later formation of soviets.<sup>12</sup>

But the Politburo did not agree with the United Opposition that it was the proper time to call for the formation of soviets. Stalin opposed the United Opposition’s recommendation to form soviets immediately in China for three

reasons: (1) they would have to be organized against the Guomindang; (2) they would confuse the task of organizing workers and peasants; and (3) they would allow the CCP's enemies to say that it was not a "national revolution, but artificially transplanted 'Moscow Sovietization'." By staying within the Guomindang, however, the Chinese "Communist Party must more than ever before preserve its independence, as an essential condition for ensuring the hegemony of the proletariat in the bourgeois-democratic revolution."<sup>13</sup>

How the Politburo expected the Chinese Communists simultaneously to remain in the Guomindang party and yet also "preserve its independence" was not explained. In essence, it reiterated the strategy behind Trotsky's call for the Chinese Communists to be more independent—so that the CCP could take control over the workers' movement—without recognizing the substance of Trotsky's criticism: that for its own survival the CCP must become distinctly separate from the Guomindang.

The Politburo further proclaimed that an "antidote" for counter-revolution should be "the arming of the workers and peasants." While acknowledging that the "opposition is dissatisfied because the Shanghai workers did not give decisive battle to the imperialists and their underlings," the Politburo defended its actions by claiming that the United Opposition "does not realize that decisive battle must not be given in unfavorable conditions, when the reserves have not yet been brought up—just as the Bolsheviks, for example, did not give decisive battle either in April or in July, 1917."<sup>14</sup>

The Politburo report tacitly acknowledged that, from an organizational point of view at least, fighting Chiang Kai-shek in early April would have been impossible. However, the Politburo's insistence that the "timing" was not right was seen by Trotsky and the other leaders of the United Opposition as proof that the Politburo cared more about the USSR's security than it did about the success of the Chinese revolution. As the next sections will show, the United Opposition made a fatal mistake in the weeks following Chiang's purge by forwarding three separate, and in many ways contradictory, proposals on the China policy.

## **The United Opposition's response**

The United Opposition soon entered the fray, with Karl Radek accusing the Comintern of misunderstanding the basic nature of the Chinese revolution. Simultaneously, Zinoviev submitted his "Theses on the Chinese Revolution" to the Central Committee on 15 April 1927. Finally, in early May, Trotsky responded to the Central Committee's new policy in an article entitled "The Chinese Revolution and the Theses of Comrade Stalin." Unfortunately, the leaders of the United Opposition could not agree on a single China policy, and so presented three different programs that disagreed with each other on such basic questions as whether China was Asiatic, whether the CCP should remain in the United Front, or what stage the Chinese revolution had reached.

As discussed earlier, Radek had argued that China was Asiatic and thus, according to Marxist theory at least, could not support a bourgeois-democratic revolution. Instead, it required a revolution led by the peasants and the proletariat. To Radek, it appeared that Chiang's purge proved that the Comintern was incorrect in treating the Chinese revolution as "a bourgeois-democratic revolution bent on destroying the feudal structure of China while simultaneously delivering the land from foreign imperialism." Radek denied that feudalism was the most important distinctive factor in China's Asiatic society and instead pointed to "imperialist-supported capitalism" and the "class struggle of peasants and workers against their exploiters."<sup>15</sup>

Radek blamed the onetime Mensheviks Martinov and Rafes, two of the Comintern experts working in China, for the Menshevik overtones inherent in the Comintern policy. Radek referred to Feodor Dan, a leading Menshevik émigré and writer, who supported this view when he wrote an article complimenting the Comintern's Menshevik policies in China. Furthermore, Radek accused Bukharin, the head of the Comintern since October 1926, for being under the influence of Martinov, whom Radek dubbed the "John the Baptist of Menshevism."<sup>16</sup>

To save the revolution in China, Radek recommended that revolutionary soviets be formed and that the CCP work with the Left Guomindang in Hankou against the Right Guomindang. By advocating that the CCP work with the Left Guomindang, Radek appeared to contradict Trotsky, who had formerly called for a complete break with the Guomindang. Even though he disagreed with Trotsky on dissolving the United Front, Radek did acknowledge that the bourgeoisie was underdeveloped and that it could not be allowed to lead the revolution in China. With respect to soviets, Radek thought that soviets could be used to seize power on the local level, and until this was done, the Left Guomindang's Hankou government would not be an effective revolutionary government. The Hankou government should also adopt a radical program of social reform, support worker and peasant organizations, and cooperate more closely with the Chinese Communists or risk the censure of the Comintern.<sup>17</sup>

To add to the confusion about what the "United Opposition" actually stood for, Zinoviev submitted his opinions on the Chinese revolution to the Central Committee on 15 April 1927 in a paper entitled "Theses on the Chinese Revolution." He emphasized the importance of the Chinese revolution by comparing it to the unsuccessful German revolution of 1923: "And if at that time the entire attention of our party was turned to Germany, so this must now be done with China, all the more so because the international situation has become more complicated and more disturbing to us." As during 1923, the Central Committee should call "together a special conference of representatives of the local party organizations (together with the Plenum), adopt special theses, mobilize the whole party, call a special international conference through its representatives in the ECCI [Comintern], etc." The Chinese revolution could be victorious only "under the leadership

of the working class or not at all,” and with the help of the Soviet Union the “productive forces in China” could be developed along socialist lines.<sup>18</sup>

In this essay, Zinoviev referred directly to Lenin’s thesis at the Second Comintern Congress stating that a “capitalist stage of development” was not absolutely necessary for colonial countries going through revolution. This appeared to agree with Stalin’s argument that a socialist USSR could help China move directly to socialism. But, Zinoviev added:

Since the USSR exists, covering one-sixth of the earth’s surface, and already has an enormous influence on the Chinese revolution; since the proletarian revolution in the USSR has already existed for ten years; since the CI [Communist International] exists, uniting the vanguard of the world proletariat in its ranks; since national liberation movements are growing throughout the world; since serious contradictions still divide the camp of the imperialists and since a lusty, young, rapidly revolutionized working class, comprising millions of people, exists in China—the non-capitalist road of development of China is possible.

The primary condition required in order to have socialist development in China would be in making the Chinese Communist Party “an independent class force,” which could be “the leader and director of the whole revolutionary movement in China,” including the unification of China.<sup>19</sup>

With the support of the Soviet Union and of other proletarian revolutions in the advanced capitalist countries, a proletarian revolution could succeed in China. To make this happen, the working class in China had to tear the “leadership of the movement directly out of the hands of the bourgeoisie, under the slogan of the agrarian revolution and in general to draw the petty bourgeoisie with it.” The first step was to form soviets and the peasant movement had to be made as revolutionary as possible.<sup>20</sup>

So far, Zinoviev appeared to agree with Radek and Trotsky on the need to create soviets. However, Zinoviev’s views on the “Asiatic mode of production” differed from Radek’s. Zinoviev agreed with the view that China was in a bourgeois-democratic revolution and that it was a “semi-colonial country.” When looking at the nature of China’s bourgeoisie, Zinoviev stated that it rested on the “feudal roots of the exploitation of the Chinese peasantry,” and that Chinese landowners applied “feudal forms of exploitation to the peasantry.”<sup>21</sup>

Based on this, Zinoviev promoted the United Front between the CCP and the Guomindang in theory, even though he criticized the Chinese bourgeoisie for being “relatively weak,” complimented the Chinese proletariat for their “great strength,” and hypothesized that the “hegemony of the proletariat in the developing bourgeois democratic Chinese revolution is quite possible.” Therefore, Zinoviev argued that the CCP “can and must remain” in the Guomindang, while on the other hand urging: “the Communist Party of China must be assisted to achieve real political and organizational independence

at all costs. Everything must be destroyed that binds and limits the independence of the Communist Party of China.”<sup>22</sup>

Finally, Zinoviev turned at the end of his thesis to the impending threat of war between the Soviet Union and England in order to emphasize China’s importance. According to Zinoviev, the “encirclement of the USSR” was devised by Britain and the “attack” on the Soviet embassies in Beijing and other large cities in China were merely “links in a whole chain of a deliberate policy of provocation.” He then accused Chamberlain for initiating these provocations and claimed:

It is also not impossible that Chamberlain, by referring to “documents” which are being forged after the raids and the arrests of our comrades by the Northern troops, will take a new step in the struggle against us, will contrive a campaign in the whole bourgeois press of the world, and will perhaps go to the length of breaking off diplomatic relations with the USSR.

It was for this reason that the “Chinese question is becoming the main question of the immediate destiny of the world revolution. It may exercise a direct influence on the immediate destiny of the USSR.”<sup>23</sup>

In his conclusions, Zinoviev once again disagreed with Trotsky’s argument from as early as April 1926 that the Chinese Communist Party had to leave the Guomindang. Instead, he stated that the Chinese Communists had to remain in the Guomindang until it could “gather its forces,” and then “rally the masses under its banner” and struggle relentlessly to expel and destroy the Right Guomindang. But simultaneously the Chinese Communists also had to achieve “the complete and unconditional political and organizational independence of the Communist Party from the Guomindang.”<sup>24</sup>

Following Chiang’s April coup Trotsky appears to have largely refrained from joining in the debate over China, perhaps because he was on vacation at the time. The only China-related document in the Trotsky Archives dating from April 1927 was one note to the Eastern Secretariat of the Executive Committee of the Communist International in which Trotsky returned to them a recent photograph of Chiang Kai-shek, which he had just received, and refused to comply with their request to send Chiang Kai-shek his own signed portrait.<sup>25</sup>

By 7 May 1927, however, Trotsky was back and he responded to the Central Committee’s new China policy in an article entitled “The Chinese Revolution and the Theses of Comrade Stalin.” In this piece, Trotsky first criticized how this new strategy came to be formulated, and was especially upset that the policy was never presented to the Central Committee plenum, with the Politburo instead choosing three of its members—Stalin, Bukharin, and Molotov—to look over Stalin’s thesis and then to publish it in the name of the Central Committee. This process effectively sidestepped any criticism from the United Opposition and, according to Trotsky, “such a ‘simplified’

method of deciding questions of world importance, after the mistakes made and the heavy defeats, in no wise serves the interests of the party and of the Chinese revolution.” Instead, for the good of everyone the policies of the Central Committee “demand an open, energetic, exhaustive discussion of all the problems of the Chinese revolution, especially those in dispute.”<sup>26</sup>

The recent debacle in China was further evidence to Trotsky of a troubling transformation that had taken place within the Soviet government since the October revolution—the bureaucratization of the Bolshevik party. The Chinese defeat was also, therefore, a “defeat for the bureaucratic methods of the leadership.” The method of making policy decisions in Moscow, without giving the Chinese Communists a chance to express their own views, “is incompatible with the development of a revolutionary party, [and] becomes an especially heavy obstacle to young parties that can and should learn independently from the experiences of defeats and mistakes.”<sup>27</sup>

Trotsky then moved on to an actual critique of the Politburo’s China policy, starting with the misguided concept that the Guomindang was a party formed out of a “bloc of four classes.” To Trotsky, the bourgeoisie in the Guomindang were really only an “instrument of the compradores and imperialism,” and the “militarists” in China were supported by an alliance of foreign capital with sections of “the Chinese bourgeoisie, the bureaucracy and the military.” Attacking Bukharin in his role as editor of *Pravda*, Trotsky recalled that right up until the Shanghai massacre *Pravda* was not admitting that revolutionary China was ruled by a bourgeois government but by a “government of the bloc of four classes.” The Shanghai massacre proved that the CCP was never really allied with the Guomindang, but was in fact subordinate to it: “In order to justify a false policy, one is forced to call dependence independence, and to demand the preservation of what ought to be buried for all time.” If the Chinese Communists remained part of a bourgeois party like the Guomindang, it would be better to say that “the time has not yet come for a Communist Party in China.”<sup>28</sup>

According to Trotsky, the problems with the Politburo’s China policy were due to Menshevik thinking that talked of reining in the revolutionary spirit of the Chinese masses:

Only woeful philistines and sycophants, who hope in their hearts to obtain freedom for China as an imperialist bounty for the good behavior of the masses, can believe that the national liberation of China can be achieved by moderating the class struggle, by curbing strikes and agrarian uprisings, by abandoning the arming of the masses, etc.

It was therefore necessary to help the CCP to purge itself from “Menshevism and Mensheviks” before the party split into opposing factions.<sup>29</sup>

What was needed, according to Trotsky, was for the Chinese Communists to separate from the Guomindang, arm themselves, and set up soviets. Workers’, peasants’, and soldiers’ soviets were especially important in order to safeguard

an independent “revolutionary program” and “fighting organization.” Trotsky opined that when Stalin called for peasant committees and “revolutionary trade unions” he forgot that they can “arouse the hatred of the enemy no less than soviets” but they are then “far less capable than soviets of warding off its blows.” If there had been soldiers’ soviets in the national army in China then it could not have been “transformed into an empty camouflage for bourgeois militarism” and used against the proletariat in the Shanghai massacre. For the Comintern to call for the arming of the revolutionaries in China without also calling for the forming of soviets would “sow confusion,” because only the soviets “can become the organs capable of really conducting the arming of the workers and of directing these armed masses.”<sup>30</sup>

In conclusion, Trotsky seemed to shift away from his earlier call for the Chinese Communist Party to stand alone—perhaps in a vain attempt to make his views conform more closely to Radek’s and Zinoviev’s—by instead agreeing that a revolutionary bloc could be formed with the Left Guomindang, but only if the Communists were really independent and relied solely upon their own “organization, arms and power.” Linking his criticism of the China policy with his abhorrence of Stalin’s theory of “Socialism in One Country,” Trotsky criticized those Communists who refused to support the revolutionary movement in China for fear that it would provoke imperialist intervention:

There is no doubt and there can be none that now, after the new defeats of the international revolutionary movement, the theory of socialism in one country will serve, independent of the will of its creators, to justify, to motivate and to sanctify all the tendencies directed towards restricting the revolutionary objectives, towards quenching the ardor of the struggle, towards a national and conservative narrowness.<sup>31</sup>

Turning towards his own theory of permanent revolution, Trotsky reminded his audience that the “extension of the Soviet front is simultaneously the best defense of the USSR.” Given the sharp divisions in the world between capitalists and Communists, it would be dangerous to try to hinder or slow down the progress of the Chinese revolution. In line with this idea, Trotsky concluded:

The best way to defend the USSR is to vanquish the Chiang Kai-shek counter-revolution and to raise the movement to a higher stage. Whoever rejects soviets for China under such conditions, disarms the Chinese revolution. Whoever proclaims the principle of non-interference in the relations of the European proletariat, weakens its revolutionary vanguard. Both weaken the position of the USSR, the principal fortress of the international proletariat.<sup>32</sup>

According to Trotsky, therefore, it was time for the revolution in China to speed up, not to slow down.

As this section has tried to show, while Radek, Zinoviev, and Trotsky all supported the creation of soviets, they disagreed over whether China should be called “Asiatic,” they disagreed over the nature of the Chinese Communist Party’s alliance with the Left Guomindang, and they disagreed over what stage of the revolutionary process China was in. Such policy divisions would prove to be fatal for the United Opposition. In particular, Trotsky still argued that the CCP had to regain its full autonomy by making a clean break with the Guomindang, while both Radek and Zinoviev advocated siding with the Left Guomindang against the Right Guomindang. Such basic differences over their China strategy would give the Centrists the perfect weapon to discredit the United Opposition.

### **The factional battle warms up**

Stalin accepted the challenge from the United Opposition. On 13 May 1927, he retaliated first against Radek’s criticisms when he gave a talk to the Chinese students at the Sun Yat-sen University. Stalin took questions from the Chinese students in advance and then prepared replies to a select few. Using this methodology, Stalin gave the outward appearance of a free exchange of ideas by responding to criticism of the Comintern’s China policy, while in fact he only discussed those issues he had prepared well in advance.

Stalin began by accusing Radek of misjudging the situation in China. China’s peculiar agrarian structure allowed, according to Stalin, for feudal domination and capitalist domination to exist side by side with each other. If this situation did not exist, asked Stalin rhetorically, how could there be an agrarian revolution in China? Stalin next criticized Radek for not really understanding how the Guomindang was formed. While Radek said that Marx had not allowed for the possibility of a party composed of several classes, Stalin countered that it was because the Guomindang was an anti-imperialist party that the Communists could join with it. This was especially true of the Left Guomindang:

Radek’s error, and that of the opposition generally, is that he disregards the semi-colonial status of China, fails to observe the anti-imperialist character of the Chinese revolution, and does not observe that the Guomindang in Hankou, the Guomindang without the Right Guomindangists, is the centre of the struggle of the Chinese laboring masses *against* imperialism.<sup>33</sup>

When asked about the “bloc of four classes” or the alliance between the workers, urban and rural petty bourgeoisie, and the national bourgeoisie, Stalin claimed that at the present stage in China the “big capitalist bourgeoisie” had been kicked out of the Guomindang so as to allow an even more revolutionary alliance between the “proletariat, the peasantry, and the

urban petty bourgeoisie." Stalin then claimed that when he had identified the Guomindang as containing two blocs, the workers and the petty bourgeoisie in May of 1925, he had hoped that the Guomindang would move in this direction and that was just what was "beginning to take shape in Hankou after the splitting of the Guomindang and the desertion of the national bourgeoisie." Since the alliance of the Communists and the Left Guomindang was just what was needed to carry the revolution in China to the next stage, the call for soviets would initiate a struggle between the soviets and the Left Guomindang for control over the revolution. For this reason, Stalin claimed that the time was not right for the formation of soviets in China.<sup>34</sup>

Stalin then turned the Menshevik spotlight back on to Trotsky and the United Opposition by claiming that their call for the independence of the CCP was similar to the Mensheviks' call in 1905 for the independence of the workers' party:<sup>35</sup>

I think that the opposition, in talking today of the independence of the Chinese Communist Party and at the same time urging or hinting that the Chinese Communist Party should withdraw from the Guomindang and the Hankou government, slips into the line of advocating the Menshevik "independence" of the 1905 period. The Communist Party can preserve real independence and real hegemony only if it becomes the leading force both inside the Guomindang and outside it, among the broad masses of the working people.

Not withdrawal from the Guomindang, but ensuring the leadership of the Communist Party both inside and outside the Guomindang—that is what is now required of the Chinese Communist Party, if it wants to be really independent.

While Stalin claimed that it was necessary for the CCP to take over the leadership of the Left Guomindang, he also called for the acceleration of the agrarian revolution. The agrarian revolution in China was important because it was engaged in "sweeping away the survivals of feudalism," under the leadership of the "revolutionary proletariat of China." Chiang Kai-shek's coup had pushed the Chinese revolution into a new and higher phase, that of the agrarian movement. Making the most of a bad situation, Stalin claimed that Chiang Kai-shek's coup had resulted in a "partial defeat for the workers in a number of areas," but this was "merely a partial and temporary defeat," while the important thing to remember was that the coup had "in fact led to the Guomindang being cleansed of dross and to the core of the Guomindang moving to the Left." With the growth of the agrarian movement in China the slogan "confiscation of the landlords' land" had to be promoted so that the peasants would support the workers' movement.<sup>36</sup>

Considering that he had denounced forming soviets, Stalin did not apparently see that calling for the agrarian revolution while at the same time ordering the Chinese Communist Party to stay in the Left Guomindang

might be taken as conflicting slogans. In particular, the Left Guomindang was composed of many members of the landlord class who opposed the agrarian revolution and especially the confiscation of land. Stalin's call for nationalization of land, therefore, would be no more welcome to many of the leaders of the Left Guomindang than it would have been for the leaders of the Right Guomindang. As will be shown below, such contradictory slogans would eventually spell doom for this new phase of the United Front policy.

## The CCP's Fifth Party Congress

In the midst of this intellectual debate in the USSR, the CCP held its Fifth Congress beginning on 9 May 1927. In its general report, it stated that the party had grown from 900 members at the Fourth Congress to over 50,000 members in 1927. In addition, it claimed that during the previous four years more than 2,800,000 workers and more than 9,000,000 peasants had been organized.<sup>37</sup> Such numbers must be treated with great suspicion, however, since one report claimed that in the Changsha area alone fully 70 percent of all of the "poor" peasants had joined the peasant union, 20 percent of the "middle" peasants had joined, and even 10 percent of the "rich" peasants had joined.<sup>38</sup> These numbers would appear to be much too high to be taken as a real indicator of the strength of the peasant unions, and were perhaps intended to substantiate Stalin's calls for agrarian revolution. In fact, at this time the CCP never had the support it claimed—or was attributed to them by the Comintern—among the peasant masses of China.

The Chinese Communists tacitly admitted that their support among the peasantry was exaggerated when they acknowledged that following the 20 March 1926 coup by Chiang Kai-shek, the peasantry did not support the Communists because their program did not demand radical land reforms. The Chinese Communists also acknowledged that they did not do enough to eliminate the right-wing leadership of the Guomindang and they did not gain the support of the petty bourgeoisie. Therefore, the CCP Congress followed the recent Comintern's recommendations by calling for the adoption of a platform that supported the agrarian revolution and the building of "revolutionary-democratic power in the countryside." The Congress also accepted the Comintern's criticism of the CCP's leadership, and recommended that the members of the CCP fight against "liquidatist tendencies," reminding them that a "revolutionary bloc is not the same as a party."<sup>39</sup>

During the Congress, the Comintern representative in China, M.N. Roy, gave a sharply worded speech berating the Chinese Communists for their failings and reminding them that the Comintern's Seventh Plenum had instructed them to prepare the agrarian revolution, arm the peasants to defend the revolution, establish peasant organizations to allow them to farm the land independently from the landowners, establish government organs to bring about the democratic dictatorship, and finally, to build a revolutionary army.<sup>40</sup> Chen Duxiu had thought that these recommendations were "impractical" but his opinions

were criticized as being “opportunistic” and were repudiated by the Congress.<sup>41</sup> To counterbalance the older leaders of the CCP the Central Committee was widened from the original nine members by adding 40 more members, of which seventeen were actively involved in the workers’ union movement.<sup>42</sup>

In Ch'u Ch'iu-pai's book, *The Chinese Revolution*, he divided the views at the Fifth Congress into three lines, Borodin's, Roy's, and the CCP Central Committee's:<sup>43</sup>

Borodin's line was retreat and the slackening of the agrarian revolution; concessions to the so-called industrialists and merchants; concessions to the landlords and gentry; alliance with Feng Yuxiang to overthrow Chiang Kai-shek; and with such a policy lead the left leaders against the right reactionary forces of Hankou and Nanjing. Roy was for relative concessions to the businessmen; against conceding anything to the landlords and revolutionary generals. The Central Committee of the party was for complete concessions to the businessmen, complete concessions to the landlords and gentry, considering that the agrarian revolution could not be realized immediately, but required an adequate period of propaganda, considering it best to let the Left Guomindang lead and for us to go off the path a bit so that the revolution should not be prematurely advanced.

These differences in general remained valid and help to explain many of the events of the following months.

Meanwhile, Ch'u Ch'iu-pai's article from 14 May 1927 entitled “Peasant Power and the Agrarian Revolution” was the beginning of the propaganda program in order to promote the Fifth Congress's resolutions on the National Revolution's Peasant Platform. These resolutions called for the “complete elimination” of the feudal power of the landlords in the countryside, as a prerequisite to the “overthrow of the imperialistic warlords.” The agrarian revolution was, therefore, the “central pivot” on which the Chinese national revolution rested, and so if “China does not have an agrarian revolution then it will definitely not be able to eradicate the foundations of the imperialistic warlords' rule and oppression.” The peasants' power and the movement for land were “in reality, the greatest force which the National government has to consolidate its success.”<sup>44</sup>

China's “weak” capitalist class could not bring about the agrarian revolution, since it was closely allied with the landlords, and so the “national revolution” could not include the Chinese capitalists. As Chiang Kai-shek's actions had so clearly shown, the “capitalist class only wanted to use the workers and peasants to build up their own military power, and then once they reached a compromise with the imperialistic warlords, they used these weapons to oppress the common people” and to establish a “military dictatorship.” This happened right as peasants in Hunan and Hubei were “attacking the landlords' power” and as the “small capitalists, under the leadership of the workers, were establishing a civilian democratic regime in Shanghai.”<sup>45</sup>

The revolution was now entering a new stage in which an “alliance of workers, peasants, and small capitalists” would work together to “establish the peasants’ political power” and to “put the agrarian revolution into practice.” To bring about the agrarian revolution the Fifth Congress enacted seven resolutions:

- 1 To have the peasants establish “land committees” to decide how to confiscate and use so-called “public land,” such as land owned by shrines, monasteries, churches, schools, and agricultural companies;
- 2 These land committees would then determine how to redistribute land confiscated from landowners, excepting only small landowners and revolutionary military leaders, and how to allocate land to revolutionary soldiers once the “revolutionary war” was completely over;
- 3 For those peasants using land which had already been redistributed, they should not pay any taxes except for the government tax, while for peasants on land not yet redistributed they should pay only a fixed land tax;
- 4 To destroy the landowners’ political power and to establish peasant self-government, which would be responsible to a “village conference composed of all oppressed classes”;
- 5 To eliminate any opposition military forces in the villages, and to organize a “peasant militia” to protect the village government and the “successes of the revolution”;
- 6 To organize an agricultural bank and a peasants’ “consumer and producers’ credit cooperative”;
- 7 To cancel the interest from high interest loans, to limit high interest exploitation, and to regulate the maximum interest rates.

Ch’iu-pai’s article made no mention of continuing to work with the Left Guomindang, and it should be noted that many of these resolutions were not congenial to doing so.<sup>46</sup>

On 17 May 1927, Trotsky criticized the CCP’s decisions by attacking the Chinese Communist leader Chen Duxiu’s speech from the 29 April 1927 Preliminary Convention of the Chinese Communist Party, which had been reprinted in *Pravda* on 15 May 1927. Trotsky opposed Chen’s advocacy that the Chinese Communists should wait until the threat of foreign intervention and war in China was over in order to “build up a genuinely revolutionary and democratic government.” This was the “surest and shortest road to ruin,” Trotsky claimed, since the Chinese Communists were already in the midst of a “spontaneous agrarian revolution” and a pacific policy “signifies the most grievous mistake that a party of the proletariat can possibly commit.”<sup>47</sup>

According to Trotsky:

The agrarian formula of comrade [Chen Duxiu], who is bound hand and foot by the false leadership of the representatives of the Comintern, is objectively nothing else than the formula of the severance of the CCP

from the real agrarian movement which is now proceeding in China and which is producing a new wave of the Chinese revolution.

Trotsky then reiterated his call for the founding of workers', peasants', and soldiers' soviets as the only possible strategy:

The deepening of the agrarian revolution, the immediate seizure of the land by the peasants, will weaken Chiang Kai-shek on the spot, bring confusion into the ranks of his soldiers, and set the peasant hinterland in motion. There is no other road to victory and there can be none.<sup>48</sup>

### **The deteriorating international situation**

During the spring of 1927, the USSR's relations with Great Britain continued to deteriorate. On 12 May, in particular, the Soviet trade delegation in London was raided by the British police. Two weeks later, on 26 May, a British White Book was published claiming that ARCOS—the All-Russian Cooperative Society—was really just a front for Soviet propaganda activities. On the same day, Austen Chamberlain addressed a note to M. Rosengolz, the Soviet ambassador in England, in which he accused the ARCOS company and the Russian trade delegation of carrying out "military espionage and subversive activities" in their offices in London.<sup>49</sup> These rapidly increasing Soviet-British tensions exacerbated their ongoing conflict over China.

As a result of the revolutionary situation in China, the British government put pressure on the Soviet diplomats and trade organizations in London. Protesting these groups' "anti-British espionage and propaganda" as being aimed at interfering with the domestic affairs of Great Britain, the British government suspended diplomatic relations with Moscow. In Foreign Minister Litvinov's response dated 28 May 1927, he rejected all such accusations and called the rupture a "diversion" in order to "cover up" the defeat of the Conservative government's China policy.<sup>50</sup>

Meanwhile, the *Communist International* responded to this diplomatic dispute in three of the journal's lead editorials on 20 and 27 May, and then again on 3 June 1927. The journal explained that in addition to being afraid of the USSR's connections with the British working class, Britain was also worried about the USSR's impact on the "revolutionary movement in China, which, beginning with the Shanghai strike, has in a short time grown into a nationalistic movement of grand dimensions." This editorial attributed the diplomatic break specifically to money and agitation with which Moscow was helping the Chinese and, more generally, to the

influence of the October revolution on the Chinese revolutionary movement, and of the Communist leadership on the Chinese proletariat masses, which emanated from the Communist International, located in Moscow, and which deepened the hatred toward Moscow on the side of

the British imperialism and spurred them on to break relations with [the Soviet Union].<sup>51</sup>

This break in relations threatened the imminent danger of war between Great Britain and the Soviet Union. To respond to this danger a “United Front from below” had to be formed in order to oppose this “militarist and capitalist reaction.”<sup>52</sup>

Over time, the China policy and Soviet foreign policy began to work more closely with each other. In the Politburo, in particular, the revolution in China was now considered to be the “key for understanding the international situation.” China was a crucial “link” in the capitalist offensive which would ultimately culminate in the “blockade and intervention” against the Soviet Union.<sup>53</sup> As the fear of war with Great Britain became even greater with the break in relations in late May, the China policy became even more closely intertwined with Soviet foreign policy. In a letter from T.H. Preston to Austen Chamberlain at this time, Preston reported that people in Leningrad were now worried that other nations would follow Great Britain’s lead and that the “Anglo-Soviet rupture is having the effect of shaking the Bolshevik government to its very foundation.”<sup>54</sup>

The Eighth Plenum of the Executive Committee of the Communist International met in late May in the wake of the China disaster and immediately after relations were broken with Great Britain. International events seemed to confirm this opinion and Bukharin opened the plenum by announcing that the two international failures—“The act of breaking off diplomatic relations between the Soviet Union and the British empire” and the “new stage in the development of the Chinese revolution”—would make the decisions of the Eighth Plenum of historical importance to the Communist movement as well as to the “history of the struggle of the Communist International.” The “anti-party” activities of the United Opposition were also of “outstanding historical importance,” and Bukharin listed the top four problems that the plenum would have to tackle in the following order: (1) “the question about the struggle with the war danger and with war in connection with the general international position,” (2) the “China question,” (3) the “English question,” and then (4) the “evaluation of the appearance of the opposition.”<sup>55</sup>

During Trotsky’s first plenum speech on the Chinese question, he turned the Centrists’ accusations against the United Opposition on their head, linking England’s decision to break relations with the Soviet Union on the Comintern’s failed China policy. Trotsky blamed Stalin for bringing this about:

Nothing has facilitated the work of Chamberlain so much as the false policy of Stalin, particularly in China. The revolution cannot be made by halves. The London blow is the receipt for the Martinovist course in China. On this path, only defeats can be accumulated.<sup>56</sup>

In particular, Trotsky warned that the “problems of the Chinese revolution cannot be stuck into a bottle and sealed up.” After restating his main objections to the Comintern’s policy in China, Trotsky criticized Stalin and Bukharin for their negative impact on the formation of the China policy:

This regime weighs heavily on the International. One does not trust himself to speak a word of criticism openly, on the false pretense of not wanting to harm the Soviet Union. But that is exactly how the greatest harm is done. Our internal policy needs revolutionary international criticism, for the false tendencies in foreign policies are only the extension of the incorrect tendencies in our internal policy.<sup>57</sup>

Trotsky also attacked Bukharin’s theses. In particular, he claimed that the Comintern was not trying to make the best decisions for the Chinese revolution:<sup>58</sup>

Whoever speaks of arming the workers without permitting the workers to build soviets, is not serious about arming them. If the revolution develops further—and we are fully confident that it will—the impulse of the workers to build soviets will grow even stronger. We must prepare, strengthen and extend this movement, but not hamper and apply brakes to it as the revolution proposes.

The Chinese revolution cannot be advanced if the worst Right deviations are abetted, and smuggled Menshevik goods are allowed to be circulated under the customs seal of Bolshevism—comrade Kuusinen did this for a whole hour yesterday—while on the other hand the real revolutionary warnings of the Left are mechanically smothered.

Bukharin’s resolution is false and dangerous. It directs the attack towards the Left. The Communist Party of China, which can and must become a really Bolshevik party in the fire of the revolution, cannot accept this resolution. Our party and the entire Comintern cannot declare the resolution their own. The world historical problem must be openly and honestly discussed by the whole International. The discussion, may it be ever so sharp politically, should not be conducted in the tone of envenomed, personal baiting and slander. All the documents, the speeches, the theses, the articles must be made available to the membership of the International.

The Chinese revolution cannot be stuffed into a bottle and sealed from above with a signet.

Following the Comintern plenum, 83 prominent Bolshevik leaders, including Trotsky, Radek, and Zinoviev, sent a letter to the Central Committee supporting Trotsky’s critiques of Stalin and Bukharin’s policies on China. The defeat in China was the most important problem addressed in this declaration, as shown by the first line: “Comrades, Serious mistakes, committed by

the leaders of the Chinese revolution, contributed to the serious defeat, from which it is possible to extricate ourselves only by returning to the path of Lenin.” The Chinese revolution was the main contributor to the “extraordinarily strained situation in the party” in which the official party newspaper, *Pravda*, and its journal, *Bolshevik*, only presented one side of the debate and tried to cover the mistakes of the leadership by “defaming the opposition.”<sup>59</sup>

When asking the question why the Chinese Communist Party had failed even though they had received firm support from the proletariat and peasantry, the declaration was severely critical of the limitations that the Comintern had placed upon them:

The “leadership” in China in practice has resulted in making it impossible to arm the workers, impossible to organize revolutionary strikes, impossible to promote the peasants against the landowners, impossible to publish a daily Communist paper, impossible to criticize the bourgeoisie from the “right” Guomindang and the petty bourgeoisie from the “left” Guomindang, impossible to organize Communist cells in the army of Chiang Kai-shek, impossible to use the slogan of soviets—so as “not to repel” the bourgeoisie, so as “not to intimidate” the petty bourgeoisie, so as not to shake the government’s “bloc of four classes.” Thanks to this, the Chinese “nationalist” bourgeoisie, waiting for a convenient time, are ruthlessly shooting Chinese workers, and are inviting to help today the Japanese, tomorrow the American, and the day after the British imperialists.

The primary mistake of the Comintern was in claiming that it was too “early to promote a program of revolutionary-democratic dictatorship of the proletariat and peasants and to form soviets.”<sup>60</sup>

The declaration then warned that after suppressing the Chinese revolution, the imperialists might next advance on the Soviet Union: “The defeat of the Chinese revolution is especially able to draw war against the Soviet Union.” For this reason the Chinese question was the most important problem facing the Bolshevik party, as the “first party of the Comintern,” and a full discussion of the problem was needed.<sup>61</sup>

Stalin answered Trotsky’s accusations on 24 May 1927 at the tenth sitting of the Eighth Plenum of the Central Committee of the Comintern. In a speech called “The Revolution in China and the Tasks of the Comintern,” Stalin denounced the United Opposition for violating its 16 October 1926 promise that it would not support factionalism in the Bolshevik party. He lamented that the United Opposition “cannot manage without tittle-tattle and distortions.” In particular, Stalin responded to the United Opposition’s allegation that the Comintern had actively assisted the Guomindang:

It scarcely needs proof that this allegation of Trotsky’s and Zinoviev’s is a fabrication, a slander, a deliberate distortion of the facts. As a matter

of fact, the CC, CPSU (B) [Bolshevik party] and the Comintern upheld not the policy of supporting the national bourgeoisie, but a policy of *utilizing* the national bourgeoisie *so long as* the revolution in China was the revolution of an *all-national* united front, and they later *replaced* that policy by a policy of *armed struggle* against the national bourgeoisie *when* the revolution in China became an *agrarian* revolution, and the national bourgeoisie began to desert the revolution.

Trotsky's error, according to Stalin, was in not recognizing the importance of the agrarian revolution and that it was this fault that constituted the "semi-Menshevism" of Trotsky and the United Opposition.<sup>62</sup>

Even though Stalin claimed that agrarian revolution was imminent, he continued to oppose the formation of soviets because it would set up a "dual power" in China. This would lead to the call to overthrow the Left Guomindang government in Hankou, which would be wrong since—according to Stalin—the "Left Guomindang is performing approximately the same role in the present bourgeois-democratic revolution in China as the soviets performed in the bourgeois-democratic revolution in Russia in 1905." Stalin accused Trotsky of being blind to deny to the "Left Guomindang the role of an organ of revolutionary struggle, an organ of revolt against feudal survivals and imperialism in China." As a result, Trotsky did not understand "that to withdraw support from the Hankou government, to issue the slogan of a dual power and to proceed to overthrow the Hankou government *at the present time*, through the immediate formation of soviets, would mean rendering direct and indubitable support to Chiang Kai-shek and Zhang Zuolin."<sup>63</sup>

Stalin then stated that the situation in China was "not so simple as certain excessively light-minded people, like Trotsky and Zinoviev, make out." While Soviets could be formed in China, it would have to be at a much later date:<sup>64</sup>

It is necessary first to enable the agrarian movement to develop throughout China, it is necessary to strengthen Hankou and support it in the struggle against the feudal-bureaucratic regime, it is necessary to help Hankou to achieve victory over the counter-revolution, it is necessary broadly and universally to develop peasant associations, workers' trade unions and other revolutionary organizations as a basis for the setting up of Soviets in the future, it is necessary to enable the Chinese Communist Party to strengthen its influence among the peasantry and in the army—and only after this may Soviets of workers' and peasants' deputies be set up as organs of struggle for a new power, as elements of a dual power, as elements in the preparation for the transition from the bourgeois-democratic revolution to the proletariat revolution.

The Comintern's new strategy, therefore, should be to work with the Left Guomindang and only later separate from the Guomindang and form soviets to oppose it.

Stalin pointedly criticized Trotsky and Zinoviev for advocating different strategies in the Chinese revolution. While Trotsky at different times called the Hankou government a “fiction” and advocated that the Chinese Communists should end their alliance with it, Zinoviev called it “Kemalist” and thought that it should be strengthened. Labeling their “line” as “grotesque and confused,” Stalin called the United Opposition “revolutionary tourists” and turned Trotsky’s invective back on the United Opposition by insulting them as “bureaucrats who are completely divorced from real life.”<sup>65</sup>

Finally, Stalin turned to the USSR’s precarious international situation and, in the first indication of the kind of historical rewriting that would follow after Stalin’s complete victory, claimed that Trotsky was in league with the British:

I must say, comrades, that Trotsky has chosen a very inappropriate moment for his attacks on the Party and the Comintern. I have just received information that the British Conservative government has decided to break off relations with the USSR. There is no need to prove that this will be followed by a universal campaign against the Communists. This campaign has already begun. Some are threatening the CPSU (B) with war and intervention. Others threaten it with a split. Something like a united front from Chamberlain to Trotsky is being formed.

Stalin’s final call, therefore, was a nationalistic call to “protect the motherland.”<sup>66</sup>

On 27 May 1927, Trotsky responded to Stalin and listed seven specific goals that needed to be carried out in China:<sup>67</sup>

In the first place, peasants and workers should place no faith in the leaders of the Left Guomindang but they should instead build their soviets jointly with the soldiers. In the second place, the soviets should arm the workers and the advanced peasants. In the third place, the Communist Party must assure its complete independence, create a daily press, and assume the leadership in creating the soviets. Fourth, the land must be immediately taken away from the landlords. Fifth, the reactionary bureaucracy must be immediately dismissed. Sixth, perfidious generals and other counterrevolutionaries must be summarily dealt with. And finally, the general course must be toward the establishment of a revolutionary dictatorship through the soviets of workers’ and peasants’ deputies.

Later, after the final break between the Chinese Communists and the Left Guomindang during July of 1927, the United Opposition platform of 4 September 1927 quoted this paragraph from May in an attempt to prove that the United Opposition had understood the revolutionary situation in China better than Stalin and Bukharin had.

In a final article dated 28 May 1927, Trotsky referred to several TASS communications that had arrived in Moscow during the preceding day or two. One of these telegrams described how trade unions were going beyond the orders of the Left Guomindang government in Hankou by ordering the arrest of those who did not support the workers' movement. As a result the Central Committee of the CCP had to order these labor unions to be more obedient to the orders of the national government. Trotsky pointed to this example as proof that the Comintern policy in China was Menshevik in its orientation and was, in fact, holding back the revolutionary movement in China.<sup>68</sup>

This policy would result, Trotsky prophetically claimed, in disaster:

If the Hankou government is supported in this ruinous policy, if the Chinese workers and peasants are restrained from immediately eliminating the enemy, and from building soviets, then *the Chinese Communist Party is helping the Hankou government to collapse in the shortest time*, and to die an inglorious death, not at the hand of the worker and peasant masses, but at the hand of the bourgeois reaction. What is more, with such a policy the Hankou government, before it "collapses," will most probably unite with Chiang Kai-shek—against the workers and peasants.

Trotsky ended his article with the plea: "Is it not really time to understand this?"<sup>69</sup> Later events would show that Trotsky's prediction was almost 100 percent correct.

## Conclusions

The May plenum of the Comintern ignored the warnings of the United Opposition and ordered the continuation of the United Front policy in China. The April coup was treated not as a policy failure—as the United Opposition and the Chinese Communist leaders thought—but as proof of the success of the Comintern's policy in China:

the main reason for the betrayal of the bourgeoisie and the government to the side of its military leader Chiang Kai-shek was the development of the mass movement of the working class and peasants and the successes of the Communist Party, on the one side, and the increased pressure of the united power of international imperialism, on the other hand.<sup>70</sup>

Following the Comintern's Eighth Plenum, however, Chen Duxiu once again criticized the China policy as impractical.

In fact, the factional battles that erupted following the Chiang's April coup showed that the Centrists were using the China policy mainly as a club to attack the United Opposition. According to Stalin, the factional struggles

should end—on Stalin's terms of course—because it was damaging the USSR's foreign standing. By revealing that there were divisions within the Bolshevik party, such criticism merely invited attack from foreign powers. Therefore, Stalin claimed that the criticism of the United Opposition had directly contributed to the Comintern's problems in China.

Stalin's criticism is one of the first clear examples during the spring and summer of 1927 of how the Centrists used the nationalistic call to protect the safety of the USSR in order to oppose Trotsky's more internationalistic demands to support the world revolution, and in particular the Chinese revolution. This would not be the last time Stalin resorted to this technique. In the midst of the war scare that followed Britain's decision to break off relations with the Soviet government, this stance proved to be a very effective tool against Stalin's domestic rivals.

Events in China could also be turned against the United Opposition. Following the 12 April 1927 coup, the Centrists were to blame every successive defeat on the United Opposition. Beginning with the events in April 1927, there was a continuous series of setbacks for Chinese revolution—(1) 12 April in Shanghai; (2) 15 April in Guangzhou; (3) 21 May in Changsha; (4) 1 June in Nanchang; (5) from May to June in Henan; and (6) 14 July in Hunan.<sup>71</sup> As the next chapter will discuss, by far the greatest disaster proved to be the mid-July split between the Chinese Communist Party and the Left Guomindang, which is exactly what Trotsky was already warning might happen in late May.

## **7 The failure of the CCP–Left GMD stage of the United Front policy**

As discussed in the previous chapter, the Comintern's plenum in May 1927 once again supported the United Front policy, only this time an alliance of the CCP and the Left Guomindang alone. However, behind the scenes the Communist International's sub-committee on China took sole responsibility upon itself for evaluating the agrarian movement in China and deciding how the Chinese Communist Party could best use it to their advantage. While this sub-committee appears to have adhered publicly to the Comintern's policies supporting the agrarian revolution in China, in private it sought to temper the agrarian movement so as not to endanger the Chinese Communist Party's faltering United Front with the Left Guomindang and the Hankou government.

One of the Centrists' main goals in keeping the second stage of the United Front alive was to attack and destroy the United Opposition. During the middle of July 1927, Radek, Zinoviev, and Trotsky finally buried their own ideological differences and proposed a unified China policy of their own. For a time, it appeared that their proposals might even gain wide support throughout the Comintern, especially with the final collapse of the CCP–Left Guomindang alliance in late July. The Centrists could not afford to see this happen, and were willing to do almost anything to stop them.

In a move specifically designed to undermine the policies of the United Opposition, this chapter will provide the background to Stalin's order to the Chinese Communists to organize and carry out an urban uprising in Nanchang under the banner of the Left Guomindang. A military action of this type—no matter how brief or how unsuccessful—would throw significant doubts on the United Opposition's criticism that the Chinese Communists had little or no following among China's urban population. Although the Centrist order to stage this uprising was carried out successfully and the United Opposition lost further ground as a result, such self-serving orders were to wreak havoc within the Chinese Communist Party, while ultimately leading to the Communist Red Army's first purely military disaster.

## The Comintern's China sub-committee

The Communist International's sub-committee on China was composed of Bukharin, Ercoli (Palmiro Togliatti), and Albert Treint. Information on the meetings of this sub-committee is extremely limited. However, what little is known about its activities during this period suggests that while this sub-committee adhered publicly to the Comintern's official policy supporting the agrarian revolution in China, in private Bukharin warned that since the agrarian movement "terrifies the Hankou Government," the peasant movement should be curbed so that "we can continue to extend our influence within the Guomindang; and when we have become sufficiently powerful we will abandon, if necessary, our present allies and go as far as we wish."<sup>1</sup> Bukharin's attempt to prop up the United Front at all costs was mainly to avoid criticism from the United Opposition.

According to one detailed account of these events, Treint stubbornly opposed Bukharin's suggestion. He advocated instead continued support for the agrarian movement by immediately linking "the peasant revolts to the proletarian insurrection." To subdue Treint's unexpected defiance, Bukharin called Stalin to the meeting. Stalin backed Bukharin, claiming that it was necessary to avoid division with the Left Guomindang and that: "If we do not oppose the peasant revolt at the present time, the left-wing bourgeoisie will turn against us." Stalin further suggested that the Comintern send a telegram to Borodin "directing him to oppose the confiscation and the dividing up of land belonging to members of the Guomindang or to officers in the national army." Stalin then expressed his certainty that the Comintern had "sufficient authority over the Chinese masses to get them to accept our decisions," and that it was necessary to maneuver their way out of this crisis so that it would not end in civil war.<sup>2</sup>

Treint was forced to accept Stalin's and Bukharin's proposals. But he insisted that additional instructions be sent to Borodin stating that he should "oppose every attempt by the Hankou government and by the Guomindang to impose by force of arms limitations on the agrarian revolution." He then threatened to express publicly his reservations at the plenary session of the Executive Committee of the Comintern if these additional instructions were not included. Bukharin in turn demanded that Treint abandon his threat or be disciplined. To this, Treint reportedly answered: "The question involved is so grave that no force on earth will prevent me from formulating my reservations in a way which will be heard. Or do you propose to employ physical violence against me too?" To this, Stalin reportedly replied: "Let's not dramatize things."<sup>3</sup>

Acting on this sub-committee's recommendations, the Comintern's May plenum appeared to adopt contradictory proposals. Besides calling for agrarian revolution in China that would include the "confiscation and nationalization of land," the Comintern endorsed working with the Left Guomindang government in Hankou against the Right Guomindang in Nanjing. The

CCP was also warned that the Hankou government would have to be very careful in its interaction with foreign imperialists—so as to avoid future foreign interventions—and the Communist leaders were ordered to find a way to take responsibility for the “tactical maneuvers of this government.”<sup>4</sup>

The Comintern plenum also made four important recommendations to the CCP:

firstly, with all energy to bring to a head and to lead the agrarian revolution and the movement of the workers’ masses; secondly, to everywhere fight for the transformation of the Guomindang into a mass revolutionary organization; thirdly, to criticize the mistakes and the oscillations of the leaders of the Guomindang, and, finally, of especial importance, to direct energy into transforming the national army into a modern revolutionary army.<sup>5</sup>

The Comintern’s May plenum refused to adopt the United Opposition’s demand to form soviets in China. Instead, it claimed that the Chinese Communists would have to work through the Guomindang government system until the time was ripe to create soviets. The signal for this new stage of the revolution would be when “the democratic revolution began the process of developing into a socialist revolution, which would necessitate the creation of soviets of workers, soldiers and peasant deputies.”<sup>6</sup>

While publicly advocating the extension of the agrarian revolution in China, the leadership of the Comintern’s sub-committee on China privately ordered the CCP not to let the peasant movement interfere with their new United Front with the Left Guomindang. The goal of this policy was to allow the Chinese Communists sufficient time to infiltrate and take over the controlling organs of the Left Guomindang. Until the Chinese revolution was ready to develop into a socialist revolution, therefore, the CCP should be careful not to tip its hand. According to Trotsky and his supporters within the United Opposition, China had already long ago passed into this new stage.

## New attacks against the United Opposition

In the aftermath of the Comintern’s May 1927 plenum, both the *Communist International* and *Bolshevik* were especially harsh in their criticism of the United Opposition. According to editorials published in these journals, the world was now firmly divided into two camps: in one camp were the Soviet Union and China and in the other camp was all of the “capitalist world.” The Soviet Union was the “base of world proletariat revolution” while China was their “great ally in the struggle against imperialism.”<sup>7</sup> Put into this perspective, the United Opposition’s efforts to criticize and change the Comintern’s China policy actively assisted the capitalist camp.

Simultaneous with the Chinese revolution on the USSR’s eastern border, its western border was imperiled. The British government’s decision during May 1927 to break off diplomatic and economic relations with the USSR greatly

exacerbated the internal divisions within the Bolshevik party. On 26 May 1927, Foreign Minister Litvinov once again transparently lied when he denied that the Soviet government supported Borodin: “M. Borodin is not in the service of the Soviet government, nor does he stand in any official relations with it.” Elsewhere, however, the Soviet government acknowledged that the recent Soviet–British break was the result of the British government’s failure in China:

For the whole world it is quite clear that the basic cause of the rupture is the defeat of the policy of the Conservative government in China and an attempt to cover this defeat by a diversion in the direction of the Soviet Union.<sup>8</sup>

During this tense period, the Centrists increased their attacks on the United Opposition. In early June, the *Communist International* claimed that the “ultra-left renegades from the Comintern” were “trying in the event of war to disorganize the Soviet rear by means of slandering and discrediting the Soviet power and the leadership of the Bolshevik party in the eyes of the working masses.” Taking the interparty dispute to new levels of invective this editorial then claimed that included in the “defense of the Russian and Chinese revolutions is the ruthless struggle with all of these deceivers and slanderers.”<sup>9</sup>

One Centrist tactic to decrease Trotsky’s influence within the international Communist movement was to refuse to publish the transcript of his recent speech at the Comintern plenum. In fact, the plenum’s recently adopted rule from 21 May 1927 prohibited the publication of any speeches without the express permission of the editorial committee.<sup>10</sup> But, to avoid having to make use of this rule, the stenographic record turning down Trotsky’s speech for publication noted on page four that since a corrected version of Trotsky’s speech was not made available by the publishing deadline, it was not to be included in the proceedings; Trotsky immediately disputed this decision in a letter dated 4 June 1927.<sup>11</sup>

In a second letter addressed to the Presidium of the Comintern from 9 June 1927, Trotsky further complained that the newspaper *Leningrad Pravda* had not only ignored the rule prohibiting publication of plenum speeches, but had grossly misquoted his speech, to the point where the published meaning was directly opposite to the original meaning. Trotsky then called for the publication of his speech in a special brochure, so that “readers could compare the views which were attributed to me, with those that I actually expressed.”<sup>12</sup> The Comintern ignored both of Trotsky’s letters.

As the debate between Trotsky and Stalin over China heated up, several interesting similarities appeared. For example, taking a page from Bolshevik history, each side attacked the other for being Menshevik and denounced the other’s policies for being Menshevik-inspired policies. In this battle Stalin had the upper hand since Trotsky was an ardent Menshevik up until 1917, although Trotsky had better evidence that the Comintern’s policies in China were of a Menshevik character.

Second, both sides accused each other of being bureaucrats of the worst sort. While Stalin claimed that Trotsky and Zinoviev were like bureaucrats who were “divorced from real life,” Trotsky continually accused Stalin of setting up a bureaucratic machine within the Bolshevik party that had merely served to repress freedom of speech and party democracy. On the basis of Trotsky’s difficulties getting his opinions published, his accusations would appear accurate.

Finally, at the core of the ongoing debates was the formation of policy, and especially the Soviet Union’s foreign policy. In this realm, Stalin proved dominant, in large part because of the fact that Trotsky, Zinoviev, and Radek had experienced so much trouble in agreeing on one policy for the Chinese Communists. Such divisions were cleverly exploited by the Centrists, who were quick to point out that while Trotsky initially opposed working with the Left Guomindang, Zinoviev supported it.

Trotsky and Zinoviev also had differing ideas on what role soviets should play in the Chinese revolution: Trotsky thought that the soviets should oppose the Hankou government while Zinoviev thought that they should support it. Arguably, these disagreements among the various leaders of the United Opposition proved to be one of the most important factors in discrediting their policy recommendations. Stalin made full use of this fact and continually criticized Trotsky, Zinoviev, and Radek for not knowing what they were doing.

By comparison, Stalin and Bukharin supported only one policy recommendation and were careful not to disagree publicly about the major elements of this policy. Considering that the overwhelming majority of the Bolshevik party were new members who had not gone through the crucial formative period of the 1917 multi-stage revolutions, it should not be surprising that the majority supported a policy that on the surface at least appeared to be more rational and coherent. This tendency was merely exacerbated by the fact that the revolutionary situation in China was not easy to understand, even for experts on the subject.

Finally, and perhaps most importantly, the opinions of the major Centrist leaders were splashed on the front pages of *Pravda*, *Izvestia*, and numerous party journals, such as the *Communist International* and *Bolshevik*. By comparison, the leaders of the United Opposition were often denied permission to publish in party newspapers and so had to publish and circulate their statements on their own private printing presses. As a result, the vast majority of the Bolshevik party members accepted without question Stalin’s and Bukharin’s policy of having the Chinese Communists join with the Left Guomindang in a new United Front.

## M.N. Roy and the new United Front

Events in China began to change rapidly almost as soon as the Comintern’s May plenum ended. Only three days later, on 1 June 1927, the temporary

alliance between the Chinese Communists and the Left Guomindang already began to falter. The catalyst for this change appears to have been certain indiscretions committed by the Comintern representative M.N. Roy. According to several reports—including his own—Roy showed Wang Jingwei a telegram from Moscow calling for the mobilization of a Communist army. Faced with the possible threat of an independent Communist force—thereby placing the Left Guomindang in the middle between the Nationalist Army and the Communists—the leaders of the Left Guomindang eventually decided to break relations with the USSR and expel the Communists from the United Front.

According to Roy's version of these events, he had already met with Wang Jingwei several times before and had proposed a plan that would re-establish the dominant leadership of the Hankou government. This program included:

Local conferences for setting up the platform of National Revolution; an emergency Party Congress of delegates elected at the local conferences; endorsement by the emergency Congress of the platform of National Revolution; re-election of the party leadership and exclusion from the new leadership of all who did not unconditionally agree to stand on the platform of National Revolution.<sup>13</sup>

Wang Jingwei seemed receptive to these ideas. In particular, the new platform of the National Revolution was very important and would call for the<sup>14</sup>

Confiscation of landed property over a fixed minimum limit; to empower the peasants' unions to carry out the confiscation and to distribute the confiscated land to the actual cultivators; freedom of the peasantry from all charges and levies except a unitary land tax; abolition of the *Likin* [internal customs]; disarming of the military forces of the rural reaction; formation of village militia out of the members of the peasants' unions; investing of peasants' unions with the functions of village self-government; nationalization of mines and railways; eight-hour day and minimum wages for the industrial workers; establishment of Workers' Councils in factories, etc; formation of a Workers' Militia; creation of a revolutionary army directly under the Nationalist Government; struggle against the traitors of Nanjing; and vigorous prosecution of the anti-imperialist fight.

This program pushed China's Nationalist revolution to the left. By calling for the confiscation of land and the nationalization of industry, it went far beyond anything the Guomindang party had discussed previously. Apparently, Roy did not foresee that this might cause any problems.

Immediately following the end of the Eighth Plenum, however, the Comintern leadership sent a new telegram to the main Comintern advisers in China, including Mikhail Borodin and M.N. Roy. This telegram arrived on 1

June 1927. Although similar to many other telegrams from Moscow, it proved to be the catalyst for the next major realignment of forces in China. In the telegram, the Comintern communicated the decisions made by the Eighth Plenum. It ordered the CCP to support the agrarian revolution, although as mentioned above it also emphasized that excesses had to be halted by the peasant unions, and that land owned by Guomindang officers and men could not be confiscated.<sup>15</sup>

This Comintern telegram also called for the leadership of the Left Guomindang to be “freshened” and for “new leaders who have come to the fore in the agrarian revolution” to be promoted.<sup>16</sup> According to Chen Duxiu’s account of these events, the telegram next went on to say that “It is necessary to liquidate the unreliable generals immediately.”<sup>17</sup> The official version, although similar in purpose to Chen’s rendition, was worded slightly more diplomatically:<sup>18</sup>

This dependence upon unreliable generals must be put an end to. Mobilize about 20,000 Communists and about 50,000 revolutionary workers and peasants from Hunan and Hubei, form several new army corps, utilize the students of the school for commanders, and organize your own reliable army before it is too late. Otherwise, there can be no guarantee against failures. It is a difficult matter, but there is no other course.

Organize a revolutionary tribunal headed by prominent non-Communist Guomindangists. Punish officers who maintain contact with Chiang Kai-shek or who set soldiers on the people, the workers and peasants. Persuasion is not enough. It is time to act. The scoundrels must be punished. If the Guomindangists do not learn to be revolutionary Jacobins, they will be lost both to the people and to the revolution.

This section of the Comintern telegram did have certain similarities with the program that Roy had already discussed with Wang Jingwei. But, by advocating the arming of 20,000 Communists and the formation of a new army of 50,000 “revolutionary workers and peasants,” the intent of the telegram certainly appeared to be suggesting that the Chinese Communist Party might one day take military control of the revolution away from the Left Guomindang. Roy evidently thought otherwise when he first read the telegram, but this is clearly how Wang Jingwei was to interpret it.

After he received his copy of this telegram, Roy took it and showed it to Wang Jingwei, the head of the Left Guomindang. His stated goal was to pressure the Left Guomindang into moving more quickly to adopt reforms. Roy later defended his actions by claiming that the telegram was simply a repetition of their earlier agreements and that Wang Jingwei not only knew the plan but had “expressed his agreement with it” as long as necessary help would be forthcoming from the Comintern.<sup>19</sup>

But according to other accounts, Wang Jingwei was reportedly “astonished” at the contents of the telegram. Soon afterwards he showed a copy of

it to the other Left Guomindang leaders. When Wang Jingwei met with Roy the next day, Roy further told him that the telegram was an “ultimatum.”<sup>20</sup> This term smacked of the USSR’s use of an “ultimatum” to Zhang Zuolin during the railway conflict of January 1926. After hearing this, Wang accused Roy of ignoring the conditions agreed to by Adolf Joffe and Sun Yat-sen in 1923, under which the Guomindang and the Chinese Communists had been carrying out the United Front; prime among these conditions was Moscow’s assurance that China was not ready for a Communist revolution.<sup>21</sup>

On 4 June 1927, Wang Jingwei informed other top leaders of the Left Guomindang about the Soviet ultimatum. Thereafter, between 13 and 15 June 1927, the Left Guomindang secretly made preparations to expel the Communists from the United Front.<sup>22</sup> Thus, within two weeks of the highly contentious Comintern plenum, which had supported the continuation of the United Front with the Left Guomindang, the Centrist policy was already imperiled. This rapid failure would prove to be particularly unsettling for Stalin and Bukharin, who were fearful that any additional setback in China could be used as a weapon by the United Opposition to their disadvantage.

In hindsight, Roy’s decision to show Wang Jingwei the Comintern telegram badly misfired. Roy’s analysis of Wang Jingwei’s motives for carrying out the United Front policy closely paralleled Chen Duxiu’s earlier explanation, i.e. that by maintaining that the

main task of the Chinese Revolution was the overthrow of foreign Imperialism, and that the accomplishment of this task required the united front of all revolutionary nationalist elements. All other tasks of the revolution, which may disturb the anti-imperialist united front, must therefore be set aside.<sup>23</sup>

But Roy also claimed that the political task of overthrowing imperialism in China could not be separated from important social tasks. This was because the Guomindang’s attempts to ignore their social obligations were what had led them to become “counter-revolutionary.”<sup>24</sup> Roy’s analysis was diametrically opposite to Chen Duxiu’s earlier proposal to separate political and economic issues, in large part because of the fact that the size of the Chinese proletariat was so small, and so there were enormous middle-class interests involved in the ongoing Nationalist revolution.

As a result of his fatal indiscretions Roy was recalled to Moscow, but it proved to be too late for the United Front. The Chinese Communists tried to repair the damage to the United Front by issuing an eleven point statement agreeing that the Guomindang held the “leading position” in the national revolution; denying that the Chinese Communists were acting as Bolsheviks while participating as members of the Guomindang; accepting Guomindang control over workers’ and peasants’ organizations as well as over armed worker and peasant forces; and putting strict limits on the actions of labor unions so that they would not encroach upon the Guomindang’s civil

authority.<sup>25</sup> But as events would soon prove, the damage to the United Front caused by Roy's indiscretion was already irreparable. News of this setback helped convince the leaders of the United Opposition to adopt a single China policy.

## The “unification” of the United Opposition

Back in Moscow, the collapse of the CCP–Left Guomindang United Front occurred simultaneously with the anti-British war scare. As stated by Bukharin in early June: “The main centers of the present events lie in *the relations between England and the Soviet Union and in the relations of the imperialist front to the Chinese revolution.*” As a result, all sections of the Comintern should adopt the slogan “defend the USSR and the Chinese revolution.”<sup>26</sup> Following the raid on the Soviet embassy in Beijing, the raid on their trade mission in London, and the murder of a Soviet representative—Voykova—in Warsaw, all of these events were blamed on an anti-Soviet “terrorist” campaign.<sup>27</sup> During this period of international crisis the leaders of the United Opposition finally settled their differences and agreed to back a single China policy. This merely increased the Centrists’ determination to tighten their control over the Comintern’s policies.

During June and July 1927, the Bolshevik leaders began to believe that they were at the center of an international conspiracy of espionage and terror. As described by a *Communist International* article:

The English intelligence officer George Raleigh went to the Soviet Union in 1925 with instructions from Churchill for the organization of terrorist actions. At the end of 1926 an attempt was made upon Comrades Chybarya and Petrovskii, on 12 March 1927, an attempt was made upon Comrade Bukharin in the Bolshoi Theater, on 10 May a group was arrested, which had connections with the head consul’s department at Great Britain’s mission, which was planning to set explosions in the Kremlin and in the Bolshoi Theater.

Besides listing other assassination attempts against the secret police and bombs left at a party club in Leningrad, the report blamed many of the Soviet Union’s own internal problems on terrorists: “At the same time in different places in the Soviet Union it was disclosed that arsonists had [destroyed] mills, factories, war depots, etc.”<sup>28</sup>

During an era characterized by paranoia, Great Britain was accused not only of forming an “anti-Soviet and anti-Chinese bloc” but also of making use of “White Guard organizations” to promote a campaign of “white terror” in the Soviet Union. On 9 June 1927, 20 counter-revolutionaries from a “monarchist organization” were executed by the Soviet secret police for murder, conspiracy, and spying. Great Britain was also accused of preparing a blockade of the Soviet republics that was calculated to cause panic and disrupt the economy so as

to “tear apart her socialist construction, flood her with bandits and to cause uprisings and revolt.”<sup>29</sup>

With this increased worry that the Soviet Union might be attacked, a new revolutionary slogan was adopted—“Defend the USSR and the Chinese revolution”—that for the first time clearly placed the security of the Soviet Union ahead of the Chinese revolution.<sup>30</sup> One Comintern delegate at this time even described the importance of the Soviet Union as the “main stronghold and organizational center of all of the revolutionary movements in the world.”<sup>31</sup>

The Soviet government used the war scare in order to justify its repression of the United Opposition. According to Litvinov, he became aware soon after Great Britain broke relations with the USSR that Sir Austen Chamberlain had no intention of organizing an “anti-Soviet” campaign and that he was willing to reopen relations as long as the Soviet government would “guarantee not to interfere in British domestic affairs.” This information was apparently confirmed when the Foreign Department was able to buy for 50,000 Swiss francs the minutes of a meeting between Chamberlain, G. Stresemann, A. Briand, and others, which took place in Geneva on 15 June 1927. According to these minutes, Chamberlain did indeed claim that he had no intention of organizing “a crusade against Bolshevism” and he even asked Stresemann to intercede and approach the Soviet government with offers “to seek ways of cooperating.”<sup>32</sup>

Even after the Soviet government learned that they were not going to be attacked, therefore, the Centrists used the war scare as a weapon. Following the Comintern’s Eighth Plenum in May, some of the leading members of the United Opposition were reassigned to foreign posts while others were removed from their positions. When Smilga was departing on 9 June for his new post on the Manchurian border, a large crowd of United Opposition supporters gathered at the Yaroslavl station to see him off. Trotsky and Zinoviev gave short speeches. On this occasion, *Pravda* accused Trotsky and Zinoviev of sponsoring a “demonstration.” A tribunal was convened on 24 June 1927 to see whether these two leaders should be expelled from the Bolshevik party. Although this tribunal met for the next four months it could not find any evidence of wrongdoing and so did not expel either Trotsky or Zinoviev for ordering this “demonstration.”<sup>33</sup>

Near the end of May 1927, Karl Radek was replaced by Pavel Mif as provost of the Sun Yat-sen University. Since Radek had previously been expelled from the Bolshevik party’s Central Committee, his value to the United Opposition was greatly diminished. Radek took out his frustration by spending the summer of 1927 writing articles accusing the Soviet government of moving into a period of “Thermidorian reaction.”<sup>34</sup> Trotsky had first brought up this controversial issue at a meeting of the Central Committee on 24 June 1927. This charge greatly upset Stalin and Bukharin and one of Bukharin’s students, Maretsky, wrote several articles claiming that use of the term “Thermidor” was slander against the party.<sup>35</sup> At one point Bukharin called the charge “unforgivable.”<sup>36</sup>

But in his personal papers Radek claimed that the Thermidorian reaction had already started:

Whoever weakens the international character of our revolution, that person [Stalin] is also inducing a Thermidorian reaction. The USSR has been able to develop, thanks to the international crisis of capitalism caused by imperialism and the imperialist war. We can continue to build socialism only if there is a proletarian revolution in the West. Until then, our primary goal is to strive to protect the dictatorship of the proletariat.

To Radek, it was up to the United Opposition to lead the masses against Stalin's and Bukharin's leadership and thereby save “the international character of the revolution.”<sup>37</sup> According to one account, Radek even threatened to split the Bolshevik party into two new parties, an idea that Trotsky refused to accept.<sup>38</sup>

Trotsky, on the contrary, did not agree that a Thermidor was inevitable. During the summer of 1927 he wrote an article in which he expressed the view that a Thermidor did not have to be a violent and sudden event, as it was in the French revolution, but could be “a special form of counter-revolution carried out on the installment plan through several installments, and making use, in the first stage, of elements of the same ruling party—by regrouping them and counterposing some to others.”<sup>39</sup>

According to Trotsky, the “working over” of the United Opposition was a sign that the Thermidor was in the process of being carried out and that this had a negative effect on the proletariat and the party:

This is the spiritual disarming of the proletariat, the anesthetization of the party, the obliteration of the ideological and political boundaries between right and left, between revolutionaries and opportunists, between Social Democracy and Bolshevism. The theoretical disarming and political narcotization of the party facilitates the work of Thermidorian tendencies. Against such a disarming the Opposition has waged, and will continue to wage, an irreconcilable struggle—precisely because it does not in any way regard a Thermidor as inevitable.<sup>40</sup>

In the meantime, Trotsky, Zinoviev, and Radek had compromised on a single policy for China that all of the United Opposition would support. It was difficult to keep abreast of events in China, since much of the negative news about China was suppressed by the central government, but the United Opposition expressed their new program in a series of twelve revolutionary slogans written by Zinoviev and then signed by Zinoviev, Trotsky, Radek, and Evdokimov. On 25 June 1927, copies of these slogans were sent to the Politburo, the Presidium, and the Executive Committee of the Communist International:<sup>41</sup>

- 1 The immediate withdrawal of the [Chinese] Communist Party from the Guomindang and a proposal for the honest union of the workers, peasants, and toiling “masses” of the Guomindang against the treachery and wavering of the leaders.
- 2 Long live an independent Communist Party—a single party, capable of leading all the working class and the majority of the peasantry against the imperialists, landowners, bourgeoisie, usurers and gentry and bringing the Chinese Revolution to a successful conclusion!
- 3 Not a single Communist is allowed to participate in the national government side by side with the patrons of the reactionary coup, and side by side with the allies and lackeys of Chiang Kai-shek!
- 4 Long live Soviets of the workers, peasants, and soldiers’ deputies!
- 5 Down with the militarists of all colors, who are fighting against the worker and peasant organizations! Oppose the unions and settlements of Wang Jingwei, Tang Shengzhi, Feng Yuxiang, Chiang Kai-shek with a union of workers, peasants and the urban poor!
- 6 Down with the destruction of the worker and peasant organizations. Down with the officer-landowners! Immediate execution of the officers-traitors!
- 7 Down with the false promises of the agrarian “reforms.” Long live the agrarian revolution! “The agrarian revolution is an empty phrase, if its victory does not presuppose the conquest of power by the revolutionary peoples.”
- 8 Down with the imperialists! Struggle against the imperialists under the slogan: “Victory or death!” Only a union of the workers and peasants, under the leadership of the proletariat, is capable of liberating and unifying China! Only Soviet deputies are able to organize this union, strengthen it and lead it to power!
- 9 Long live the revolutionary-democratic dictatorship of the proletariat and peasants!
- 10 Long live the independent, free, united worker-peasant China!
- 11 Long live the union of the independent, free, united worker-peasant China with the Soviet Union!
- 12 Proletariat of all countries and oppressed peoples of the world, unite!

Besides calling for the Chinese Communists to leave the Guomindang and adopt soviets to establish their own independent revolutionary movement, the United Opposition also called for the Comintern to kick the Guomindang out of the Comintern and revoke its status as a “sympathizing member.”

On 27 June 1927, Trotsky gave a speech to the Central Committee in which he claimed that the party crisis was deepening, right at the time that international tension was rising. According to Trotsky, the defeats in China were a direct cause of this worsening international situation: “In direct conjunction with the recent setbacks in China, which were brought about to a significant extent by the incorrect leadership of the Chinese revolution, the international

situation has abruptly worsened. The danger of war and intervention is unquestionable.”<sup>42</sup>

To face this danger the party crisis had to be resolved, not by the “mechanical suppression of the Opposition,” but by constructing a “solid and active party closely tied to the working class.” Trotsky especially denounced the tactics the Central Committee was using against the United Opposition, such as denying them the right to speak at party meetings, being threatened with losing their jobs, and not allowing their speeches to be printed in the Bolshevik press. Finally, Trotsky called for the publication and examination of all documents on the different issues so that party members could be prepared for the Fifteenth Party Congress, which was to convene in several months.<sup>43</sup> For obvious reasons, the Centrists opposed the adoption of these recommendations.

### **The end of the CCP–Left Guomindang United Front**

Meanwhile, in China, there were several meetings of the leaders of the Chinese Communist Party at Borodin’s house in Hankou on or around 1 July 1927. They discussed the latest instructions from the Comintern and their reaction to the change in policy was not positive. Chen Duxiu was even quoted in the “History of Opportunism in the Chinese Communist Army” as saying: “Earlier Zinoviev instructed us to help the bourgeoisie, but now Stalin orders us in twenty-four hours to carry out an agrarian revolution.”<sup>44</sup> Back in Moscow, the 1 July 1927 issue of the *Communist International* was making inflated claims that the agrarian revolution in China had already started. The Communist Party committee in Hankou was even quoted as calling for arming “tens of thousands of peasants,” increasing participation of “peasants and workers in the national revolutionary army,” and “strengthening political work among the soldiers.”<sup>45</sup> Obviously, all such claims were greatly exaggerated.

Meanwhile, in early July 1927, Vuyovitch, Zinoviev, and Trotsky sent a note to the Presidium of the Comintern calling for the immediate convocation of the Presidium together with any members of the Executive Committee present in Moscow. Their request was strongly worded:

The latest news from China demonstrates that the headquarters at the Hankou government, as “the organizational center of the revolution,” has suffered complete ruin. On the territory of the Hankou government, the counter-revolution has been free to organize and, at the same time, has crushed the workers and peasant movement. The situation is very serious both for the Chinese revolution and for the USSR, because the defeat of the Chinese revolution would increase—by a factor of ten—the danger of war.

This note concluded that it was necessary to discuss and change the “incorrect line” that had been adopted by the Comintern and approved by the

Allowing the Guomindang to become a “sympathizing” member of the Comintern was also a briefly useful political maneuver. Now, however, the Guomindang’s policies did not support the workers and peasants, they supported the bourgeoisie. Therefore, the CCP’s break with the Guomindang would necessarily include the “expulsion of the Guomindang from the ranks of the Comintern.” Their analysis ended with the view that: “The Chinese revolution has been defeated but not vanquished.”<sup>50</sup>

In looking at the future policy of the Chinese revolution, the United Opposition stated that China still had enormous reserves in its young working class and in its millions of pauperized peasants. If only the Chinese Communists would leave the Hankou government, establish an independent organization, adopt a revolutionary program which included the formation of soviets and support of the agrarian revolution, then the situation could be saved. The Comintern had to expel the Left Guomindang from its ranks immediately and send an open letter to the CCP ordering them to break with any Communists who continued to support a union with the Hankou government. Finally, the Politburo had to “cancel its prohibition on the discussion of the Chinese revolution in our press” immediately and allow discussion of these “life and death” questions.<sup>51</sup>

On 4 July 1927 a separate appeal was sent by Evdokimov, Zinoviev, and Trotsky to the Central Committee and Politburo of the Bolshevik party. Probably also written by Zinoviev, this three-page letter was especially critical of the Bolshevik party newspaper *Pravda*. At a time when Chiang Kai-shek and other generals in Hankou and Nanjing were preparing “new attacks on the Chinese workers and peasants,” the editorial staff of *Pravda* was “completely quiet, and, apparently, was fully and consciously striving—in union with the ‘strange’ TASS correspondents—to smooth over, hush up, and conceal the debauchery of the counter-revolution in Hankou from the workers and peasants of the USSR.” *Pravda*’s editorial staff even included “shockingly scornful commentaries” of TASS telegrams which had just arrived from China, hoping to change the meaning of the telegrams. This appeal then called for the editorial staff of *Pravda*—meaning Bukharin among others—and the authors of telegrams from Shanghai and Hankou to be called before a party court and for those found guilty to be dismissed.<sup>52</sup>

Of particular importance, Zinoviev and Trotsky complained to the Politburo, Presidium, and to the Presidium of the Comintern, was that the United Opposition’s articles had not been published in the party publications. Their opinions had repeatedly been denied publication, even though Bukharin and others freely and arbitrarily quoted from the United Opposition’s “unpublished articles and letters to the Politburo.” In particular, Bukharin had publicly criticized in *Pravda* the United Opposition’s thesis “The New Path of the Chinese Revolution” even though it also had been refused publication. The very fact that Bukharin felt it necessary to argue with the United Opposition’s thesis proved that it was worth public consideration and should be published.<sup>53</sup>

Radek, who viewed the leaders of the CCP as “victims,” not as “culprits.”<sup>59</sup> Instead, Trotsky blamed a badly formulated Comintern policy:

In China, precisely because there was a revolution and because relations assumed a solidly tangible and massive form almost at once, it would have been the easiest thing in the world to avoid mistakes if the initial fundamental positions had been at all correct.

What was wrong was that the Politburo misjudged the “productive role of the Chinese proletariat” and tried to rein in the revolutionary movement so as to continue to work with the Guomindang party. In this way, the “line of the leadership was aimed entirely against the perspective of the proletariat actually winning the leading role in the revolution.”<sup>60</sup>

The rapidly changing events in China were to prove Trotsky correct. The Chinese Communist attempts to placate the Left Guomindang were unsuccessful. On 15 July 1927, the Political Council of the Left Guomindang ordered the expulsion of the CCP. Borodin’s resignation was accepted and he returned to the USSR on 27 July 1927. The Left Guomindang’s Political Council also issued a decree that prohibited any close cooperation between the Left Guomindang and any other party:

- (1) Members of the Guomindang cannot be in any other party or group;
- (2) Within the Guomindang factions and small groups will not be allowed;
- (3) Governmental posts can only be held by Guomindang members;
- (4) The worker and peasant movements should be led only by “genuine Guomindangists”; and
- (5) Severe discipline must be maintained in the party.<sup>61</sup>

With the Left Guomindang’s decision to oust the Chinese Communists, even the most far-fetched warnings of the United Opposition appeared to be coming true. To shield themselves from the political fallout, the Centrists in Moscow desperately needed proof that their policies in China had been correct. A visible sign that the revolutionary wave was cresting could be that proof. Once again, it would be the Chinese Communists who were expected to risk their own lives to provide this sign.

## Conclusions

Following the collapse of the CCP’s new United Front with the Left Guomindang, the China policy once again took center-stage in Moscow. During late July 1927, the *Communist International* once again blamed the CCP for this policy’s failure:

In the preceding periods of the Chinese revolution the Central Committee of the young Chinese Communist Party did not reveal sufficient flexibility.

The Comintern furnished the Chinese Communist Party the problem of achieving hegemony over the working class in the national-revolutionary movement and correctly selected the tactics to struggle for the hegemony in the different periods in the intricate conditions of the Chinese revolution. But the leadership of the Chinese Communist Party either sabotaged the realization of these tactics, or agreed with the Comintern in words, but in actions slid down frequently into the swamp of opportunism.<sup>62</sup>

To make up for their failings, the Comintern gave the CCP another chance. On 26 July 1927, the Central Committee of the Chinese Communist Party met to discuss the possibility of an urban uprising in the city of Nanchang. The Comintern military representative, V.K. Bluker, was at the meeting and presented a telegram from the Central Committee of the Comintern recommending: “the sober weighing of the chances for a declaration and in case of the adoption of a decision about the [Nanchang] uprising to declare under the flag of the Left Guomindang.” Bluker stated that from a military point of view it was “possible and desirable” to declare an insurrection in Nanchang.<sup>63</sup>

On 28 July 1927, only two days after the planning committee for the Nanchang Uprising, and the day after Borodin’s departure for the Soviet Union, the Executive Committee of the Comintern placed full responsibility for the failure of the United Front with the Hankou government squarely on the Chinese Communists’ shoulders. According to the resolution on the “Present Situation of the Chinese Revolution,” the Chinese

should have developed and led the agrarian revolution; should have openly criticized and exposed the half-hearted and cowardly attitude of the so-called radical leaders of the Hankou government; should have warned the masses of the possible betrayal of the generals; should have armed ever greater numbers of workers and pushed the Guomindang and Hankou government onto a really revolutionary path.

Finally, the Comintern’s Executive Committee declared that: “The Comintern considers it necessary that these errors committed by the Communist Party of China should be made good at once.”<sup>64</sup> In effect, this statement gave the Chinese Communists only one choice: to carry out an urban uprising in the city of Nanchang.

As will be shown below, the Chinese Communists were ordered by the Comintern to sacrifice themselves in what would ultimately prove to be a futile attempt to save China’s faltering revolutionary movement by instigating an urban-based rebellion. Perhaps the strangest facet of the new Comintern policy was that the CCP members were expected to continue their membership in the Guomindang party, and the Nanchang Uprising was carried out under the Guomindang flag; this fact has been largely hidden by Chinese histories of this event, which emphasize the Nanchang Uprising as the birthplace of the People’s Liberation Army (PLA).

This order was to incur a great deal of anger among the CCP. Even though the Chinese Communists had been all but destroyed in April by the Right Guomindang and then kicked out of the Hankou government by the Left Guomindang in July, the Comintern insisted that the United Front in China should continue, in name if not in fact. The Chinese Communist Party was now—for all intents and purposes—the sole remaining member of the United Front. But, on orders from Moscow, it was expected to seize the mantle not of the Chinese proletariat, but of the Chinese bourgeoisie. The Comintern order to carry out armed urban uprisings in China was to usher in a new era of the Chinese revolution not on their own behalf, but on the side of their sworn enemies—the Nationalists—since to do otherwise would merely validate the criticisms of the United Opposition.

## 8 The final stage is set

### Stalin orders the Nanchang Uprising

Before turning to the events surrounding the Nanchang Uprising itself, it is important to outline the factional infighting in Moscow that made a Chinese urban rebellion necessary in the first place. After the CCP was purged by the Right Guomindang in April and then kicked out of the Hankou government in July, one practical step for the Chinese Communists would have been to declare their independence, raise the banner of Communism, and continue forward on their own. That this did not happen is due mainly to the dispute in Moscow between the United Opposition and the Centrists.

It was Trotsky who had been calling for over a year for the Chinese Communists to leave the United Front. This fact was well known both in the USSR and throughout the international Communist movement. As a result, Stalin could not admit that the Comintern policy in China was a failure, for fear of strengthening the United Opposition and undermining his own legitimacy. Instead, he now called for the United Front to continue—but this time without either the Right or the Left Guomindang—at the same time that he advocated the fulfillment of an agrarian revolution in China.

As this chapter will discuss in some detail, in order to defeat Trotsky, Stalin had to prove that the Chinese Communists remained a viable force in the Chinese revolution. A successful urban revolt would be the best way to do this. Even an unsuccessful urban revolt—so long as it was timed to correspond to political events in Moscow—could also be extremely helpful. Thus, the Comintern order for the CCP to organize a military putsch to take control of Nanchang had relatively little to do with the comparative strengths and weaknesses of the Chinese Communists and the Guomindang; by contrast, it had everything to do with the ongoing factional battles between Trotsky and Stalin.

#### **Stalin's United Front minus the Guomindang**

Following the July disasters in the United Front policy, Stalin declared the need for the CCP to continue the United Front, only this time without the active cooperation of the Guomindang. In a speech given by Stalin on 28 July 1927—the very day that the Nanchang Uprising was being planned by

Soviet advisers in China—he called again for the CCP to push the Guomindang to the left and “transform it into the core of a revolutionary-democratic dictatorship of the proletariat and peasantry.” Stalin claimed that proof of the United Front’s viability was that under the Comintern’s leadership the CCP grew from 5–6,000 members to 50–60,000 members. Meanwhile, the peasant organizations included “several tens of millions of members.”<sup>1</sup>

As mentioned above, it was Mao Zedong who had discussed the progress of the peasant organizations during February 1927. Stalin was probably quoting Mao’s figure of ten million members when he referred to such a large number of peasants. However, in April 1927, B.N. Semenov had listed the number of members of the peasant organizations as 9,829,000, which was still a far cry from Stalin’s purported “tens of millions.”<sup>2</sup> As a result of this supposed growth, however, the Chinese Communist Party “became the leader of the agrarian revolution,” and the “hegemony of the proletariat began to change from a wish into a reality.”<sup>3</sup>

Although optimistic about the future of the Communist revolution in China, Stalin was not so kind when allocating blame for the recent disasters:<sup>4</sup>

It is true that the Chinese Communist Party failed to exploit all the possibilities of that period. It is true that during that period the Central Committee of the Chinese Communist Party committed a number of grave errors. But it would be ridiculous to think that the Chinese Communist Party can become a real Bolshevik party at one stroke, so to speak, on the basis of the Comintern’s directives. One has only to recall the history of our Party, which passed through a series of splits, successions, betrayals, treacheries and so forth, to realize that real Bolshevik parties do not come into being at one stroke ... It follows, then, that the Comintern’s leadership during that period, too, was quite correct.

In responding to United Opposition claims that joining with the Guomindang had been one of the Comintern’s tactical mistakes, Stalin answered that to repudiate working with “mass allies” would be to repudiate a “tactical principle of Leninism.”<sup>5</sup>

Stalin then accused Trotsky and Zinoviev of trying to “skip over” the national peculiarities of the Chinese revolutionary movement when they had demanded the withdrawal of the Communists from the Guomindang in April 1926 and when they had prematurely called for the formation of soviets. Characteristically, Stalin adopted the policies of his adversaries by claiming that soviets could now be formed in China if there were a “new upsurge in the revolution” which was based on an “agrarian revolution, revolutionary unification of China, [and] emancipation from the imperialist yoke.”<sup>6</sup>

Such an upsurge could take place at any time from six months to a year, but either way it was now possible to spread propaganda for soviets “without actually forming soviets.”<sup>7</sup> Stalin rhetorically asked whether this wasn’t what the United Opposition had said, but answered “no.” In fact, the United

Opposition's timing was wrong and they were guilty of "overshooting" on their tactics. As a result:

From the fact that the slogan of soviets may become a slogan of the day in China *in the near future*, it does not by any means follow that it was not dangerous and harmful adventurism on the part of the United Opposition to put forward the slogan of soviets in *the spring of the year*.<sup>8</sup>

As a result of its "bad timing," therefore, the United Opposition was guilty of "ultra-left adventurism."<sup>9</sup> As events in China would soon show, however, Stalin now tried to proclaim that the time was ripe for urban rebellion and the establishment of soviets. It cannot be overlooked that the Nanchang Uprising—and the subsequent founding of the Nanchang soviet—took place in China only three days after this important speech. The timing of these events was not coincidental: Stalin ordered the CCP to carry out the uprising.

On the very next day, A. Martinov, a Stalin supporter, made these links even more clear when he explained that the "defeat of the Chinese revolution encouraged our opposition." Searching for the United Opposition's weakest point, Martinov attacked Radek's actions both before and after the April coup:

Radek in April ... still conducted himself very modestly, even timidly. He stressed that he was speaking not as an oppositionist but as a "China expert," that he was speaking not against the Comintern and not against the resolutions of the Seventh Plenum, but only against the executors and interpretation of these Comintern resolutions. Now, after a series of defeats of the Chinese revolution, Comrade Radek became braver and he already attacked, like a severe public prosecutor, the very same Comintern and against the very same Central Committee of the Bolshevik party, which, it is said, systematically seduced the Chinese Communist Party and contributed to their "breaking their own back".<sup>10</sup>

## **Central Committee joint plenum**

Stalin was already prepared for the next phase of these factional battles, which would take place at the joint plenum of the Bolshevik Central Committee, beginning on 1 August 1927. What Trotsky could not possibly have known is that on the very day he was criticizing the Comintern's China policy, the Nanchang Uprising was even then underway in China. The establishment of the Nanchang soviet—albeit short-lived and ultimately a dismal failure—completely undermined Trotsky's otherwise valid criticisms of the Centrists. It would not be an exaggeration to conclude that this was exactly the outcome that Stalin was hoping for.

Trotsky began his speech to the Central Committee by outlining the Comintern's mistakes in their China policy: First, throughout all of the betrayals by the Guomindang, the Chinese Communists were told to stay within

the party and “submit to its bourgeois discipline.” Second, the Guomindang was allowed to enter the Comintern and use its name without having to submit to its discipline. Third, the Guomindang shielded the “landlord-generals” who retained power over the soldiers and the peasants. Fourth, Moscow aided these landlords by ordering that the agrarian revolution be kept from developing so as not to cause problems in the United Front. Fifth, the Guomindang leaders didn’t object to having the Northern Expedition called “national revolutionary” as long as they kept control of all power and land. Sixth, Moscow ordered that the workers should not be fully armed, which meant that when civil war did come it proved to be more cruel, “catching the workers unarmed and drowning them in blood.”<sup>11</sup>

From Trotsky’s point of view, Moscow came out against forming soviets so as “not to disorganize the rear of the very same generals who two days later crushed the workers and peasants in their rear.” In short, the Comintern policy reinforced the bourgeoisie and the landlords by placing them under the banner of the Comintern. It weakened the peasantry by “retarding the development of the agrarian revolution and of the soviets.” It weakened the workers by promoting the slogans: “Minimum arming” and “No need for soviets.” Trotsky then asked rhetorically: “Is it to be wondered at that we suffered a defeat, having done everything that could have made victory difficult?”<sup>12</sup>

Trotsky next reminded the Central Committee that if it had followed the United Opposition’s recommendations, events in China would have turned out differently:<sup>13</sup>

Had we duly secured the complete independence of the [Chinese] Communist Party, assisted it to arm itself with its press and with correct tactics; had we given it the slogans “Maximum arming of the workers!” “Extend the peasant war in the villages!” the Communist Party would have grown, not from day to day, but from hour to hour, and its cadres would have been tempered in the fires of the revolutionary struggle. The slogan of soviets should have been raised from the very first days of the mass movement. Everywhere, wherever the slightest possibility existed, steps for the actual realization of soviets should have been taken. Soldiers should have been drawn into the soviets. The agrarian revolution would have disorganized the pseudo-revolutionary armies but it would have likewise transmitted the infection to the counter-revolutionary armies of the enemy. Only on this foundation could it have been possible to forge gradually a real revolutionary, i.e. workers’ and peasants’ army.

Returning to his oft-repeated denunciation of Stalin’s and Bukharin’s Chinese policy as Menshevik, Trotsky accused them of placing “hopes on those who were not to be relied upon,” and of underestimating the “revolutionary training of the masses.”<sup>14</sup>

Instead of “inoculating the masses with mistrust towards reformists, vague ‘Left’ Centrists, and all vacillators in general,” the Menshevik China policy

acted in a “diametrically opposite direction” by putting their hopes that the liberal bourgeoisie and the trade unions would move to the left. These Menshevik policies in China were caused by the Centrist leadership of Bukharin and Stalin that issued “vacillating directives” to the Chinese Communists. As a result, Trotsky told Bukharin and Stalin, the “unprecedented collapse of your leadership in China demands that you finally repudiate the policy which compelled you under the most difficult conditions to clutch at rotten ropes.”<sup>15</sup>

The Centrist course in China was especially dangerous because it tried to appeal to the liberal bourgeoisie instead of taking what it needed, which is why a course like this “irritates or dampens the ardor of some while it fails to win over the others.” Now that the Soviet Union was faced with war, the Centrist policies had to be denounced. In particular: “The shilly-shallying Centrist policy cannot hold its own during wartime. It must turn either to the Right or to the Left, i.e. take either the Thermidorian road or the road of the Opposition.”<sup>16</sup>

In the forthcoming battles against world imperialism, therefore, Trotsky made it clear that he and the United Opposition were not “opposed to the victory of the USSR,” but they were opposed to Stalin’s leadership. Trotsky even accused Stalin of standing in the way of victory:<sup>17</sup>

The party has been strangled by you. The Opposition thinks that the leadership of Stalin makes the victory more difficult. The Opposition insisted on that with regard to the Chinese Revolution. Its warnings have been confirmed by events, to a frightful extent. It is necessary to effect a change in policy without waiting for a similar catastrophic test from within. Every Oppositionist, if he is a genuine Oppositionist and not a fraud, will assume in the event of war whatever post, at the front or behind the lines, that the party will entrust to him, and carry out his duty to the end. But not a single Oppositionist will renounce his right and his duty, on the eve of war, or during the war, to fight for the correction of the party’s course—as has always been the case in our party—because therein lies the most important conditions for victory. To sum up. For the socialist fatherland? Yes! For the Stalinist course? No!

While many—if not most—of Trotsky’s criticisms were valid in the context of the July 1927 dissolution of the CCP–Left Guomindang United Front, they would prove to be woefully outdated and incorrect once news of the 1 August 1927 Nanchang Uprising was reported in Moscow. As the next section will make clear, Stalin knew of the impending military uprising—for the simple reason that he had ordered it—and so made good use of his prior knowledge to attack the United Opposition.

## **Stalin attacks**

With foreknowledge of what was to take place in China, Stalin turned Trotsky’s words against him and later that same day called him a “Clemenceau”

for claiming that he was defending the revolution against Stalin. To do this, however, Trotsky would have to “sweep away” the majority of the Bolsheviks, which would necessitate starting a civil war in the party. Stalin protested: “And so, Trotsky is thinking of starting civil war in the Party at a time when the enemy will be eighty kilometers from the Kremlin.”<sup>18</sup>

Taking Trotsky’s well-known view on the importance of the international revolution, Stalin stood it on its head, proclaiming that:<sup>19</sup>

An *Internationalist* is one who is ready to defend the USSR without reservation, without wavering, unconditionally; for the USSR is the base of the world revolutionary movement, and this revolutionary movement cannot be defended and promoted unless the USSR is defended. For whoever thinks of defending the world revolutionary movement apart from, or against, the USSR, goes against the revolution and must inevitably slide into the camp of the enemies of the revolution.

Stalin’s tactic to denounce the United Opposition divided the world into only two camps, thus any detractor from the Soviet government’s policy must logically belong to the enemy’s camp. Trotsky’s attempts to save the Soviet Union were declared by Stalin to be treasonous attempts to destroy it.

In his strongest attack on the United Opposition yet, Stalin then identified two dangers that he thought were threatening the Bolshevik party:<sup>20</sup>

Comrades, we are faced by two dangers: the danger of war, which has become the threat of war; and the danger of degeneration of some of the links of our Party. In setting out to prepare for defense we must create iron discipline in our Party. Without such discipline defense is impossible. We must strengthen Party discipline, we must curb all those who are disorganizing our Party. We must curb all those who are splitting out brother parties in the West and in the East. (*Applause*) ... Only thus, only in this way shall we be able to meet war fully armed, while at the same time striving, at the cost of some material sacrifice, to postpone war, to gain time, to ransom ourselves from capitalism. This we must do, and we shall do it. The second danger is the danger of degeneration. Where does it come from? From there! [Pointing to the opposition] That danger must be eliminated. [Prolonged applause]

Stalin’s accusation that Trotsky was trying to “split out” brother parties in the East would seem especially noteworthy once news of the Nanchang Uprising arrived.

In his speech, Stalin furthermore admitted that while Menshevik deviations did occur in China from time to time, they were an inevitable mistake due to the complexity of the situation. Stalin used this admission to attack Trotsky:<sup>21</sup>

I am surprised at the arrogance displayed by Trotsky who, you see, apparently cannot tolerate the slightest mistake being made by the Communist Parties in the West or in the East. He, if you please, is surprised that over there, in China, where there is a young party, barely two years old, Menshevik mistakes could make their appearance. But how many years did Trotsky himself stray among the Mensheviks? Has he forgotten that? Why, he strayed among the Mensheviks for fourteen years—from 1903 to 1917. Why does he excuse his own straying among all sorts of anti-Leninist “trends” for fourteen years before he drew near to Bolshevism, but does not grant the young Chinese Communists at least four years? Why is he so arrogant towards others while forgetting about his own strayings? Why? Where is the “fairness” of it, so to speak?

Stalin also went back and reminded the plenum of all of the times when members of the United Opposition had disagreed with each other about which policy in China was really the best policy, and then also tried to prove how his policies had been correct all along.

Stalin concluded his speech by referring once again to the rapid growth of the Communist movement in China. Stalin stated:

Needless to say, if the policy of the opposition, with its mistakes and its anti-Leninist line on questions of colonial revolution, had been followed, these gains of the Chinese revolution would either not have been achieved at all, or would have been extremely insignificant.<sup>22</sup>

Stalin left it to his supporters to complete the job. Molotov also spoke at the plenum. In sharp contrast to Stalin’s questioning tone, Molotov vocally accused the United Opposition of promoting “rebellion against the party and the Soviet power.”<sup>23</sup> It was particularly telling that this accusation was made on 1 August, as the Nanchang events were unfolding. Trotsky did not allow this attack to go unanswered. He and twelve other leading United Oppositionists, including Zinoviev and Kamenev, immediately sent a letter, marked “Top Secret,” to all full members and candidate members of the Central Committee in reply to Molotov’s allegations. In this letter, the United Opposition denied Molotov’s claim that the United Opposition was “rebellious” and “defeatist.” Instead, they accused Stalin’s Centrist group of rebelling against the “party and Soviet power.”<sup>24</sup>

In this letter, Trotsky contrasted the different methods of Stalinism and Leninism. He reminded the Central Committee that Lenin had never accused the Left Communists of being “rebellious,” nor was a single member expelled from the party when they joined with the Left Social Revolutionaries to oppose the signing of the Brest–Litovsk treaty in 1918. By contrast, Molotov’s use of the word “rebellious” was a sign that Stalin’s faction wanted to accustom the party to the idea of the “destruction of the Opposition,” a tactic that the United Opposition claimed was in basic contradistinction to Leninism.<sup>25</sup>

The United Opposition denied that they were being rebellious. Instead, they accused the Stalinist faction of trying to drive a wedge between the United Opposition and the party, and in the face of the war threat of discarding the “workers of Khabarovsk, Japan, and Afghanistan” and weakening the defense of the state. Therefore, the United Opposition denied that they were organizing a “second party,” but did accuse the Stalinist faction of trying to subordinate not only the Bolshevik party but also the “government apparatus” under its control.<sup>26</sup>

The United Opposition also denied that the revolution was in a period of Thermidorian reaction or that the Bolshevik party was Thermidorian. But, once again, it did reaffirm that Thermidorian elements were “with impunity raising their heads in the party.” Finally, the United Opposition denied that it was revolting against the party and soviet power while it was incontestable that “the Stalinist faction, in order to attain its goals, had cold-bloodedly planned to carry out the physical destruction” of the party and continued to threaten usurping the “highest rights of the party.”<sup>27</sup>

In concluding, the United Opposition emphasized that it would not be “intimidated either by slander or by threats of physical destruction,” and that these tactics would only add to the support which the United Opposition was already receiving from “dozens and hundreds of rank-and-file members.” The United Opposition was committed to “protecting the revolutionary unity of the party” against all usurpers and to do so it reserved the right to “patiently and persistently explain its views.”<sup>28</sup>

Trotsky and his supporters furthermore promised to continue their fight to stand up for the rights of the party:<sup>29</sup>

But against further trammings upon the party rules, against usurpation of the rights of the party congress, against the seizure of all control over party discussion and the party press by an artificially selected faction of Stalinists, against the forced closing of the Opposition’s mouth by the state apparatus, against the doctrine that the leading Stalinist nucleus is irreplaceable, against the theory and practice of usurpationism, the Opposition will fight uncompromisingly by all means consistent with the revolutionary unity of the party and the lasting stability of the dictatorship of the proletariat. The Opposition will not allow the fundamental questions of the proletarian revolution to be decided behind closed doors by the Stalin faction. The party must decide, and it will. We are thoroughly and completely for the revolutionary unity of the party and the Comintern.

In conclusion, the United Opposition made it clear that it was willing to meet halfway any proposals which would improve party relations, to use all its strength to alleviate the internal struggle within the party, and would help create conditions which would allow all sides of the party to develop correct policies at the upcoming Fifteenth Party Congress.

News of the Nanchang Uprising began to arrive in Moscow right at this time. In response, Zinoviev was quick to claim that: “a new revolutionary

war and a new revolution in China were inevitable.”<sup>30</sup> He stated that even Lenin had called for the creation of soviets in China as early as 1920, and it was now time to organize soviets as the center of the revolution. The revolution in China contradicted Stalin’s theory that capitalism had stabilized, the basis for his proposal to build “Socialism in One Country.” In fact, the revolution in China as well as an estimated twenty million unemployed colonial workers throughout the world were solid proofs that capitalism had not stabilized. But the Comintern’s policies had made the “Central Committee of the Chinese Communist Party no better than an appendage to the bourgeois leaders of the Guomindang” and it was now necessary for the Chinese Communists to assert their independence.<sup>31</sup>

Zinoviev concluded his attack against Stalin by asserting that the Centrist faction wished to “walk away from China.” In particular, they wanted to end support for all national-revolutionary movements right when it was most important to return to the Leninist line. In order to succeed, the international movement had to return to the “resolutions of the second and fourth international congresses of the Comintern” before the Comintern “loses the sympathy of the workers and peasants in the East.”<sup>32</sup>

## **Stalin, Trotsky, and the Nanchang Uprising**

On 1 August 1927, Yeh Ting and Ho Lung led a reported 30,000 Communist troops—the core of the Red Army, later renamed the People’s Liberation Army—to victory in Nanchang. Soon afterwards, they were credited with creating China’s first soviet. However, the Nationalist Army quickly surrounded Nanchang, and only three days later the soviet collapsed. Still, for about a week, the Chinese Communists appeared to have entered a new revolutionary phase. While the uprising and its aftermath will be discussed in greater detail in the next chapter, for our purposes here it is sufficient merely to emphasize how Stalin attempted to use these events to attack and destroy Trotsky and the United Opposition.

Following the initial news from China of the Nanchang Uprising, Stalin once again took the offensive and attacked the United Opposition. Criticizing Zinoviev first, he claimed that Zinoviev had only recently supported the Chinese Communists remaining in alliance with the Left Guomindang and had even called for “all-around assistance” to the Hankou government. According to Stalin, a Communist who did not try to transform the Hankou Guomindang into a “revolutionary-democratic dictatorship,” would not be “worth a farthing.” Stalin continued:

True, that attempt failed, because at that stage the imperialists and the feudal landlords in China proved to be stronger than the revolution and, as a consequence, the Chinese revolution suffered temporary defeat. But does it follow from that that the Communist Party’s policy was wrong?

"Of course not," Stalin answered: that would be like saying that the Russian Communists' failure to turn the 1905 Soviets into a "revolutionary-democratic dictatorship" was also a failure.<sup>33</sup>

Stalin then criticized Zinoviev's assertion that Lenin himself had called for soviets to be formed as part of the revolutionary process. Stalin clarified that Lenin had never called for "soviets of workers' deputies in China." In addition, Stalin claimed that Lenin said that "peasant soviets," "people's soviets," or "toilers' soviets" should be formed in countries "*where there is no industrial proletariat, or practically none.*" China, by contrast, had a large working class and so peasant, people's, and toilers' soviets could not be formed until after forming soviets of the working class, which could only be done in the cities. With a tacit reference to the ongoing uprising in Nanchang, Stalin said that this discrepancy proved that the United Opposition was trying to deceive the party when they referred to Lenin's theses about forming soviets in China.<sup>34</sup>

Stalin also claimed that Lenin said, "Only the soviet system is capable of ensuring genuine equality of nations, by uniting first the proletarians and then the whole mass of the working population in the struggle against the bourgeoisie." This advice applied to all capitalist countries. As for countries where "pre-capitalist relations predominate," Lenin said it was "particularly necessary to exert every effort to apply the basic principles of the soviet system ... by setting up 'working people's soviets'."<sup>35</sup> Since Stalin knew in advance that the uprising in China was an urban one, and not rural, he emphasized the importance of the working class over the peasantry.

In conclusion, Stalin accused the United Opposition of "trying to split the Comintern." It must denounce "its 'Thermidor' twaddle and its foolish slogan of a Clemenceau experiment," its support of the "anti-Leninist Maslow-Ruth Fischer group in Germany," and it must stop splitting the Bolshevik party with factionalism. Stalin said: "Such, comrades, are the three chief conditions which must be accepted if we are to allow Trotsky and Zinoviev to remain members of the Central Committee of our Party."<sup>36</sup>

On 6 August 1927, Trotsky tried his best to respond to Stalin. By now, the Nanchang Uprising had failed, but details of what had happened were lacking. Therefore, Trotsky challenged Stalin's accusation of "Trotskyism" as a term that implied absolute denial that socialism could be built in one country. Trotsky disputed that Lenin had ever supported the idea that socialism could be built in one country. He referred to the fact that Stalin and Bukharin had also not thought it was possible up until 1924. The program for the Communist League of Youth, written by Bukharin in 1921 and then approved by Lenin, definitively linked the success of the world revolution and the success of Soviet socialism.<sup>37</sup>

According to the transcripts, Trotsky was shouted down at this point and the plenum continued the discussion of whether Trotsky and Zinoviev should be expelled. Trotsky spoke up again and denounced Stalin for comparing him with Clemenceau. He also opposed the removal of the United Opposition

piece of string,” which in the midst of war might be useful, even though in a small way. He accused the United Opposition of keeping four weapons to use later against the party: Trotsky’s Clemenceau speech, his Thermidorian claims, his refusal to break totally with the Maslow–Ruth Fischer group, and finally, Trotsky’s claim that the factional struggle was caused by the “inner-Party regime.” Stalin then accused the United Opposition of refusing to disband and of planning to hold an illegal meeting in Moscow only a day or two later so that they could continue to attack the Bolshevik party.<sup>42</sup>

Finally, Stalin advised the plenum to remember his reservations, but reiterated that he was willing to make a truce with the United Opposition. Although the plenum considered the 8 August statement to be “insufficient” and reprimanded Trotsky and Zinoviev for their views, it agreed they could remain in the party under the following three conditions:<sup>43</sup>

- 1 Renounce Trotsky’s semi-defeatist theory in face of the threat of war (Trotsky’s thesis on Clemenceau), take the road of absolute and unconditional defense of our socialist motherland against imperialism, and denounce the Opposition’s slander that our party and Soviet leadership have degenerated into Thermidoranism;
- 2 Renounce the policy of splitting the Comintern, denounce the party formed by Maslow and Fischer, who have been expelled from the Comintern, rupture all contacts with that anti-Leninist, divisive party, and carry out all the decisions of the Communist International;
- 3 Renounce the policy of splitting the AUCP (B), denounce the attempt to form a second party, disband the faction, and pledge to carry out all the decisions of the AUCP (B) and its Central Committee.

Although the United Opposition remained in the party, Trotsky was not prepared to give up the fight. He opposed as “a vulgar philistine philosophy” the very idea that the United Opposition should not have the right to voice its own opinions. At the same time, Trotsky defended the declaration of the thirteen. He described why the United Opposition had to check the mistakes of the Centrists, especially with regard to the China policy:

Relations became highly strained, not because of one or another “incautious” step, but because of the abrupt surfacing of very deep differences over the events of the Chinese revolution. On the day of Chiang Kai-shek’s coup, which we predicted, we said, “Stalin will be forced to intensify his struggle against the Opposition tenfold.” How could this have been avoided? Only in one way: by keeping quiet about the mistakes being made or minimizing them by not tracing them back to their point of origin—the purely Menshevik line. But that would have been the road of ideological betrayal. If one is to do one’s duty and call things by their right name, the question of “tone” becomes secondary. Finally, even on the question of “tone” the truth is that we did not commit any

excesses. It was precisely the depth and intensity of the differences over China and the Anglo-Russian Committee that led Stalin to the idea of crushing the top layer of the Opposition as quickly as he could. The collective declaration spread the burden of responsibility to many more shoulders and by that alone helped to soften the blow.

Even though Stalin had used the Nanchang Uprising to win this round, Trotsky felt confident that the truth behind his case would win out: “In the entire history of Bolshevism one could hardly find an example in which events so rapidly revealed the 100 percent incorrectness of one line (the Stalinists’) and the correctness of the other (ours).”<sup>44</sup>

## Conclusions

Although Trotsky was convinced that he and the United Opposition would soon be vindicated, Stalin and Bukharin used their victory in August to continue to broaden their support within the Bolshevik party. In the months between August and December 1927, the developing revolutionary situation in China was to play an important role in the Soviet Union’s factional battles. As before, Stalin and Bukharin used their control over the Comintern to order policies that were intended more to fend off the United Opposition’s criticism than to further the Chinese revolution. They also used the chaotic international scene to denounce the United Opposition as traitors, accusing them of not supporting the party in the face of war.

Although it proved crucial to the outcome of the August plenum, the Nanchang Uprising was short-lived: it began on 1 August 1927, and by 5 August the Communist troops under the leadership of Yeh Ting and Ho Lung were forced to retreat from Nanchang and admit defeat. News of the CCP’s defeat reached Moscow too late to help Trotsky. However, it did reinvigorate discussion over the China policy. In the wake of the August plenum, therefore, the factional debates over the Comintern’s China policy did not die away, but became even more heated.

Following the Nanchang Uprising and the final schism between the CCP and the Left Guomindang, the Comintern’s policy in China was in chaos. Although the Chinese Communist Party had broken with the Right Guomindang in April and the Left Guomindang in July, the Comintern insisted that the CCP was still in the Guomindang and that their new goals should include the strengthening of relations with the “Guomindang masses.”<sup>45</sup> Even more surprising, to avoid the appearance of confirming the United Opposition’s criticism of the United Front, the Chinese Communists were ordered to support armed uprisings under the name of the Guomindang, not under their own party. Although this order may appear minor, such restrictions alienated the Chinese Communist leaders even further; arguably, Moscow’s poor treatment of the CCP during this period would later contribute to Sino-Soviet frictions following 1949.

By resorting to these slight-of-hand methods, the Centrists' policy of supporting the United Front in China appeared to be succeeding. However, the reality behind this façade was very different and the intra-party debates between the United Opposition and the Centrists would prove to be far from over. The next chapter will discuss how these Chinese realities impacted the factional debates that finally culminated in the United Opposition's complete defeat at the Fifteenth Party Congress in December, and to Trotsky's expulsion from the Bolshevik party.

## 9 The Nanchang Uprising and the CCP's "false" line

The timing of the Nanchang Uprising—corresponding to the very first day of the August plenum—was too exact to be a coincidence. It not only allowed Stalin and Bukharin to defeat the United Opposition before the Central Committee, but it helped to set up the final act of the play—the expulsion of Trotsky from the Bolshevik party. With this action, Stalin's philosophy of "Socialism in One Country" decisively defeated Trotsky's "Permanent Revolution." This decision, in turn, sent the Soviet Union down an isolationist path of industrial development that inevitably put the interests of the Soviet state above those of its foreign sympathizers, like China.

Although "Socialism in One Country" helped guarantee the survival of the Soviet state, and so this tactic arguably produced many positive gains—especially during and immediately after World War II—the long-range prognosis for the Bolshevik party was poor; from the perspective of the early twenty-first century, over 15 years after the end of the Cold War and the collapse of the USSR, the enormous implications of this decision are now all too clear. If Trotsky had won this battle during late 1927, then the USSR's prospects for spreading world revolution—especially during the turmoil of the Great Depression—would have been greater. For this reason, the Chinese Communists were destined to play a critical role during a major turning point in twentieth-century history.

Of course, it should be emphasized that the Chinese Communists were not the instigators of this change, they were merely the tools; they were not the players, but the pawns. Stalin was able to defeat Trotsky during the USSR's factional infighting only over the corpses of loyal Chinese allies. Also, as this chapter will show, it was not enough that the CCP had to initiate a series of urban uprisings in China exactly on schedule: it was also expected to lose. This simple fact helps to explain why Comintern advisers like Borodin and Bluker were withdrawn from China only four days prior to the Nanchang Uprising; if Stalin was serious about this CCP uprising, why did he refuse to assist them? In fact, if the CCP had won, and thereby proved the efficacy of world revolution, this would have supported Trotsky's call for permanent revolution, even while undermining Stalin's "Socialism in One Country." Stalin needed to avoid this possibility.

its base throughout all of the Guomindang. Because of China's unique position in between a bourgeois-democratic revolution and a socialist revolution, the CCP could now begin propaganda for soviets but it could not yet organize them. The call for soviets could only be made when the revolution was clearly in an upsurge and when the Chinese Communists had organized a revolutionary Guomindang. In the meantime, Revolutionary Committees should be organized in areas where successful uprisings had taken place.<sup>6</sup> In particular, the restriction against organizing soviets opposed the United Opposition's recent position.

Even though the CCP was no longer linked with the Guomindang in the United Front, it was expected by the Comintern to extend its power in the name of this organization. To do otherwise would confirm what the United Opposition had been saying for over a year, that the CCP had to take a leading role in China's revolution. This was made more difficult after 19 August 1927, when the left and right wings of the Guomindang agreed to overlook their differences and once again began to work together to reunite China.<sup>7</sup> Beginning in January 1928, the Guomindang would once again start the Northern Expedition, and by October of that year succeeded in reuniting North and South China. This would give the Guomindang an almost unassailable position of strength.

The Comintern also made the leadership of the CCP fully responsible for the Nanchang defeat, and soon blamed their failure on the United Opposition. In an article from 12 August 1927, N. Lensner claimed the Chinese Communists had "diverged" from and "rejected" the Comintern's policies. In the first of what would become an ever-increasing trend toward rewriting history, Lensner claimed the Chinese Communists had failed because their line had "lost its way in *Trotskyism*" and they had a "*Trotskyist* appraisal of the basic problems of the Chinese revolution." He condemned the CCP for being Trotskyist because the Seventh Comintern Plenum in December 1926 stated that there would be two revolutions in China—a Nationalist revolution followed by a socialist revolution—while the CCP thought that there would only be one revolution. This deviation was Trotskyist in nature, although Lensner had to admit: "We, of course, do not think to *identify* the tactical line of the CCP's Central Committee as oppositionist. We only maintain that the political methodology of the leadership of the CCP and the Opposition was, basically, one and the same." Lensner furthermore had to admit that the Chinese Communists did not know that they were repeating Trotsky's line but, nevertheless, they "saw the Chinese revolution through Trotskyist eyeglasses."<sup>8</sup>

A final "proof" that the leadership of the CCP was "Trotskyist" was that as early as summer of 1926 they had advocated breaking with the Guomindang. Both the CCP's leadership and the United Opposition thought that it was only possible either to capitulate to the petty bourgeoisie in the Guomindang or to break with it. The correct position was not to see the Guomindang as the party of the Nationalist revolution, but to see it as a bloc of the proletariat, peasants, and urban petty bourgeoisie. It was the "mechanical separation" of the socialist revolution from the Nationalist revolution that was Trotskyist

and that had made it impossible for the Chinese Communists to succeed. Quoting the Chinese Communist Ch'u Ch'iu-pai, Lensner concluded with the following criticism: "In the CCP there are groups, there is opportunism, and this opportunism appears to be a Chinese form of Trotskyism."<sup>9</sup>

One editorial in the 19 August 1927 *Communist International* tried to split hairs by explaining that there were three different interpretations of the "dynamics of the Chinese revolution and the tactics of the Communist International." The first was that of a "single national-revolution front, including the bourgeoisie in *all* periods of the revolution." The Comintern labeled this a right deviation that was turning into Menshevism; this was the line adopted by the CCP. The second line was characterized for its "refusal to tolerate any agreements or any blocs with the bourgeoisie, *independently* from the periods of the development of the revolution." This second line was described as "Trotskyist" and resulted because of a lack of understanding of the "intertwining of the national anti-imperialist revolution and the agrarian revolution" in China.<sup>10</sup>

The CCP's failings were blamed on Trotsky. To explain how the Trotsky line could at the same time be both the same and different from the CCP's line, the editorial added that the second line could appear to be the antithesis of the first line. The third—correct—line was, of course, the Comintern's line. In accordance with Lenin and the second Congress of the Comintern, this line "took into account the necessity of making agreements with the bourgeoisie of colonial and semicolonial countries during *certain periods* of development and under *certain conditions*."<sup>11</sup>

Besides accusing the United Opposition for China's problems, this editorial also denounced the United Opposition of spreading their influence throughout Europe:<sup>12</sup>

If we seriously analyze the actions of the opposition, beginning from the summer of last year, we see that, after the failure of opposition leaders at meetings of workers' cells in Moscow and in Peter [Leningrad], the opposition directed their gaze at Europe. It apparently decided that the Russian workers were hopeless and that loyal believers [*posobnikov*] could be found through all of the renegades expelled from different Communist parties in Western Europe. This explains the fact that beginning from the end of last year, the opposition began to devote less and less attention to the problems of the economic life of the USSR, and specialized more on international problems.

Another article from the same 19 August 1927 issue further explained that the United Opposition was "trying to deny and belittle the fact of the war danger and at the same time they are charged with being responsible for the coming war against the USSR and its government."<sup>13</sup>

All of these views supported Stalin and Bukharin. Since the United Opposition was not able to publish its views in the Bolshevik-controlled

press, it had to use journals that were published outside of the USSR. In the 26 August 1927 issue of *Banner of Communism* the United Opposition claimed that the “Communist International never criticized and never corrected the opportunistic tactics of the Central Committee of the CCP.” According to this view, the Chinese Communists were now “declaring that the policies of the Communist International had led them to the catastrophe for which the Central Committee of the CCP was now being made scapegoat.”<sup>14</sup> However, in their official documents the Chinese Communists had no choice but to accept full responsibility for the failure of the Nanchang Uprising.

## **CCP responsibility is challenged by the United Opposition**

The Chinese Communist Party acknowledged the Comintern’s criticisms in the Central Committee’s August Theses. In a document called “An Appeal from the Shanghai Provincial Committee,” the party leadership admitted that they were “witnesses to the greatest crisis of the Chinese revolution” as the alliance of the “workers, peasants, and urban poor” was faced with the prospect that “the power of the generals, landowners, gentry, local tyrants, suppliers, and exploiters would destroy the country and the people.”<sup>15</sup> As the United Opposition had predicted, the Chinese Communists were saddled with the blame for the failure of the Comintern’s China policy.

On orders from the Comintern, the CCP admitted that the crisis had been brought about because the “Opportunistic line of the leadership of the Communist Party turned to the right, which meant that the Communists in the Guomindang participated in the capitulation of the proletarian vanguard before the petty bourgeoisie.” The CCP’s Central Committee also dutifully observed the Comintern’s instructions and carefully explained that since the formation of soviets should only take place when a bourgeoisie-democratic revolution was changing into a socialist revolution, the “Party should not promote at the present time the slogan of organizing soviets in the cities, countryside, or in the army.”<sup>16</sup>

Trotsky was virtually alone in standing up for the CCP. On 3 September 1927, the thirteen leading members of the United Opposition signed and sent to the Politburo a draft platform for the upcoming Fifteenth Party Congress. Divided into twelve chapters, this program discussed the trade union movement, state industry, the soviets, the national question, and the party dispute. Chapter 9, entitled “Our International Situation and the War Danger,” was primarily concerned with the situation in China: the defeat in China and the defeat of the general strike in Britain “has inspired the imperialists with the hope that they may succeed in crushing the Soviet Union.” Thus, the defeat of the Chinese revolution was responsible for “hastening” the break in diplomatic relations between the Soviet Union and Britain. The United Opposition blamed this outcome on the “Central Committee’s refusal to adopt a real Bolshevik policy in China.”<sup>17</sup>

suppressed and denounced as a “spiteful attack” upon the Chinese party. Afterward, when the dismal failure of Martinov–Stalin–Bukharin became perfectly clear, they attempted to throw all the blame upon the young Chinese Communist Party.

The Centrists were also trying to use Lenin to prop up their gospel of “alliance with the bourgeoisie,” which went against everything that Lenin had ever said about the proletariat depending on their own strength, organization, unity, and weapons. The question of the defeat of the Chinese revolution had to be studied because these “questions will tomorrow become questions of life and death for the working class movement, not only in China but in India and other Eastern countries—and thus, for the entire international proletariat.”<sup>20</sup>

The United Opposition also characterized the Centrists’ policies as placating the capitalist nations by: (1) recognizing the tsarist debts; (2) abolishing the government monopoly over foreign trade; (3) withdrawing support from China; and (4) expanding the NEP within the Soviet Union. This was due to the theory of “Socialism in One Country,” which played a “directly harmful and destructive role” in trying to stabilize the international situation. As a result, support for the international world revolution was being withdrawn and the Centrists were saying: “we have no business ‘butting in’ in China, that we had better ‘get out of China as quick as we can,’ that if we behave ‘reasonably,’ they will ‘leave us alone,’ etc.” By contrast, the United Opposition called for returning to the course outlined by Lenin at the second and the fourth Comintern Congresses, especially in China. Otherwise, the Comintern would be perceived as being a “brake upon the national-revolutionary movement” and would inevitably lose the “sympathy of the workers and peasants of the East.” It was necessary, therefore, for the CCP leaders as soon as possible to “dissolve all organizational and political dependence upon the Guomindang,” and the Comintern must expel the Guomindang.<sup>21</sup>

It would appear that in this document Zinoviev wrote the section about the Chinese revolution, because Trotsky, a year later, stated that “in the Platform, the question of the Chinese revolution was dealt with very insufficiently, incompletely, and in part positively falsely by Zinoviev.”<sup>22</sup> The United Opposition’s Platform was sent to the Politburo on 3 September 1927, but they refused to publish it. In fact, Stalin evidently took it as a new challenge from the United Opposition and postponed the Fifteenth Party Congress for an additional two weeks in order to gain more time for orchestrating the expulsion of Trotsky and Zinoviev from the party.<sup>23</sup>

## Trotsky’s September 1927 article

Trotsky came out with his own separate opinion on China in September 1927 in an article called “New Opportunities for the Chinese Revolution, New Tasks, and New Mistakes.” In this article, he reminded the Centrists that the United

and state apparatus, withstand blockade and sabotage, safeguard the country's most important economic operations, etc.? In essence, this question is tantamount to another question: Does the Chinese revolution in fact have a chance for further development and victory, since roads and methods other than those designated above do not exist?

Trotsky answered "yes." But for this to happen the CCP must have a clear vision of where it was heading and it should realize that the "Chinese revolution at its new stage will win as a dictatorship of the proletariat, or it will not win at all."<sup>27</sup>

## **The Centrist response to the United Opposition**

M.N. Roy presented his opinion of the Chinese revolution in a *Communist International* article from 9 September 1927. According to Roy, the label of "opportunist" was justified because it was the Chinese Communists' "mistaken idea of the United Front" that hindered their leadership in the "class struggle" against the "landowners and capitalists," hindered their "struggle with Chiang Kai-shek after the 20 March [1926] revolution," and hindered their "clear understanding of the counter-revolutionary nature" of the April split in the Guomindang party.<sup>28</sup> Roy argued that all blame be directed at the leaders of the CCP.

Roy listed four factors that contributed to the defeat of the revolution:

- (1) The intervention of imperialism; (2) The military superiority and economic predominance of the counter-revolutionary feudal-bourgeois bloc; (3) The youth and unpreparedness of the revolutionary forces; (4) The political weakness, opportunism and capitulationist policies of the leaders of the Communist Party (Chen Duxiu, Tan Ping-shan, Ch'u Ch'iu-pai, etc.).

This was one of the first times that the leaders of the CCP, like Chen Duxiu, were individually called "capitulators" and "opportunists." Thus, Roy placed most of the blame for the defeat of the Chinese revolution on the leaders of the CCP:<sup>29</sup>

The capitulationist tactics of Chen Duxiu, Tan Ping-shan, and Ch'u Ch'iu-pai have a long history. It in many ways contributed to the defeat of the revolution. But this tactic was not by chance. It had historical motives. It is necessary to study this separately. One of the most valuable lessons of the present defeat of the Chinese revolution is the study of the question of how and why the Chinese Communist Party, which grew from brilliant revolutionary battles and which has in their ranks the proletarian and peasant masses, [who are] always prepared to struggle, had these opportunistic leaders.

As we can see, Roy was careful to condemn the CCP leaders without condemning the party itself. As will be shown below, Stalin still needed the Chinese Communist Party.

In a second article from September, Roy continued to castigate Chen Duxiu as an opportunist. He began by saying that Chen Duxiu had been censured at the Comintern's Seventh Plenum in December 1926, for his "incorrect appraisal ... of the role of the bourgeoisie" in the revolution and for his "opportunistic tactics in the agrarian question." Next, he criticized Chen Duxiu for signing a joint manifesto with Wang Jingwei on 5 April 1927, forming a bloc against Chiang Kai-shek and the Right Guomindang. Even though this was the Comintern's policy in early 1927, Roy now insisted that a "Comintern delegation harshly criticized Chen Duxiu's declaration, threatening to remove him from the leadership of the party if he did not correct his mistakes."<sup>30</sup>

Finally, Roy concluded: "It was noted by the Communist International that it was the opportunism of Chen Duxiu and other leaders of the CCP, which was used by comrades Zinoviev and Trotsky like a club to hit the Communist International."<sup>31</sup> Therefore, Chen Duxiu's crime was that the defeat of the Chinese revolution gave the United Opposition ammunition with which to attack the leaders of the Comintern; meanwhile, the United Opposition was accused of undermining the Chinese Communists. Such cross denunciations would soon become a hallmark of Stalinism.

On 16 September 1927, the *Communist International* published an article by A. Lozovskii finally admitting that the United Opposition had been saying for a long time that the majority of the Chinese bourgeoisie were now opposed to the Chinese Communists. According to Lozovskii, the Left Guomindang had been composed of "workers, peasants and part of the petty bourgeoisie" while the Right Guomindang was made up of the "army, all of the upper and middle classes, and part of the petty bourgeoisie." When the Left Guomindang split with the Chinese Communist Party and reunited with the Right Guomindang, it took with it the petty bourgeoisie, which meant that most of the Chinese bourgeoisie was now part of the "counter-revolution."<sup>32</sup>

By exaggerating Stalin's statistics on rural peasants, which were in turn probably inflated from Mao's numbers, Lozovskii next said that the revolution was now dependent on the "millions of workers" and the "tens of millions of peasants who had joined the peasant unions." The recent defeat in China was already being described as the dress rehearsal for a future victory, and Lozovskii optimistically predicted: "One thing, in all events, is clear, that between the recent defeat of the Chinese revolution and the new national uprising it will be much less [time], than between 1905 and 1917."<sup>33</sup> In fact, it would prove to be almost exactly ten years longer—or 22 years total—finally taking place in 1949.

By the end of September, Stalin and Bukharin had gathered their forces and the United Opposition was clearly in danger of being eliminated. On 26

September 1927, two members of the presidium of the Comintern, Ercoli and Humbert-Droz, signed a letter calling for the United Opposition to return to the fold. The final lines of their letter resembled a threat more than a plea:

If the United Opposition has not killed off all sense of revolutionary responsibility, it should know that it has reached the point beyond which the United Opposition will become counter-revolutionary. In view of this serious situation, we request that the Central Commission carry out an investigation to check up on our accusations and to take measures which will guarantee the Comintern and the Russian revolution against the dangers to the political order which it is subjected to by the work of the United Opposition.<sup>34</sup>

Meanwhile, the United Opposition at this stage was slowly increasing its number of supporters from among the Chinese students at the Sun Yat-sen University. During the fall of 1927, the students asked Borodin to deliver a speech about the current situation in China. Borodin refused. But a meeting was eventually arranged between Borodin and certain selected students at a small hall not far from the campus. According to one participant, He was evasive and the hour-long talk was not very informative. The Chinese students were particularly upset that their questions had not been answered and the “towering reputation that Stalin and Bukharin had acquired among many of us was badly shaken.”<sup>35</sup>

The Centrists' sharp criticism of the CCP's leaders and yet at the same time its evasive responses to basic questions pushed many Chinese students into sympathizing even more with Trotsky. Gradually, many of them became more critical of Stalin and the Comintern and more supportive of the United Opposition's position. Later, “many of the students at Sun Yat-sen University who in this trying period came to sympathize with Trotsky's positions eventually became formal members of the Trotsky opposition.”<sup>36</sup> Some of these issues came to a head at the Comintern's Executive Committee meeting in late September 1927.

## **The September 1927 Comintern Executive Committee and the October plenum**

The Comintern Executive Committee met during late September 1927. At issue was more than the China policy. The United Opposition accused the Comintern of being little more than a department within the Centrist-controlled Soviet government. On 27 September 1927, Trotsky made a speech to the Presidium of the Executive Committee of the Communist International in which he affirmed:

You accuse me of violating discipline. I have no doubt that your verdict is already prepared. Today there is not one organization that discusses

and decides; they only *carry out orders*. Even the Presidium of the Communist International is no exception.<sup>37</sup>

It was clear, to Trotsky at least, that the Comintern had fallen almost completely under the control of Stalin. The China policy was Stalin's one weakness. Trotsky tried to exploit this weakness to his own advantage. He began his discussion of the situation in China by referring to the revolutionary armies under Ho Lung and Yeh Ting. Although these armies had occupied Swatow, in southern China, what slogans and programs did they have? Why weren't they forming Chinese soviets, as even a July edition of *Pravda* had advocated? Finally, why did the Comintern not nullify the resolution from their last plenum that had instructed the Chinese Communists to work with the Guomindang?<sup>38</sup>

In voicing these rhetorical questions, Trotsky hoped to prick the consciences of the Comintern delegates and convince them that it was time for an open discussion of the Chinese situation:

But we say that every honest party member is duty bound to demand the publication of all the documents on the Chinese question and is duty bound to circulate our criticism of the opportunist line of Stalin-Bukharin, and to do so with all the forces and resources possible. The question of the fate of the Chinese revolution stands immeasurably higher than the bureaucratic orders and bans of the CC Secretariat, which are presented as measures of revolutionary proletarian discipline.

Trotsky asked that the theses of the United Opposition be circulated so that new decisions on the situation in China could be made. In particular, Stalin and Bukharin's policy of working with Sun Yat-sen's widow and his former assistant, Eugene Chen, was bound to end yet again with the "workers and peasants being crushed and shot down." By binding the "proletarian vanguard hand and foot," the Comintern was guaranteeing a "third catastrophe."<sup>39</sup>

In particular, Trotsky condemned the continued membership of the Guomindang in the Communist International. Now that the Right and the Left Guomindang had reunited against the Chinese Communists, the time was ripe to stop thinking of expelling the United Opposition members and to start thinking of expelling the Guomindang. In his final comment, Trotsky made it clear that the real battle was between "revolutionists" and "bureaucrats" and that the label of Trotskyism was being used to pervert the party doctrine, not strengthen it:

The fight for the independence of the Communist Party, the fight of the proletariat for the peasantry and against the bourgeoisie, the fight for soviets of workers', peasants', and soldiers' deputies is called by the opportunists *Trotskyism*. Why? In order the more surely to fight against Leninism. Trotskyism is an epithet the bankrupt hide behind when they

have nothing to say. The silence of the Comintern in regard to the new stage of the Chinese revolution, unfolding before our eyes, is evidence of unparalleled confusion. The right road and destination must be pointed out clearly. We cannot be silent. We will not be silent, because we are revolutionists and not bureaucrats.<sup>40</sup>

In effect, the China question had come to symbolize all of the Bolsheviks' revolutionary choices, with Trotsky accurately predicting that how China went, so would go the Bolshevik party. As history has shown, Trotsky's concerns were soon proven to be thoroughly justified.

Stalin responded to Trotsky later that same day. He first criticized the United Opposition for never having any set line on China. Instead, the "Opposition has wobbled, has marked time, has swung to and fro, but it has never had any line, any policy in relation to China." Stalin addressed the three main issues then under dispute: (1) whether the Chinese Communists should stay in the Guomindang; (2) whether soviets should be formed; and (3) the character of the Chinese revolution. Because the United Opposition did not have a set line it proved itself to be "bankrupt" on all three of these questions.<sup>41</sup>

On the first issue, Stalin acknowledged to the Comintern delegates that the United Opposition had started to demand that the Communists leave the Guomindang as early as April 1926. But in April of 1927, the United Opposition—although in reality it was really only Zinoviev—had contradicted itself and called for the Communists to "participate" in the Hankou government with the Left Guomindang. On the issue of soviets, Stalin reminded his listeners that Trotsky and Zinoviev had called for forming soviets in April 1927, but Trotsky envisaged using them to overthrow the Hankou government while Zinoviev saw them supporting that very same government. Finally, on the issue of the character of the Chinese revolution, Stalin pointed to the United Opposition's changing emphasis on a "revolution for customs autonomy" as proof that they did not understand the importance of the agrarian revolution in China.<sup>42</sup>

Stalin next countered Trotsky's "vile gossip" that it was the Comintern that was forcing the Chinese Communists to advance on Guangzhou, and insisted that Ho Lung's and Yeh Ting's march into Guangdong was carried out on the "initiative of the Chinese Communist Party." Now that the "Guomindangists have disgraced and discredited themselves by their connection with the counter-revolution," the situation in China had changed; soviets headed by the Communists could be formed around the workers and peasants. This was possible only because the Chinese Communists would not work with the Guomindang even if a more revolutionary Guomindang appeared on the scene. According to Stalin, this was a very different policy from what the United Opposition had advocated because only "ignoramuses can combine the existence of soviets with the possibility of Communists belonging to the Guomindang party."<sup>43</sup>

Stalin for the first time also attacked Trotsky personally, describing his behavior towards the party as like a “nobleman to the mob,” like a “bureaucrat to his subordinates,” and then later as a “mean party aristocrat.” Stalin next tried to assert that Trotsky himself stated in a speech in 1923 that ever since the Tenth Party Congress he had been carrying out a struggle against the “Leninist regime in the party.” To this, Trotsky answered from the floor: “I did not talk about the Tenth Congress. You are inventing this.” Stalin replied: “Comrade Trotsky is not able not to know that I am able to prove this with documents.” To which Trotsky replied: “You trade unionists, you never proved it before and you can't prove it now. You are lying.” A footnote seems to support Trotsky’s position when it adds that Trotsky had actually said “before the Twelfth Congress” not “after the Tenth Congress.”<sup>44</sup>

Stalin next condemned the United Opposition’s use of a private printing press, conveniently ignoring the fact that the central party publications refused to publish their opinions. In a statement that summed up the Bolsheviks’ views towards party democracy, Stalin said:

If we go in Trotsky’s footsteps, then it is necessary to allow that every one of these groups should have the right to set up their own illegal printing press. We admit that they have indeed set up their own illegal printing press, but the party is not organizing a struggle with this evil—in that case what would be left of the party? Indeed, what would it mean if every and all groups within the party had their own illegal printing press? This would mean permitting the existence of several centers within the party, each having their own “programs,” their own “platforms,” and their own “lines.” Would not this bring to an end the iron discipline in our party, which Lenin thought was the basis for the dictatorship of the proletariat? Is it possible to have this discipline without a single, united central leadership? Do you understand, Comrade Trotsky, into what kind of a swamp you have fallen, by defending the right of opposition groups to organize their own illegal anti-party printing presses?<sup>45</sup>

According to Stalin at least, the United Opposition should not be allowed to publish, period. Party democracy was to be sacrificed to party discipline. Taken to the ultimate extreme, this reasoning eventually doomed the Bolshevik party and the Soviet people to a full-blown dictatorship.

Bukharin also gave a speech on 27 September 1927. He soundly condemned the United Opposition’s accusation that the Comintern was trying to “leave China” and end its support for all national-revolutionary movements:

I submit, that in all of the history of our party, there was *never* such a group or faction which fought with such poisonous weapons as you have fought on this question with our party and the Comintern. The United Opposition knows very well, that this is their invention from beginning to end, that it consciously *lied* on this point.

But later in his speech Bukharin finally did acknowledge that mistakes had been made: "Alright, good, we admit that we made mistakes in China, but, why do you say that we want to 'leave' China." Only because "it is helping you to carry out a policy of *wanton deception*."<sup>46</sup>

Bukharin then accused the United Opposition of having its supporters "speak out in every meeting of every cell" on the China question, to which Trotsky answered from the floor: "We are, you know, a group of intellectuals."<sup>47</sup> Bukharin immediately responded: "You understand 'group' too simply. You are recruiting tens of other—even hundreds of other—intellectuals. But what is this 'group' in comparison with millions of party members?" Later, Bukharin reminded the audience that on 16 October 1926, and again on 8 August 1927, Trotsky had backed down and agreed to support the Bolshevik party: "Right or wrong, it is my party." He then asked Trotsky why he now "did not stand, like a soldier, hands at attention in front of the party, why had he undergone such a change?" Trotsky quickly answered from the audience: "Because you have a stranglehold on the party."<sup>48</sup>

In Bukharin's conclusion he accused the United Opposition of operating an illegal printing press in order to circulate their theses, accused one of the United Opposition leaders, Vuyovitch, of working with agents of "Wrangel"—the former leader of the anti-Bolshevik White forces—and also accused the United Opposition of having an illegal organization. To this third accusation, Trotsky answered from the floor: "Don't make illegal, what ought to be legal." Bukharin continued, saying that the United Opposition's actions proved that they had "deviated from the side of our party, from the Comintern, and from the USSR." In a final warning to Trotsky and his followers, Bukharin said: "if you do not come to your senses in time, it will inevitably be your political death."<sup>49</sup>

On 6 October 1927, Zinoviev responded to these accusations. He disputed Stalin's comparison of the August plenum of the Chinese revolution with the July days of 1917. Instead, Zinoviev said it would be better to compare it to the defeat of the Russian revolution of 1905. But because of the fast pace of change in the international sphere, Zinoviev predicted that instead of taking twelve years to reach their "1917" revolution, the Chinese revolution might require only a year and a half to two years. He advised the CCP to "build illegal bases" all throughout China, and form "illegal cells" within the professional unions, the peasant movement, and in all of the armies. Most importantly, they had to "break conclusively with the counter-revolutionary Guomindang" and expel from the party any member who refused to "break with the Guomindang."<sup>50</sup>

Zinoviev also dashed cold water on the hope that Ho Lung's and Yeh Ting's march into Guangdong would save the revolution. According to reports from recently returned advisers:

- (1) the largest role in the expedition of Yeh Ting and Ho Lung is being played by the circumstance that the soldiers in these ranks—Guangdong

## **The USSR's international position**

The Soviet Union was facing trying times. The constant internecine disputes within the Bolshevik party had not gone unnoticed by the rest of the world. The British, in particular, were watching these events carefully. A report by the Foreign Office from 27 September 1927 estimated that the Soviet war scare in the summer of 1927 had resulted in a drop in industrial output of 10 percent in June, and another 12 percent in July. Panic buying and hoarding accounted for shortages and led to the rationing of cloth and sugar. The total amount of money issued in the third quarter (April–June) was 129 million rubles, a huge increase over the eleven million increase in the previous seven months. These changes were in part due to consumer demand, but might also have been caused by the readjustment in planning due to a “possible war emergency.”<sup>54</sup>

Sir R. Hodgson delivered a lecture on 29 September 1927 at the Imperial Defence College, in which he stated that the monolithic Bolshevik party was now “irretrievably riven” and that a “process of decay has already set in within the Communist Party.” This decay could best be seen in the interminable arguments over policy, proving the Bolsheviks were

too closely wedded to theory, too much the victims of the doctrine on which the revolution was proclaimed to permit of their subscribing to any admission of error—by the nature of things they are condemned to a labour of Sisyphus, to be struggling everlasting to recover the ground which they have yielded to circumstances.

The mood of the Soviet government was also decidedly pacific, and the Bolshevik party was actually “afraid of war because it believes that war, whether successful or not, would lead to a military dictatorship and its own downfall.” Although the Soviet government might “do a lot of sabre rattling in order to create a diversion in internal politics” it would actually go “a long way to avoid it.”<sup>55</sup>

Internationally, the Soviet Union could no longer look both to Europe and to Asia; it had now to turn to Europe alone, and to maintain relations with Europe it must “abjure the mischievous propensities of the Communist Party.” The Comintern, therefore, was a “doomed institution” and was likely to “dissolve into a number of discordant groups distrustful of guidance from Moscow.” The Soviet government was now turning away from world revolution, and in its place was the “ambition to build up the single Socialist State which will act as a beacon to the proletariat of other countries.” Internally, the USSR was going through huge changes. Hodgson referred to Karl Radek on this issue:

I have heard Karl Radek, who is a sagacious if sinister observer, prophesy that Russia ten years hence will be nothing more nor less than a

With respect to China, the United Opposition in particular accused the Comintern of “betraying the Chinese revolution.” Later, when the plenum supported Stalin’s policy of “Socialism in One Country” and passed the first Five-Year Plan, the United Opposition accused it of supporting a “left zigzag.”<sup>59</sup>

Trotsky attacked Stalin during the course of the October plenum meetings by once again openly referring to Lenin’s Testament, in which Lenin had called Stalin “rude” and had recommended that Stalin be removed from his position in the party. Stalin, in turn, pointed to a statement made by Trotsky in 1925 that had denied that there even was a “last testament” and Stalin proposed that the United Opposition be expelled from the Central Committee.

At the joint plenum in August, Stalin had almost been successful in convincing the Central Committee to expel Trotsky and Zinoviev from its ranks, but at the last minute the United Opposition compromised and was allowed to remain in the Central Committee. In addition, the Nanchang Uprising failed too quickly, giving the United Opposition a short reprieve. Now, however, the Central Committee agreed with Stalin. On 23 October 1927, it issued a resolution stating:

comrades Trotsky and Zinoviev for the second time deceived the party and in the rudest manner broke the commitments to which they pledged themselves, and not only did not obliterate “the elements of factionalism,” but, on the contrary, brought the factional struggle against the party and its unity to a stage that verged on the formation of a new anti-Leninist party together with bourgeois intellectuals.<sup>60</sup>

The next issue of the *Communist International* from 4 November 1927 was devoted to the celebration of the tenth anniversary of the October revolution. Besides roundly lambasting the United Opposition in the main editorial, it also included personal articles by foreign revolutionaries such as the Hungarian Communist Bela Kun and the Japanese socialist Sen Katayama. These personal articles not only adopted the current line of the Bolshevik party, but also went out of their way to think of new reasons for criticizing the United Opposition. Sen Katayama even recalled how he had originally thought that Trotsky must be “very haughty from the consciousness of his own greatness” simply because he heard that Trotsky was the only Bolshevik leader who had a powerful enough voice to be heard in all four corners of Red Square.<sup>61</sup>

The editorial further claimed that three great revolutionary waves had followed from the October revolution: first, those revolutions that occurred during 1918–20; second, the abortive German revolution of 1923; and, third, the general strike in England and the revolution in China. The editorial then became more self-congratulatory, as it also praised the Soviet Bolshevik party for supporting these revolutions, either directly or through the Comintern, with its “facilities, people, and leadership.” These “Western and Eastern” Communist parties learned not only from their own experiences of “victory

and defeat" but also from the experiences of the "Russian Bolshevik party" and from the "Russian Revolution." In an indication of how self-centered the Bolshevik party was becoming as a result of the defeats in China, the editorial concluded that these "Western and Eastern" Communist parties "had learned, are learning, and will more and more learn to speak 'Russian,' and will become more and more bolshevized."<sup>62</sup>

All of these points confirmed the progressively isolationist stance taken by the leaders of the Bolshevik party. Trotsky and Zinoviev had fought against this dangerous trend during the ten years between October 1917 and October 1927, when they were expelled from the Central Committee. As this work has tried to show, their expulsion was integrally linked to the United Opposition's decision to challenge the Comintern's China policy. Although the United Opposition tried to get its message out among the rank-and-file members of the Bolshevik party, they were cut off from the official party journals and were criticized for using illegal printing presses. As Martinov had warned, the Bolshevik party had changed rapidly during the past ten years: one important sign of this change was that new members far outnumbered the "Old Bolsheviks." As a result, Trotsky and Zinoviev were talking to smaller and smaller sympathetic audiences.

## Conclusions

A second insurrection led by Ho Lung and Yeh Ting in Swatow and Hunan during the fall of 1927 failed. The goal was to capture the port city of Swatow so that arms and munitions could be shipped to them from the Soviet Union. Although the Communists attacked on 23 September 1927, which corresponded exactly to the Comintern's Executive Committee meeting in late September, they occupied it for only six days before the 10,000 surviving troops were forced to evacuate to the west. In the Central Report Number 13, dated 30 October 1927, the CCP Executive Committee criticized Yeh Ting and Ho Lung for not calling for the confiscation of land, as well as the confiscation of foreign industries, banks, etc., in order to gain greater proletarian support.<sup>63</sup>

Back in Moscow, Trotsky later referred to these insurrections as "pseudo-Communist Makhno" feats that could never have survived because of their own isolation.<sup>64</sup> While the different factions in Moscow were arguing about the course that the revolution in China should take, the reality of the Chinese Communists' weakness were becoming more and more clear in China. In Hunan, the size of the Communist Party membership in September 1927 had dropped to between one-third and three-quarters of the level existing before 21 May, the date of the disastrous "Horse Day Incident."<sup>65</sup> Unseen to the majority of Bolsheviks in Moscow, the Communist movement in China was rapidly losing strength.

During this period, the Chinese Communist Party followed Comintern orders by dutifully calling for "a thoroughgoing land revolution," and the

peasants were instructed to “confiscate the land belonging to the big and middle landlords” and “to kill all the local bullies and bad gentry.”<sup>66</sup> But according to a report from the secretary of the Hubei Provincial Committee on 10 September 1927, a group of 2,000 peasants in Kiangling only had “ten Browning automatic rifles and 1,000 or more homemade rifles, swords, and spears.”<sup>67</sup> This general military unpreparedness was to lead to the resounding defeat of the Autumn Harvest Uprising in Hunan, a sure sign of the weakness of the agrarian revolution.

During the fall of 1927, the Chinese Communist Party proposed a new “Draft Program on the Agrarian Question,” which was intended to take the Chinese revolution into an important new stage. For the first time, this draft program conceded that the peasantry was opposed by numerous stratum of the Chinese countryside, which included the “landowners, suppliers, gentry, local tyrants, and kulaks.” The CCP now had to “organize and prepare” for an armed struggle against these groups as well as to build soviets of deputies from the workers, peasantry, and “urban poor” so as to implement a “non-capitalist path of development.” Included in this proposed plan would be the confiscation of all “privately owned land” and its transfer into “general ownership of all of the working people, organized as a Soviet Government.”<sup>68</sup>

As part of this new phase, the Comintern ordered the Chinese Communists to carry out an urban uprising in Guangzhou. What was to be popularly called the “Canton Commune” was portrayed as the culmination of years of effort to formulate a successful China policy. The decision to stage a revolt in Guangzhou was made on 17 November 1927. As we shall see in the next chapter, the Canton Commune was timed exactly to correspond with the 2 December 1927 opening of the Bolshevik party’s Fifteenth Party Congress.

In a manner similar to the Nanchang Uprising, even though the Canton Commune failed, its short life would have a direct impact on the factional struggles taking place at the same time in Moscow. News of the Canton Commune coincided with the Fifteenth Congress’s decision to expel Trotsky, Zinoviev, and many other members of the United Opposition from the Bolshevik party. By the time that news of the Canton Commune’s spectacular defeat reached Moscow, Trotsky and Zinoviev had already been ousted, and it was too late to reverse this decision. The next chapter will examine these events in greater detail.

# 10 The Canton Commune and Trotsky's expulsion from the Bolshevik party

The December 1927 Canton Commune was the culmination of years of effort on the part of the Comintern to formulate what it claimed would be a successful China policy. As we have seen in the previous chapter, following the Nanchang Uprising the policy of organizing other "armed uprisings" was adopted as early as 7 August 1927, while the decision to stage an uprising in Guangzhou—Canton—was already made by 17 November 1927. The Comintern stated that an uprising in Canton would spur a worker-peasant revolution. A second Northern Expedition led by the Communists would then follow, allowing the Chinese Communist Party to defeat the Guomindang and reunite China under its power.

The Canton Commune was a disaster for many reasons: bad timing, lack of organization, and insufficient support among the Canton workers were simply some of the more obvious problems. But even though the Canton Commune failed miserably, it had a direct impact on the factional struggles taking place in the USSR. In fact, the Comintern insisted that the uprising be carried out on schedule mainly to satisfy Moscow's timing, not that of the Chinese revolution. The intended "benefit" that accrued to the Soviet leadership was that when news of the Canton Commune reached Moscow, it gave Stalin and Bukharin the crucial leverage they had formerly lacked to expel Trotsky, Zinoviev, and a number of other United Opposition leaders from the Bolshevik party.

By the time that news of the Canton Commune's defeat first began to appear at the Fifteenth Party Congress, Trotsky and Zinoviev had already been ousted from power; no amount of recriminations on the part of the United Opposition could reverse this decision. Although proclaiming that the defeat of the United Opposition would increase party unity, a new—the Right Opposition—faction soon appeared, and Bukharin eventually became its leader.

Only during 1928 and 1929, therefore, was Stalin able to destroy his former ally Bukharin and take full power for himself once again. Control over the course of the Chinese revolution proved to be a major weapon in Stalin's factional arsenal.

## The United Opposition and the Fifteenth Party Congress

On the tenth anniversary of the Bolshevik revolution—7 November 1927—Radek and Zinoviev tried to address workers in Leningrad at a public rally. But by government order they were kept under house arrest by the police and the mass demonstrations were halted before they even started. Similar demonstrations took place in Moscow as supporters of the United Opposition marched on Red Square. They were stopped at the base of Lenin's tomb by a double row of militiamen. Only the Chinese students were able to proclaim their views unchallenged when they unfurled a red banner beneath the official stand that said: "Down with Opportunism in the Chinese Revolution."<sup>1</sup> Following the constant defeats in China, the United Opposition seemed to be gaining ground. However, the outbreak of the Canton Commune in early December 1927 shifted the balance of power once again toward the Centrists, who used this opportunity to destroy the United Opposition once and for all.

The factional infighting between the Centrists and the United Opposition was bitter. In some respects it even took on characteristics of a civil war. Gangs of hoodlums were organized by Moroz, a former officer of the Cheka, and by Yaroslavsky. Under the orders of leading members of the Central Committee, they carried whistles and clubs into party meetings to make sure that the United Opposition could not be heard. On the last occasion that Trotsky spoke in a Central Committee meeting, one of Yaroslavsky's gang members threw a book at his head. This prompted Trotsky to announce: "Well, if you can't use books to persuade people, you can at least knock them down with 'em."<sup>2</sup>

On 14 November 1927, the Central Committee and the Central Control Commission recommended expelling Trotsky and Zinoviev from the party at the next Congress, which had been rescheduled to meet in early December, because of their "illegal anti-party meetings" and the "extension of intra-party discussions beyond the limits of the party."<sup>3</sup> Interestingly, the Canton Commune was also originally scheduled for November, but both events were moved back by about two weeks, thus showing how they were intrinsically linked.

The Central Committee also expelled Kamenev, Smilga, Evdokimov, Rakovsky, and Avdeev outright from the Central Committee. Meanwhile, Muralov, Bakaev, Shkovsky, Peterson, Solovev, and Lizdin were expelled from the Central Control Commission. Finally, the Central Committee and the Central Control Commission warned Radek and eleven "comrades" belonging to the United Opposition that the Fifteenth Party Congress would discuss their "compatibility" of "remaining in the ranks" of the Bolshevik party.<sup>4</sup>

In preparation for the upcoming Congress, a vote was taken in 2,290 general party cells. According to the *Communist International*, 270,268 Bolshevik members voted for the Central Committee's line while only 2,027 votes supported the United Opposition. The editorialist proudly announced

The Congress also declared that “adherence to the Trotskyite opposition and the propagation of its views are incompatible with membership in the ranks of the Bolshevik Party,” but did not—it is important to note—actually expel members of the United Opposition from the Bolshevik party at this time.<sup>9</sup>

At the same time as the Centrists were trying to defeat the United Opposition, the Soviet government attempted to reopen diplomatic relations with Great Britain. Foreign Minister Litvinov even called Austen Chamberlain on 4 December 1927, and they agreed to meet the following day. At this meeting, Litvinov disclaimed “any power to control the Third International,” insisting that because the Comintern was comprised of Communist parties from “Great Britain, Germany, France, and other countries” the Soviet government could not tell it what to do.<sup>10</sup>

By late 1927, this claim was patently untrue. Chamberlain clearly did not believe Zinoviev and stated he

regarded the Communist International as one of the organs of the Russian government, and, as long as they professed that there had been nothing improper in their diplomatic methods in the past and refused to control the Communist International and like bodies in the future, there was no basis for any agreement between us.

Litvinov repeated that it was impossible for the Soviet government to promise that it could control the Comintern, and if that was a precondition of reopening relations then there was nothing more to be said. Chamberlain agreed and the meeting ended, but not before Litvinov requested that nothing be said in public about their talks.<sup>11</sup>

Litvinov’s request for secrecy stems from the fact that Chamberlain was clearly making a secret offer to the Soviet Union: order a retreat in China and in return diplomatic and economic relations could be reopened between Great Britain and the USSR. This offer could potentially give many economic advantages to the Soviet government, which had already declared that its highest priority was the construction of state industry; Great Britain could provide important technical assistance to make this possible. On the international stage, reopening relations with London might also decrease mounting tensions in both Europe and Asia.

## **The timing of the Canton Commune**

The recent failures of the Centrist policies in China appeared to support the United Opposition’s criticisms of Stalin and Bukharin; perhaps for this reason the Fifteenth Party Congress initially refused to expel Trotsky and Zinoviev outright. This all changed on 11 December 1927, however, when a Communist insurrection orchestrated by two Comintern agents—the German Heinz Neumann and the Georgian Besso Lominadze—seized the southern city of Canton and immediately formed a socialist commune.<sup>12</sup> The news of this

opening of the Fifteenth Party Congress, which Stalin delayed by two weeks, thus giving the Chinese Communists more time to prepare.

By 13 November 1927, the Comintern had sent another directive ordering greater preparation among the soldiers in Canton and the organization of workers' soviets. Finally, Strakov describes a final directive from the Comintern to the Communists in Canton:

This directive certainly still did not talk about when to begin the uprising, but did discuss the necessity of preparing for the uprising, since both the whole situation and the objective conditions permitted us to carry it out. I repeat, that it did not discuss exactly when it was possible to begin the uprising, that it was possible to begin the uprising now.<sup>18</sup>

## **The failure of the Canton Commune**

After the Canton Commune was already over, there were many disputes on how large it really was. According to one article only 27,000 people took part in the uprising: 20,000 workers; 2,000 soldiers; 2,000 peasants; 800 freed political prisoners; 2,000 Communists and Komsomol members.<sup>19</sup> Of these, over 5,700 participants were killed by Guomindang troops when the uprising was suppressed. If true, then these relatively small numbers would suggest that the Canton Commune was not widely supported by the population of Guangdong province, which numbered in the tens of millions.

According to one Soviet analysis of these events, the Canton Commune failed for six reasons: (1) The Chinese Communists had already suffered heavy defeats; (2) Canton was isolated; (3) The imperialists helped to suppress the uprising; (4) The constant strikes meant that many industrial workers were not living in Canton at the time; (5) The workers and peasants did not know how to use weapons; and (6) The workers' and peasants' revolts were not unified. Ch'u Ch'iu-pai agreed with the first point when he stated that the Canton Commune followed upon "three great defeats of the Chinese proletariat" during 1927: Chiang's coup in April, the Hankou debacle in July, and the unsuccessful expedition of Ho Lung and Yeh Ting in October.<sup>20</sup> The failure at Nanchang was not even mentioned.

Several more commonsense reasons exist for the failure of the Canton Commune. One explanation suggested that Wang Jingwei heard about the possibility of an uprising in Canton and sent a telegram on 9 December 1927 informing Chiang Kai-shek that it was planned for 15 December 1927. Coincidentally, this date would have almost exactly corresponded with the final days of the Fifteenth Party Congress in Moscow. When the Communists realized that the Guomindang knew what they were up to, the uprising was pushed ahead and it began before dawn on 11 December 1927. A total of seven columns of "red guards" took the major points of the city and freed all of the prisoners in the prisons. Within the first two hours of the uprising the city had been taken, with the important exception of the city's armory.<sup>21</sup>

According to this account, a soviet government was quickly formed, with sixteen members.<sup>22</sup> However, the Canton Commune fell apart within only three days because of the lack of support among the workers and peasants. A full thousand members of the “Red Guards” did not even show up for the uprising because they never “received notification about the time of the uprising.” One Chinese commentator even claimed that fewer than 100 people were killed in the uprising itself, but an estimated 5,700 people lost their lives during the post-revolt purge carried out by the Guomindang.<sup>23</sup> In the midst of the repression the Soviet advisers did not escape unscathed. The Soviet consul in Canton, B.A. Poxvalinskij, was arrested and several Chinese employees and five Soviet workers in the Canton consulate were shot, including A.I. Xassis, V.A. Ukolov, K.S. Ivanov, F.I. Popov, and P.P. Makarov.<sup>24</sup>

Lominadze, a Comintern agent who had worked in China, published an article in late December 1927 entitled “The Historical Meaning of the Canton Uprising.” This article celebrated the Canton Commune as the “first large independent appearance of the Chinese workers in the struggle for political power.” Instead of fighting in a bloc with the Nationalist bourgeoisie, he claimed, the Chinese workers were now leading a bloc with the peasantry and the urban poor and fighting against the bourgeoisie “under the banner of the soviets.” This made it the beginning of a new epoch in the Chinese revolution—a “civil war” of gigantic proportions. The Canton Commune also had international importance, since this new uprising was a “blow to English imperialism” and the “worker-peasant revolution in southern China carried with it even more terrible danger to the colonial rule of England and other imperialist countries.”<sup>25</sup>

But in a report written after the fact by the Chinese military commander, Yeh Ting, entitled “Report on the Canton Insurrection,” the Canton Commune was described in different terms. According to this account, only 4,200 people participated in the Canton Commune and of these, only 1,200 were troops. They faced more than 7,000 government troops in the city itself and some 50,000 more troops outside of the city. The only way for the Commune to have survived would have been if they had received support from workers and peasants. But Yeh Ting reported that this did not take place:

The masses took no part in the insurrection. All shops were closed, and the employees showed no desire to support us. Most of the soldiers we disarmed dispersed in the city. The insurrection was not linked to the difficulties of the railway workers. The reactionaries could still use the Canton–Hankow line. The workers of the power-plant cut off the light, and we had to work in the dark. The workers of Canton and Hong Kong as well as the sailors did not dare join the combatants. The river sailors placed themselves shamefully at the service of the Whites. The railway workers of the Hong Kong and Canton–Hankow line transmitted the telegrams of the enemy and transported their soldiers. The

The Bolshevik party's attempt to exert authority over the member parties of the Comintern is especially important when one considers how negatively these parties reacted to the decisions of the Fifteenth Party Congress. For example, the French magazines *Bulletin of Communists* and *Revolutionary Proletarian* called Stalin "first consul Stalin," labeled Bukharin as "kulak defender Bukharin" and evidently described the Soviet Union as a "Republic of Thermidors" and their economic program as "economic construction for NEPmen."<sup>35</sup>

By January 1928, the sacrifice of the USSR's Chinese allies had allowed Stalin and Bukharin to arrest a large number of their political opponents and exile them to Siberia and a number of Soviet Central Asian republics. Meanwhile, Chinese Communists who survived this defeat never forgot that it was their comrades' lives that had been sacrificed to further the Centrists' power. Such memories could not help but cloud future relations between China and the USSR.

### **The long-term impact of the Canton Commune**

The Canton Commune was an enormous failure. In addition to the huge losses suffered by the CCP and the Communist International, the Soviet government suffered diplomatic setbacks. On 15 December 1927, the Guomindang government in Nanjing sent a note via the Soviet consul in Shanghai withdrawing recognition of the Soviet consulates in the provinces that the Nanjing government controlled. Furthermore, they accused the Soviet consulates and commercial offices of being used for "red propaganda and as refuges for communists" and, in particular, claimed that the Soviet consulate in Canton had been used as a base for the Guangdong revolutionary movement.<sup>36</sup>

Later during December 1927, Foreign Minister Chicherin protested the death of the Soviet vice-consul in Canton—Khassis—and the "violence, murder, and expulsions committed against Soviet citizens" during and after the Canton insurrection.<sup>37</sup> He blamed England in particular for spurring on and inspiring the anti-revolutionary atrocities. Chicherin stated that "English imperialist reaction must be recognized as the chief motive force of the Canton blood-letting," promising that the Soviet government would not allow "these savage acts" to go unpunished.<sup>38</sup>

In addition to the expulsion of the United Opposition, the Fifteenth Party Congress was a landmark event because it also passed resolutions that called for the preparation of the first Five-Year Plan and moved closer to the decision to carry out collectivization of agriculture and rapid industrialization. The scope and tempo of these two policies was not clarified by the Congress, but it was stated that the transition from "fragmented peasant farms to large-scale production" should be "gradual."<sup>39</sup> Industrialization should continue "without slowing down," and the goal was the "*rationalization* of production and administration."<sup>40</sup>

At the same time Stalin warned the delegates to the Fifteenth Party Congress that those who had profited under NEP, both in business and in

agriculture, would more violently oppose the government as it approached socialism: “the characteristic feature of the new bourgeoisie is that, in contrast to the working class and the peasantry, it has no basis to be satisfied with Soviet power.” Therefore, it would be necessary to worry about the “counter-revolutionary sentiments in this group.”<sup>41</sup>

It is highly ironic that Stalin’s economic decisions closely paralleled Trotsky’s earlier warnings about NEP, right at a time when the Bolshevik Congress agreed to expel the United Opposition from the party. But these decisions also reveal how the destruction of the United Front policy in China had a direct influence on the Soviet Union, since these failures meant there was no longer any reason to put the international revolution above the building of socialism in the USSR. This change in orientation was arguably one of the most important side-effects of the defeat of the Chinese revolution.

Stalin and Bukharin also made several organizational changes intended to strengthen their position. The Central Committee was given more power since the Congress agreed to hold Party Congresses every two years, instead of every year, and an expanded Central Committee of 71 members and 50 candidate members was elected. This increased the number of Stalinists on the Central Committee. Meanwhile, the Politburo was now composed of Stalin, Bukharin, Voroshilov, Kalinin, Molotov, Rykov, Tomsky, Rudzutak, and Kuibyshev. The candidate member Uglanov was a supporter of Bukharin, but all of the other candidate members—including Petrovskii, Andreev, Kirov, Mikoyan, Kaganovich, Chubar, and S.V. Kosior (not to be confused with the Trotsky-supporter V.V. Kosior)—were reportedly all Stalinists.<sup>42</sup>

As the previous section has shown, reports of a successful commune in Canton were perfectly timed to contribute to the downfall of Trotsky, Radek, and the other United Opposition leaders. Clearly, Stalin and Bukharin had the support of most of the delegates even before the announcement of the Canton Commune, but this apparent victory made it virtually unanimous. One *Communist International* editorial from 23 December 1927 called the Fifteenth Congress a “turning point in the international workers’ movement” and declared that the “Canton insurrection (in spite of its defeat) demonstrated that the great Chinese revolution was alive and evolving.”<sup>43</sup>

However, eye-witnesses to the Canton Commune disputed such claims. Their comments focused instead on the almost complete lack of organization throughout the city. According to one account, the uprising was orchestrated mainly by “poor farmers and dissatisfied workers” who then tried to get the non-commissioned officers and soldiers to join them by immediately increasing their salaries and promising them land and political representation.<sup>44</sup>

News of the Canton Commune eventually reached Moscow. At the end of December 1927, Trotsky commented on the events in China in an article entitled “At a New Stage.” He admitted that control over the Bolshevik party was completely in Stalin’s hands and that the Centrist faction now had power throughout the entire country. According to Trotsky, the policies of

The banishment of the Opposition to Siberia will deepen the cleft between Communist Russia and *bourgeois* Europe. It casts a brilliant light on a world incomprehensible to us, a world which few wish to understand or try to understand. As a matter of fact, this country today is much the same as it was under Catherine, who wrote excellent maxims to all the famous men in Europe but acted otherwise in her own country.<sup>47</sup>

Twenty members of the United Opposition addressed a petition during January 1928 to the Executive Committee of the Comintern as well as to each of the Communist parties that were members of the Comintern. Trotsky and Radek were included in this number, while Zinoviev and Kamenev were noticeably absent. The petition protested the exile of dozens of the United Opposition members tried under article 58 of the Soviet Criminal Code. This article had originally been intended to protect the Soviet Union against counter-revolutionaries, not against those "soldiers of October" who had done so much for the "establishment, defense, and consolidation of Soviet power."<sup>48</sup>

This petition also warned that the exile of old party members was merely a "new link on the chain of events" that had rocked the Bolshevik party in recent years. The struggle within the Bolshevik party had been carried out without the Comintern's participation, and even without its knowledge, since so many of the United Opposition's documents had not been presented to the member parties of the Comintern. The United Opposition warned that this situation was extremely dangerous for international Communism and had been brought about by the "incorrect" leadership in both the Bolshevik party and the Communist International.<sup>49</sup>

Most importantly, this petition reiterated that the theory of "Socialism in One Country" could not be isolated from the "fate of the international proletariat revolution as a whole." It could not be ignored that this theory would sap the "theoretical and political" foundations of "proletarian internationalism":<sup>50</sup>

The root of the revision of Marxism and Leninism in the basic question concerning the international character of the proletariat revolution, is that from 1923 until today has been a period of serious defeats of the international proletariat revolution: 1923—in Bulgaria and Germany, 1924—in Estonia, 1926—in England, 1927—in China and Austria. These defeats made it possible to introduce the concept of the stabilization of capitalism, which temporarily stabilized both the world bourgeoisie and strengthened the position of our own international bourgeoisie, and gave it the possibility of associating with many members of the soviet government apparatus, increased the pressure of this later group on the party apparatus and resulted in the weakening of the left wing in our party. During these same years in Europe arose a temporary revival of the social-democrats, the temporary weakening of the communist parties

of the proletariat and peasantry) ... The transition to the proletarian dictatorship is possible here only after a series of preparatory stages, only as a result of a whole period of the growing over of the bourgeois democratic revolution into the socialist revolution.<sup>58</sup>

By describing China's revolutionary situation as a bourgeois-democratic revolution and by saying that it had to go through many more "preparatory stages," the Comintern really denied that the Chinese revolution had progressed at all since Chiang's April coup.

In fact, in all previous descriptions of the Chinese failure, the magnitude of this defeat was usually lessened so as not to give the United Opposition any ammunition against the Centrists. Now, for the first time, the Comintern admitted the seriousness of the setbacks that the Chinese revolution had sustained:

The first wave of the broad revolutionary movement of the workers and peasants which, in the main, proceeded under the slogans and to a considerable extent under the leadership of the Communist Party is over. It ended in a number of centers of the revolutionary movement with heavy defeats for the workers and peasants, with the physical extermination of the Communists and of the revolutionary cadres of the labor and peasant movements in general.<sup>59</sup>

As before, the Comintern defeats in China were largely blamed on the "opportunistic" leadership of the CCP as well as those Comintern advisers who were "politically responsible to the Communist International," like the German agent Heinz Neumann.<sup>60</sup> These failures led to new changes to the CCP's revolutionary policies, which moved the Chinese Communist Party closer to the USSR. Perhaps the best example of this was the division of the Chinese peasantry into distinct groups.

### **Changes to the CCP's revolutionary policies**

During the period immediately following the failed Canton Commune, the CCP's policies began to mirror those in the USSR. Just as Stalin planned to force more grain from the peasants by suppressing the kulaks, the Chinese Communists also began to differentiate between the loyalty of the peasants, dividing them into "poor," "middle," and "rich" peasants. In fact, the Chinese Communist Party's Draft Resolutions on the Peasant Question had grouped kulaks in China along with the landowners in the fall of 1927, significantly earlier than a similar distinction was made in the Soviet Union. In an article by Xiao Yue from January 1928, he claimed that to Trotsky the peasantry were merely "a part of the bourgeoisie" and any alliance with the peasantry should be "extremely short" or else the proletariat would be forced into using oppressive measures against them. But for Stalin

and Bukharin, the poor peasants were the proletariat class's "reserve forces" and only by uniting "industry and the peasant economy" would it be possible to build the foundation on which to "construct a socialist economy."<sup>61</sup>

Even after describing the "physical extermination" of the Chinese Communists following the Canton Commune, the Comintern decided that the "revolutionary tide" was rising. In the eleven resolutions of the Ninth Comintern Plenum, the Comintern announced that the "mass revolutionary movement in China has now moved into a new, soviet stage, with the workers and peasants at the helm." This new stage of the revolution was evident because of the Canton Commune, the sovietization of certain counties in Guangdong province, and the growth of the revolutionary movement in Hunan, Shaanxi, Hubei, Honan, Shandong, Manchuria and "in the northern provinces generally." To organize and motivate this "mass armed uprising," the Comintern recommended the following slogans "Confiscate the landowners' land," "Eight-hour workday," "Free China from imperialism," "Overthrow the present government," "Dictatorship of the proletariat and peasantry," and "Organize soviets."<sup>62</sup>

The situation in the countryside was especially important, since the revolution was developing at different rates in the cities and in the countryside. The Comintern admitted that at this time "the provincial peasant movement is advancing further" because the workers' movement in the industrial centers was undergoing a "white terror" which had put it in a "stage of certain digression."<sup>63</sup> The Comintern also recommended that besides organizing peasant unions and committees, they should also "pay special attention to working among the poor peasants with special organization of the rural proletarian elements."<sup>64</sup>

But, organizational work had to be carried out both in the cities and in the countryside, since the basis of the revolution would still be the urban proletariat:

While leading the spontaneous guerrilla actions of the peasants in various provinces, the Party must recognize that these actions can be transformed into the takeoff point of a victorious national uprising only if they are linked up with a new upsurge of the revolutionary wave in the proletarian centers. Here also the Party must see its main task in preparing general and coordinated actions in the villages and towns of a number of neighboring provinces, actions prepared and organized on a broad scale. In this connection, it is necessary to combat being enthusiastic about scattered and uncoordinated guerrilla actions, which are doomed to failure ... [although] the ECCI considers that the main task of the Party in the sovietized peasant districts is to carry out the agrarian revolution and otherwise organize Red Army detachments [so] that these detachments will then be gradually unified into one general all-Chinese Red Army.<sup>65</sup>

claim that smacked of Trotsky's theory of the permanent revolution. Unlike Trotsky's concept of a democratic phase of the revolution being followed by a socialist phase, the Central Committee split hairs to explain that the Chinese revolution "had the possibility in the future to grow into a socialist revolution."<sup>72</sup> The difference between this theory and Trotsky's "permanent revolution" was small, but what was important was for the CCP to deny having any connection at all with Trotsky and the United Opposition.

The Central Committee's instructions further explained which elements should be organized in the countryside. First, it was important to organize trade unions at the county and village level, to organize "craftsmen in the urban settlements and in villages" as well as to "organize all proletarian elements in the countryside." Second, in districts where soviet power had already been established, workers' unions for "farm laborers" should be established. Finally, work among the army was important and it was necessary to first bring about the "demoralization of the enemy's army" and then to "draw the mass of the soldiers over to the side of the revolution." At the proper time, when the revolution "matured," all of these mass organizations would be united under a soviet that would be organized as the "leading organ of the uprising."<sup>73</sup>

## Conclusions

Comintern instructions to the CCP proved that the theoretical base of the revolution in the Chinese countryside had gradually dwindled. At the beginning of the United Front in 1923 the Chinese revolution had included all levels of peasantry below landowners, from the agricultural laborers through tenant farmers and up to and including independent farmers, who were categorized by Chen Duxiu as the "middle" and "petty bourgeoisie." In the midst of the tumultuous events of 1927, the numbers of peasants in the peasant unions ranged from a "low" of nine million to high estimates in the tens of millions. Now, however, the United Front was described as being stripped first of the middle bourgeoisie, next of the petty bourgeoisie, and finally, even tenant farmers—the semi-proletariat—were no longer considered reliable.

As outlined by the CCP's Central Committee, it was necessary for the Chinese Communist Policy to organize the "proletarian elements" in the countryside. However, there was very little the CCP could do with these organizations, since it was being told by the Comintern that it was necessary to wait for the creation of soviet power to form trade unions out of these agricultural laborers. What appeared to be left of the Comintern's vaunted United Front was a handful of rural artisans, the lowest and least numerous level of peasantry, and then whatever peasant soldiers the CCP could convince to defect to their side—hardly a recipe that could guarantee success.

The Canton Commune proved to be the final major defeat of the Chinese Communist Party in a long series of defeats beginning in the spring of 1927. Following these disasters Bukharin and Stalin both claimed that China's

United Front policy was still intact and that a successful revolution in China was still important to the Soviet Union's foreign policy objectives. But the Soviet government had made it all too clear that it did not intend to risk the USSR's security to assist China. While the Comintern ordered the CCP to continue the United Front policy, therefore, it admitted that one of the CCP's main enemies was the bourgeoisie, which had formerly been the core of the United Front.

During 1928, Bukharin and other Bolshevik leaders could not help but notice these increasingly obvious contradictions. Now that Trotsky was gone, Bukharin began to change his mind about the validity of the United Front. As the next chapter will discuss, such questioning led to the formation of a new "Right Opposition" under Bukharin's leadership. Soon after this development, Stalin once again attempted to use his control over the China policy—which in this case also included the revolutionary movement in Inner Mongolia—to attack and destroy Bukharin.

in Bargu, part of China's Inner Mongolian province, to discredit Bukharin during an important Moscow party committee meeting in mid-September 1928.

## International Communism after Trotsky's political demise

Following Trotsky's expulsion, the Comintern faced a chaotic world. Bukharin still saw himself as a Centrist, and now attacked the political right:

We must in every way and with every means bring together the comrades who stand for ... the decisions of the Communist International and who promise to carry on a relentless struggle against the Right dander. We wish here at the congress to create the conditions for a situation that will make any split within the future leading organs impossible.

He qualified this statement, however, by quoting from a letter Lenin had written to him years before: "If you are going to expel all the not particularly obedient but clever people, and retain only the obedient fools, you will definitely ruin the party."<sup>4</sup>

During these debates, however, Stalin's position shifted further to the left. Stalin began to criticize Bukharin for earlier mistakes, such as not stating the importance of fighting against the *Left* Social Democrats instead of just the Social Democrats, not reiterating the importance of "iron discipline in the Communist parties," and for exaggerating the stabilization of capitalism. Bukharin refused to accept the challenge and tried not to open the developing split any wider. But Stephen Cohen has suggested that Bukharin was to soon regret his "acquiescence in the final destruction of the Left."<sup>5</sup>

Although the right faction within the Bolshevik party did not openly oppose Stalin at the Comintern's Congress in June 1928, Stalin orchestrated attacks on foreign Communist parties, criticizing them for their "right opportunism," and for their "conciliatory attitude in regard to right dangers." In private, Bukharin apologized to the Swiss Comintern delegate, Humbert-Droz, for not being able to stand up for him against Stalin's attacks, but the tense situation he faced within the Bolshevik party precluded this.<sup>6</sup> But, by allowing Stalin to make an example of foreign right deviationists at the Comintern Congress, Bukharin and the other members of what would later be called the "Right Opposition" opened the door for their own future defeat.

After the Canton Commune, China's international significance diminished rapidly. In sharp contrast to the previous year, the revolutionary situation in India was now being emphasized by the Comintern as the most important to the world revolution. The continuing importance of the Chinese revolution was reaffirmed by Bukharin, however, when he reminded the delegates that:

four hundred million people, the population of China, three hundred million or so populating India—700 million; the almost one hundred

and fifty million of the Soviet Union, that together comes to 850 million—the huge scope and number of this mass ought to decide the outcome of the world war, of the world battle. That is why the Chinese revolution is of such huge international importance. That is why every revolutionary, every proletarian thinker, every revolutionary thinker of the proletariat, who is really living for the success of his class, must not underestimate or too little appreciate the international meaning of the Chinese revolution.<sup>7</sup>

According to Bukharin, it would be the growing antagonism between the “metropolis” and the colonial and semi-colonial countries that would lead to the downfall of capitalism. This was why the “great Chinese revolution, which resulted in the movement of hundreds of millions of Chinese people, signified a tremendous breach in the whole system of imperialism.”<sup>8</sup> Three important points that would ensure the Comintern’s victory included: (1) the growth of the proletariat under the Communist banner; (2) the expansion of the revolutionary movement in the colonies; and (3) the building of socialism in the Soviet Union.<sup>9</sup>

Bukharin concluded that until the colonial revolutions were successful, however, the international Communist movement had to permanently shift its eyes away from Asia as the savior of the revolution, and realize that it was the Soviet Union that was still the “most important factor for revolutionary development” because it showed the possibility for “socialist transformation.”<sup>10</sup> In response, Stalin, by proclaiming that the world revolution would soon experience a new revolutionary wave, attacked Bukharin and the Right Opposition for what he claimed was their failure to support international Communism.

## The United Opposition in exile

From the sidelines, Trotsky watched the beginning of the new great factional battle. Although the United Opposition had been expelled from the Bolshevik party and purged from important positions within the government, this did not stop Trotsky’s criticism of the Stalin–Bukharin “line” on China. His efforts to organize opposition in other Communist parties in the Comintern were apparently successful, and the June 1928 Comintern Congress made a special note that the Comintern’s member parties had to struggle against this “Trotskyist opposition.”<sup>11</sup> Among other things, Trotsky accused the Comintern of “bureaucratism” and of adopting improper resolutions, thus leading to the destruction of the Chinese revolution.

Even in exile, Trotsky was able to read transcripts of the Sixth Congress of the Communist International. He observed that one of the Chinese delegates claimed that even though the CCP had lost Canton, its actual membership increased at the same time. This new membership was made up of peasants, however, which really meant a decline in the proletarian party:<sup>12</sup>

While the revolution is beaten in the cities and in the most important centers of the workers' and peasants' movement, there will always be, especially in a country as vast as China, fresh regions, fresh just because they are backward, containing not yet exhausted revolutionary forces. On the distant periphery, the beginnings of the revolutionary wave will yet swell for a long time ... After the decisive defeat suffered by the revolution in the cities, the party, for a certain time, can still draw tens of thousands of new members from the awakening peasantry. This fact is important as a precursory sign of the great possibilities of the future. But in the period under consideration it is only one form of the dissolution and the liquidation of the CPC [CCP], for, by losing its proletarian nucleus, it ceases to be in conformity with its historical destination.

Trotsky saw the awakening of the Chinese peasantry as an important development, and one that could be used to the Comintern's advantage if only it would change its policies toward China. As history would show, Mao Zedong not only came to a similar conclusion, but was able to build up his revolutionary movement based on the support of China's "backward" peasants.

However, Trotsky argued, the Comintern had to continue to come to terms with its mistakes. In a resolution adopted by the Jiangsu District Committee of the CCP on 7 May 1928, the Jiangsu leaders criticized the Chinese Communist Party's Central Committee for the Canton insurrection:

During the Canton insurrection of December, the Central Committee decided once more to launch an immediate uprising in Hunan, Hubei and Jiangsu in order to defend Guangdong, in order to extend the framework of the movement all over China (this can be verified from the information letters of the Central Committee, Nos 16 and 22). These measures flowed from a subjective estimation of the situation and did not correspond to the objective circumstances. Obviously, under such conditions defeats will be inevitable.<sup>13</sup>

In response to the Canton insurrection, the Comintern had issued warnings against putschism. However, it was still accepted that the revolution was continuing at an "uninterrupted advance," even though the Jiangsu Communists admitted that "our organizations have lost contact with the masses." As recently as the February 1928 plenum, the Comintern was still pushing for insurrection, and as late as 6 March 1928 a Central Committee circular was still arguing over whether the next insurrection should take place in Changsha or Hankou.<sup>14</sup>

To Trotsky, these mistakes in the Comintern's China policy were due to "bureaucratism," which had undermined the policies of the Executive Committee of the Communist International. The Jiangsu Communists seemed to confirm this view, providing eight cogent reasons for how the CCP's Central Committee could have misjudged the situation so seriously:<sup>15</sup>

- 1 The revolutionary movement was estimated as an uninterrupted ascent;
- 2 No attention was paid to the loss of contact between our party and the masses, nor to the decomposition of the mass organizations at the turning point of the revolution;
- 3 No account was taken of the new regrouping of class forces inside the enemy camp during this turn;
- 4 No consideration was given to leading the movement in the cities;
- 5 No attention was paid to the importance of the anti-imperialist movement in a semi-colonial country;
- 6 During the insurrection, no account was taken of the objective conditions, nor of the necessity of applying different methods of struggle in conformity with them;
- 7 A peasant deviation made itself felt;
- 8 The Central Committee, in its estimation of the situation, was guided by a subjective point of view.

In particular, the Jiangsu Communists also criticized the Central Committee for ignoring their own mistakes while demanding the most “severe party discipline from the rank and file militants.”<sup>16</sup>

In the Executive Committee of the Comintern, however, their explanation for China’s revolutionary defeats put the blame on the local “executors” for not carrying out orders correctly. The Central Committee of the CCP then passed the blame down to the local operatives. This was just what the Jiangsu Communists were angry about:<sup>17</sup>

The Central Committee says that the whole past leadership was exorcized in accordance with the instructions of the Communist International. As if all these hesitations and errors depended only upon the rank and file militants. If one adopts such a manner regarding the question, the Central Committee will itself be unable either to repair the mistakes or to educate the comrades to study this experience. It will not be able to strengthen its ties with the lower party apparatus. The Central Committee always says that its leadership was right; it charges the rank and file comrades with all the mistakes, always especially underscoring the hesitations of the rank and file party committees ... If the leadership only attacks light-mindedly the local leading comrades or organs by pointing out their errors, but without actually analyzing the sources of these mistakes, this only produces friction with the party; such an attitude is disloyal and can do no good to the revolution and to the party. If the leadership itself covers up its errors and throws the blame on others, such conduct will do no good to the party or to the revolution.

To Trotsky, this failure of the Central Committee of the CCP applied equally well to the Comintern leadership. The Jiangsu Communists’ description of events in China shows “in an entirely exemplary manner how and by what

methods the Chinese revolution was led to numerous defeats, and the Chinese party to the brink of catastrophe.”<sup>18</sup>

Trotsky also criticized the CCP for trying to deceive itself when it claimed to lead 100,000 members—one-sixth of the world’s Communists. According to Trotsky, the further decline of the revolution in China was inevitable. Until the resolutions of the Sixth Comintern Congress were changed, then “victory is impossible.”<sup>19</sup> To Trotsky, therefore, the issues being discussed at the Sixth Comintern Congress exactly paralleled what the United Opposition had been saying six months before. This merely reaffirmed Trotsky’s belief that he had been right all along. For Stalin, however, by shifting to the left he sought to use the China policy as a weapon to purge the Comintern of so-called “right deviationists” in preparation for the decisive revolutionary upswing.

## The formation of the Right Opposition

Before early July 1928, the rightist faction was unofficially known as “Rykovist,” but then on 10 July 1928 Bukharin formally merged with Rykov and the name changed to “Right Opposition.” This new opposition group soon took the lead in opposing Stalin’s drastic grain-procurement measures.<sup>20</sup> Although much of the Right Opposition’s platform focused on the USSR’s domestic policies, the Comintern’s China policy once again played a significant role. In particular, Stalin now supported the creation of soviets in China in preparation for a new wave of revolutions, a policy the Right Opposition opposed.

Once Bukharin and Rykov buried the hatchet, a compromise policy was adopted that made it seem that all differences of opinion had been smoothed away. On 11 July 1928, Bukharin visited Kamenev’s apartment in Moscow and proposed that Zinoviev and Kamenev—both former leaders of the United Opposition—join with the new Right Opposition to oppose Stalin:

Stalin’s line is ruinous for the whole revolution. It can make us collapse ... The differences between us and Stalin are many times more serious than all our former differences with you. Rykov, Tomsky, and I agree on formulating the situation thus: “It would be much better if Zinoviev and Kamenev were in the Politburo instead of Stalin.” ... I have not spoken with Stalin for several weeks ... Our arguing with him reached the point of saying, “You lie!” He has made concessions now, so that [later] he can cut our throats.<sup>21</sup>

The tension between Stalin and Bukharin was not initially over China, but over plans to collectivize agriculture. In particular, at Stalin’s suggestion the July 1928 Central Committee plenum called for higher productivity of individual peasants, voluntary collectivization, and observing “revolutionary legality” in relations with peasants.<sup>22</sup> Tomsky protested these policies as being contradictory, saying: “What you want is a NEP without Nepmen, merchants or kulaks, but this is impossible.”<sup>23</sup>

This ebb in the revolution was best shown by the disaster in Canton during December 1927. Since the beginning of 1926, the United Opposition had called for the formation of soviets in China. Stalin and Bukharin disclaimed the need for soviets up until the last moment and then when the Canton Commune was formed it turned out to be “just one of these old Chinese dragons—it was simply drawn on paper.”<sup>30</sup> The effect of waiting so long to form soviets was that when they were finally formed they were created in a hurry, and so were ineffective. Trotsky was clearly worried that this false policy would be repeated yet again now that Stalin was actively calling for the formation of soviets in China.

Various articles published in the *Communist International* during the summer of 1928 seemed to confirm Trotsky’s most recent criticisms of the Comintern’s China policy. For example, an article by Royburg acknowledged that the timing of the Canton Commune was wrong, if for no other reason than the Communists’ 5,000 supporters were facing an army of 50,000.<sup>31</sup> Meanwhile, a month later a critique by a Chinese Communist, referred to only as Lee, implied that the CCP had been adversely affected by “anarchist” tendencies.<sup>32</sup> A third report stated that during the first eight months of 1928, some 100,000 workers and peasants lost their lives—27,000 of them executed by the Guomindang.<sup>33</sup> Such reports seemed to confirm Trotsky’s concerns that China was subsiding. However, Stalin had one more card up his sleeve in order to prove to the Bolshevik party that such doubts were wrong.

## The August–September 1928 Bargu Uprising

As part and parcel of Stalin’s factional infighting with Bukharin, he had to prove that the revolutionary wave in China was indeed rising. At a plenary session of the Moscow party committee, held from 11 to 15 September 1928, the Right Opposition openly attacked Stalin for the first time, publicly denouncing his aggressive policy of grain procurement. In response, Stalin could point to recent uprisings in China—most importantly the August–September “Bargu revolution”—as proof of his greater understanding of the world scene.

The factional struggle between Stalin and Bukharin appeared in public for the first time on 15 September 1928, in a *Pravda* article entitled “Struggle on Two Fronts.” According to another *Pravda* article that appeared a couple of days later, written by one of Stalin’s supporters: “The openly opportunist deviation finds its expression … in the misunderstanding of the tasks set by the Fifteenth Congress and subsequent party decisions regarding the intensification of the struggle against the kulak and the development of the work of collectivization.”<sup>34</sup>

Reference to the Fifteenth Congress included China, which Stalin claimed would soon exhibit a rising revolution tide. During August 1928, the Comintern ordered an uprising in Bargu—also known as Hulun Buir—in the

northwestern corner of Manchuria. The original goal of this uprising was to attack and occupy the Chinese city of Hailar, but this plan failed. The Inner Mongolians were convinced to rebel only after the Comintern promised its support. Their faith in the Comintern promise to deliver aid ultimately proved “suicidal.” By late September 1928, the embattled insurgents had agreed to “abandon both armed resistance and secessionist ambitions” in return for immunity.<sup>35</sup> Once again, as if on cue, an Asian uprising broke out, and was crushed, right as decision-makers in Moscow were arguing the future of the China policy.

Although a direct connection between Stalin and the Bargu Uprising is more difficult to prove than with the China revolution, it would appear to follow the same pattern previously set by the Nanchang Uprising and the Canton Commune. In particular, the simple fact that this uprising was ordered by the Comintern, and then later deserted by that organization when the fighting actually began, allowed the Soviet Union to disclaim any responsibility. Even better, while indicating an increase in revolutionary fervor, the failure of these revolts not only did not challenge Stalin’s “Socialism in One Country,” but supported it.

Once the battle between the Centrists and the Right Opposition became obvious during September 1928, the party debate became more intense. For example, on 19 September, Kuibyshev, the chairman of the Supreme Economic Council, warned those who would not support Stalin’s new policies for vigorous economic development:

This same discontent penetrates through all sorts of channels even as far as certain parts of our Soviet apparatus, the result being doubts as to the possibility of executing such great tasks and as to the wisdom of aspiring to such difficult objectives as are involved in the industrialization of our entire economy. By penetrating into our Soviet apparatus, such sentiments also find entrance in a small measure into our party. The party will have recourse to all available measures for the purpose of nipping in the bud such sentiments as pessimism or lack of confidence.<sup>36</sup>

Soon after this article appeared, the Central Committee advocated increased vigilance against right deviationists and warned that the July 1928 plenum of the Comintern had called for a struggle against “petty-bourgeois opportunism” and for the “struggle on two fronts.” In a pattern that closely paralleled the destruction of the United Opposition, Stalin began his attack on the right by criticizing the leader of the Moscow party organization, Uglanov, for his “conciliationist tendencies.” However, Stalin would not yet go so far as to label Bukharin, Rykov, and Tomsky as part of the right deviation.<sup>37</sup>

Without much to lose, Bukharin, Rykov, and Tomsky decided to oppose Stalin’s economic policies. They even handed in their resignations from their respective positions as chairman of the Comintern and editor of *Pravda*, premier, and trade union chief, documents that Stalin reportedly accepted

opposed it. But, Stalin won the day. With Trotsky's deportation from the USSR the Right Opposition's position was even weaker than before.<sup>40</sup>

## The Right Opposition under attack

On 9 February 1929, the Right Opposition leaders in Moscow presented their platform to the Politburo and to the presidium of the Central Control Commission. This was the high point of the Right Opposition. Among other things, they accused the Stalinists of "military-feudal exploitation" of the peasants, "a policy of propagating bureaucratism," and "a policy of dissolving the Comintern."<sup>41</sup> The last point reflected the Right Opposition's criticism of Stalin's dominance over Comintern policy, especially in China.

According to Bukharin, private farms had to continue to be the backbone of the Soviet agricultural system, since collective farms would take five or ten more years to develop to the point where they could take the place of the private sector.<sup>42</sup> He also called for the pace of the industrialization plan to be tempered and for the free market system to be retained. Parroting Trotsky and the United Opposition from the year before, Bukharin also protested the absence of democracy within the party.<sup>43</sup> Following Trotsky's recent expulsion, however, this criticism fell on deaf ears.

It was following this critique of Stalin that Bukharin, Rykov, and Tomsky were officially denounced by Stalin's followers as being part of the Right Opposition.<sup>44</sup> The Politburo and the presidium of the Central Control Commission issued an untitled resolution on 9 February 1929, which challenged all of Bukharin's recent criticisms of the Central Committee, including his accusations against their "domestic and foreign policy, and its organizational leadership." In particular, he was accused of misrepresenting the party's policy toward the kulaks, of falsely accusing the party of being overly "bureaucratized," of limiting "intra-party democracy," and of claiming that the Comintern line called for the purging of "social democratic filth and of opportunistic elements."<sup>45</sup>

The Politburo and the Central Control Commission made four points:<sup>46</sup>

- 1 to declare Comrade Bukharin's criticism of the activities of the Central Committee to be absolutely groundless;
- 2 to advise Comrade Bukharin to resolutely renounce Comrade Frumkin's line in the field of domestic policy and Comrade Humbert-Droz's line in the field of Comintern policy;
- 3 to refuse to accept Comrades Bukharin and Tomsky's resignations;
- 4 to advise Comrades Bukharin and Tomsky to carry out loyally all decisions of the ECCI and of the party and its Central Committee.

On 23 April 1929, the joint plenum of the full Central Committee and Central Control Commission agreed with the previous resolutions from 9 February 1928. In this document they expanded on their differences with the

Right Opposition. These points included denouncing the right for refusing to recognize that the world had already left behind the period called the “stabilization of capitalism” and was now moving into a period of sharpening “internal contradictions in the capitalist camp,” which would lead to a new “revolutionary upsurge” in Europe and in the colonial countries that were experiencing revolutions, most importantly among them China.<sup>47</sup>

Although the Chinese revolution did not play as large a role in Stalin’s attacks on Bukharin, it was still significant. To take advantage of this growing revolutionary era, Stalin claimed the necessity of purging the Comintern of “right deviationists” so that it would be possible to carry out: “further bolshevization of communist parties, freeing those parties of social democratic traditions, securing the leading role of the party in the growing revolutionary movement, and preparation of the broad masses for the approaching, decisive class battles.” As a result of their incorrect policies, therefore, the “Bukharin group flagrantly violates Leninist party unity, breaks Bolshevik discipline, and subverts collective leadership in the Central Committee.”<sup>48</sup>

On Stalin’s suggestion, the joint plenum removed Bukharin, Rykov, and Tomsky from their positions within the Comintern, the trade union organizations, and the editorship of *Pravda*. It further decided that the three would be expelled from the Politburo as “violators of party discipline” if they refused to carry out the resolutions of the Central Committee.<sup>49</sup> Stalin next directly attacked Tomsky’s power base in the trade union organization. In April 1929, Tomsky was removed as the trade union president. On 2 June 1929, Tomsky and his followers were furthermore kicked off the Central Trade Union Council and replaced by Stalinists.<sup>50</sup>

These changes marked the end of the New Economic Policy—NEP—as the trade union organizations were time and time again called upon to support Stalin’s goals for rapid industrial growth. Finally, the Central Committee’s concern about the influence of the Trotskyites was revealed when they proclaimed that special procedures had to be adopted to guarantee the “secrecy of the decisions of the Central Committee of the Politburo and ruling out all possibility of informing the Trotskyites about the affairs of the Central Committee and the Politburo.”<sup>51</sup> With this resolution to keep all decision-making a secret, Stalin confirmed his authority over the party, the government, and the Comintern. It also demonstrated the absolute defeat of both the United Opposition and the Right Opposition.

## Conclusions

From April through May 1929, the Right Opposition continued to oppose the rapid industrialization and the collectivization of agriculture; both elements were integral parts of Stalin’s proposed first Five-Year Plan. It also opposed Stalin’s claim that China was experiencing a new revolutionary upsurge. The Right Opposition was voted down, however, and at the Sixteenth Party Conference in April 1929, and the Fifth Congress of Soviets in May,

## 12 The 1929 Sino-Soviet War and the creation of the Stalinist state

By the spring of 1929, the Chinese Communists were weak, the Guomindang had unified North and South China—on paper at least—and Sino-Soviet relations were becoming increasingly tense. The Politburo began to receive disturbing reports from Harbin indicating that the Manchurian warlord Zhang Xueliang was threatening to seize the Chinese Eastern Railway, which the Soviet Union had originally promised to return to China “without compensation” but had then retained through using secret diplomacy; as early as spring 1926, Trotsky had warned that the Soviet government’s retention of the railway would lead to disaster.

In early May 1929, a police raid on the Soviet consulate in Harbin produced many damaging documents—purporting to prove the Soviet goal of overthrowing the Chinese government—and the consul and his staff were arrested and held in jail for six hours. Zhang Xueliang used this event as an excuse to take over the railway. These events led to greater Sino-Soviet tensions that culminated during August in an undeclared war in Manchuria. Amassing ground, air, and riverine forces, the Soviet Red Army invaded China and decisively defeated the Chinese army. As a result of this victory, the USSR reclaimed possession of the Tsarist railway concession in northern Manchuria.

The Sino-Soviet War had many unintended consequences in the Soviet Union and China. It confirmed that the Soviet government had given up on the China revolution and had adopted an aggressive policy to retain its imperialist possessions. This, in turn, meant that the Chinese Communist Party was forced to support Soviet “Red Imperialism” over China’s own sovereign claim to Manchuria, a hotly disputed position that even led to the expulsion of Chen Duxiu from the CCP as an accused Trotskyite. Meanwhile, in Moscow, Stalin used the war to eliminate the Right Opposition. He also called for a “Great Leap Forward” in collectivization; many rich peasants, known as kulaks, were deported to Siberia to help prop up Soviet security in underpopulated regions adjoining Manchuria. In line with the decision to exile his opponents, Stalin also ordered the creation of prison camps, the first of what would soon be popularly known as the “gulag archipelago.”

## Sino-Soviet tensions over the Chinese Eastern Railway

During May 1929, the Manchurian warlord Zhang Xueliang ordered police to raid the Soviet legation in Harbin. Documents implicating the USSR in trying to overthrow Chinese sovereignty gave the Chinese government in Nanjing a pretext for demanding the return of the Chinese Eastern Railway to China, as the 31 May 1924 Sino-Soviet Friendship Treaty had promised. These Sino-Soviet tensions increased until an undeclared state of war existed.

Lev Karakhan, Vice-Commissar for Foreign Affairs and formerly the Soviet ambassador to China, responded to the Chinese raid on the Soviet legation on 31 May 1929—the fifth anniversary of the Sino-Soviet Friendship Treaty promising to return the railway to China—with a sharply worded note to the Chinese chargé d'affaires in Moscow. He called the Chinese report that a meeting of the Third International was being held in the basement of the Harbin consulate, an “obvious and ludicrous invention.” He also withdrew the extraterritoriality privileges of the Chinese consulates in the Soviet Union in an attempt to pressure Nanjing to back down.<sup>1</sup>

This time, however, Moscow’s pressure tactics backfired. On 10 July 1929, Nationalist troops under Zhang Xueliang seized complete control over the Chinese Eastern Railway. Karakhan responded to these actions in a note from 13 July, in which he protested the arrest of more than 200 Soviet citizens and the expulsion of 60 others, including the manager of the Chinese Eastern Railway, M. Emshanov. In addition, Manchurian troops were reported to have taken up offensive positions along the Soviet–Manchurian border.

With war more and more likely, Karakhan argued against taking military action and instead declared his willingness to open negotiations with the Chinese authorities to settle the railway dispute. However, his methods were the same as in January 1926: the USSR sent China a three-day ultimatum to return the railway to Soviet control, or else the Soviet government would “be compelled to resort to other means to defend the legal rights of the USSR.”<sup>2</sup> This time, however, unlike on previous occasions, the Chinese government did not back down and accept the Soviet ultimatum. Instead, the Nanjing government began to send additional troops to Manchuria.

On 17 July, Moscow unofficially broke relations with Nanjing, in the process: (1) recalling from China “all Soviet diplomatic, consular, and commercial representatives”; (2) recalling “all persons appointed by the Soviet government to the CER”; (3) suspending “all railway communication between China and the USSR”; and (4) inviting the “diplomatic and consular representatives of the Chinese government in the USSR to leave Soviet territory immediately.”<sup>3</sup> The stage was now set for war between the Soviet Union and China, the USSR’s first military conflict since the end of the Civil War.

In 1926, Trotsky and the United Opposition had warned that just such a Sino-Soviet conflict might erupt over control of the Manchurian railway. They advocated returning the Chinese Eastern Railway to China, as Moscow

had promised to do in 1924. While the Bolshevik propaganda throughout the 1920s professed revolutionary brotherhood with China, the Soviet government simultaneously sought to retain the Tsarist unequal concessions in northern Manchuria. The Sino-Soviet War of 1929 was the end result of these contradictory policies.

Stalin's immediate domestic response to war with China was to use this threat to further "Socialism in One Country." In particular, he ordered enormous increases in the population of Siberia and the Urals to act as a buffer to keep Asian invaders out. The Siberian peasants were organized into collectives, or *kolkhozy*, so that it would be possible to monitor and control their actions. Finally, a series of purges produced a steady stream of political prisoners to fill labor camps—called gulags—in the vulnerable Soviet territories just north of the Sino-Soviet border.

Collectivization of agriculture went poorly. A German agricultural specialist named Puschel was working in Siberia during July 1929. He reported:<sup>4</sup>

The majority of the present *kolkhozy*—don't deceive yourselves—are candidates for death ... Inadequate grants on the one hand, and big errors in management on the other, have discredited the whole process of collectivisation and very often have even taken away confidence in the correctness of the principle of collectivisation. The majority of *kolkhozy* do not as yet have organisation plans or plans for the location of the personal plot, there is no proper division into fields or crop rotation, and buildings are being put up which don't correspond or correspond very little to their function: in *kolkhozy* it is still not known what crops should be sown and how they should be sown. Crude mistakes are made in the method of cultivating the soil, they argue about elementary principles and waste time in endless talk about various Utopias instead of getting down to practical work. The land is still used in a barbarous fashion and the soil continues to deteriorate; this does not help to increase yields or to prevent harvest failure.

The decision to begin rapid collectivization of agriculture in Siberia during the middle of summer 1929 was clearly a response to increasing tensions with China.

Because of these events, social disruption was particularly acute in Siberia. The Bolsheviks did not trust the Siberian peasants. S.I. Syrtsov had warned the April 1929 conference that the Siberian kulaks wanted to break away from Soviet control, but

he does not possess the necessary organizing ability, he has no nationwide organization, he lacks a programme which, within the context of the Soviet constitution, could give legal expression to such a movement on an all-Union scale, and there are within the ranks of the kulaks no personalities with sufficient authority to support him in his aspirations.<sup>5</sup>

At the Tenth Plenum of the Comintern's Executive Committee, which met in July 1929, Molotov argued that the world crisis would result in a new revolutionary wave, but in the short term the Soviet Union once again faced the prospect of war. In order to survive this war, internal security was all-important and purges against "bourgeois specialists" and "non-Communist elements"—defined as those corrupted by kulaks and Nepmen—were necessary. In the Far East, it was announced that sixteen people were executed in July alone for being "White Guards."<sup>6</sup> Such reports portended an even wider crackdown.

But Stalin and the other Bolshevik leaders were not particularly concerned about the domestic chaos that resulted from collectivization. Their primary goal was to adopt a quick and easy solution to the problem of increasing security in the Far East by augmenting the Russian presence on the northern side of the highly disputed Sino-Soviet border. Collectivization was merely one method of carrying out this goal. A second successful method proved to be purges and the establishment of forced labor prison camps, or gulags. Between Stalin's destruction in 1927 of the left, including Trotsky, Zinoviev, Radek, and their United Opposition followers, and his attempts beginning in 1928 to undermine the right, including most importantly Bukharin, there would soon be a steady stream of political prisoners arriving in Siberia.

## **The Sino-Soviet War and the CCP**

Events in Manchuria put pressure on the Chinese Communists to take sides: either they had to unquestioningly support the Soviet Union, or they had to support the Chinese government. This meant either affirming Chinese sovereignty in Manchuria, or conceding that the USSR had the right to dominate northern Manchuria, as it had already done in Outer Mongolia. To do the first would necessitate ignoring the Comintern directions, while to do the second would make the Communists look like traitors, thus undermining the CCP's position within Chinese society; after 1929, it was becoming harder and harder to deny that the Chinese Communists were merely "pawns" under Moscow's control.

Even before the outbreak of war, the CCP was going through a disruptive period characterized by internal divisions and purges. Sharp divisions within the party had led to division into at least five major factions:<sup>7</sup>

There was the Central Committee faction, including Ch'u Ch'iu-pai, Li Li-san, Chou En-lai, and Li Wei-han; a "real work" faction, composed mostly of middle-ranking leaders in the labor movement, such as Ho Meng-hsiung and Lo Chang-lung from Li Ta-chao's original Beijing group, at times supported by Ts'ai Ho-sen and Chang Kuo-t'ao; a Youth League faction led by Jen Pi-shih and others; the Red Army leaders, including Mao Tse-tung, Chu Teh, P'eng Teh-huai, Ho Lung, Hsu Hsiang-ch'ien, and others; and finally the so-called Trotskyist opposition, composed of

at least three factions of former students in Russia, as well as of the group led by Ch'en Tu-hsiu and P'eng Shu-chih after their expulsion from the Party in November, 1929.

After the CCP's Sixth Party Congress, held in Moscow for security reasons from 18 June to 11 July 1928, Li Li-san led the Central Committee faction to power within the CCP. But his power base was weak and the Chinese Communists remained split.

In accordance with the decisions made at the Sixth Congress, Li Li-san tried to centralize the party during October and November 1928. In particular, he criticized the party for its "extreme democratism and egalitarianism," and strengthened the power of the party's security police in order to enforce party discipline. The Jiangsu Committee, which had earlier protested against the central party leadership, was the first local section to be taken over by Li Li-san. By February 1929, it was under direct Central Committee control. Other local committees followed. By June 1929, with the backdrop of Sino-Soviet war looming on the horizon, the Second Plenum of the Sixth Central Committee completed the centralization of all party organizations under Li Li-san.

The Chinese Communist Party's Central Committee followed closely in line with many of the policy changes taking place in the Soviet Union. For example, in November 1928, April 1929, and at the Second Plenum in June 1929, the Central Committee of the CCP condemned both right and left extremism, the right for advocating "peaceful" struggle, and the left for opposing "all open organization and lawful struggle." In line with Stalin's attacks on Bukharin, the CCP leaders stated that the main danger was clearly from the right, however, and anti-rightism was declared to be its "major policy." Still, party leaders began to call more frequently for the expulsion of Trotskyists like Chen Duxiu.<sup>8</sup>

As a result of the crisis over the Chinese Eastern Railway, the Comintern began to demand a more active policy from the CCP. On 26 October 1929, the Comintern called for increased preparations to take advantage of China's "deep national crisis," and to forestall "adventurous anti-Soviet policy regarding the Chinese Eastern Railway affair." The Comintern told the CCP:

It is necessary to utilize in every way the warlord war which has already begun in order to develop further the independent mass revolutionary movement ... The slogans "transform militarist war into class, civil war" and "overthrow the power of the bourgeois landlord bloc" should become the basic current slogans of the Party ... The Party should pay special attention to the workers' strike movement ... [It must] strengthen and extend guerrilla warfare, especially in ... Manchuria ... Avoiding a recurrence of the putschist mistakes, which on the whole have already been overcome, the Party must encourage and accentuate class conflicts in every way ... transforming the revolutionary struggle to an even higher stage of development.<sup>9</sup>

The Chinese Communists, in response to the conflict in Manchuria, were compelled to support the USSR against China's own national government—a government that they had been instrumental in creating before they were purged—and their leading slogan became “Defend the Soviet Union.”<sup>10</sup> This decision allowed the Guomindang to accuse the Chinese Communists of being traitors: during the early 1930s, Chiang Kai-shek was to describe his attempts to destroy the CCP as eliminating a “disease of the heart,” while efforts to destroy Japanese imperialism were a lesser “disease of the skin.”

Chen Duxiu—the founder of the Chinese Communist Party—refused to support the Soviet government in its war with China. As a young man Chen had watched Tsarist Russia invade Manchuria during the Boxer Rebellion of 1900, and Russia later refused to withdraw. Even prior to the beginning of the Russo-Japanese War in 1904, Chen had joined a Japanese-supported volunteer army to fight Russia and he later organized the “Anhui Patriotic Society” to oppose Russian imperialism.<sup>11</sup> Chen must have found the USSR’s actions in Manchuria to be all too familiar. He resolutely attacked Li Li-san and the CCP’s Central Committee for adding weight to the Guomindang’s accusations that the Chinese Communists were mere tools of Moscow. By late 1929, Chen was branded as a Trotskyite and expelled from the CCP.

## **The Sino-Soviet War’s impact on the USSR**

On 6 August 1929, the Soviet government took another step in preparing for an East Asian war when it authorized the organization of a Special Far Eastern Army. Command of this force was given to Comrade Bliuker, the Comintern adviser responsible for organizing and training the Nationalist Army, as well as ordering the failed CCP Nanchang Uprising. On 16 August 1929, the USSR’s Central Executive Committee and the Council of People’s Commissars formally broke off diplomatic relations with China.<sup>12</sup> A number of border skirmishes foreshadowed war between the Soviet Union and China.

The fear of war with China brought about important shifts in the USSR’s foreign policy. On 3 October 1929, the Soviet Union and Great Britain reportedly signed a protocol in which each side promised not to support propaganda against the other, and agreed to resume diplomatic relations during 1930. This sudden warming in Soviet-British relations helped to decrease tensions on the USSR’s European flank. Meanwhile, the resumption of economic relations with England was to play a crucial role during Stalin’s campaign during the 1930s to develop the Soviet Union’s heavy industry.

As tensions increased in Manchuria throughout fall 1929, the Politburo met to discuss their options. Bliuker’s forces were stationed in Chita and he reassured the Soviet leadership that the Chinese troops could be easily destroyed. Litvinov argued that any conflict would fall within the limits of the Soviet talks with the Japanese ambassador to China, Yoshizawa, which clearly outlined the spheres of influence in Manchuria. Molotov and Stalin

## Stalin's final destruction of Bukharin

Stalin used deteriorating relations with China to rid himself completely of the Right Opposition. Although the Right Opposition was defeated in April 1929, many of its leaders retained positions of authority within the Bolshevik party and the Comintern. During the Central Committee Plenum in November 1929, Stalin used the ongoing war with China to coerce Bukharin, Rykov, and Tomsky into submitting a statement acknowledging the correctness of the party line. When they tried to save their draft program, claiming that it would achieve the same goal as the party line, this was rejected as a "factional maneuver." Most importantly, Bukharin was expelled from the Politburo.<sup>20</sup>

On 3 July 1929, the Executive Committee of the Comintern, acting in accordance with Politburo wishes, took advantage of the war scare with China to remove Bukharin as the Chairman of the Communist International. Public comment on this event was avoided until 21 July 1929, when it was announced that Bukharin had been removed from the Comintern because of his history of "right deviation."<sup>21</sup> On 21 August 1929, an article in *Pravda* for the first time publicly denounced Bukharin as the leader of the Right Opposition. Three days later, a second editorial continued criticizing Bukharin's faults. These articles signaled a barrage of denunciations that would end only at the November plenum of the Central Committee.

The Central Committee plenum took place during 10–17 November 1929. The right immediately came under attack, with Molotov criticizing it for its failure to realize that collectivization was "a new period in our revolution" and that the times called for attacking "the capitalist elements on the whole front, not failing in necessary cases to use extraordinary measures." On 12 November, Rykov read a statement on behalf of Bukharin, Tomsky, and himself admitting that the previous year was a "breakthrough" and he withdrew all of the right's disagreements with the center. But, at the same time, he repeated the Right Opposition's criticisms of the methods used to bring about massive industrialization and widespread collectivization.<sup>22</sup>

China was also destined to play a major role at the plenum. On the final day of the plenum meeting—17 November 1929—the Red Army attacked northern Manchuria. Once again, Stalin's timing was exact. On his command, Soviet ground troops, its riverine Amur fleet, and a number of airplanes invaded China on several fronts. The Soviet forces quickly took control of Manzhuli and heavy fighting focused on the Chinese city of Hailar. According to one account of this war:

The Soviet military campaign was a complete success: within 48 hours of the invasion, Chang Hsueh-liang was ready to sue for peace on Soviet terms, and on 26 November had already acknowledged the Soviet demand that the three-point ultimatum of July be the basis for negotiation.<sup>23</sup>

With the war even then underway in China, the plenum adopted a firm line against the Right Opposition. It stated that it was not satisfied with the Right Opposition's renunciation and passed a resolution removing Bukharin from the Politburo, while rebuking Rykov and Tomsky.

Thereafter, on 26 November 1929, Bukharin, Rykov, and Tomsky issued a second statement that backed down and agreed that the Central Committee was right. They promised to support all efforts against "the right-wing deviation and appeasement of it."<sup>24</sup> The Right Opposition leaders' "confession" was reprinted at great length in *Pravda*:<sup>25</sup>

In the course of the last year and a half there have been differences between us and the majority of the Central Committee of the CPSU on a series of political and tactical questions. We presented our views in a series of documents and statements at the plenums and other sessions of the Central Committee and the Central Control Commission of the CPSU.

We consider it our duty to declare that in this dispute the party and its Central Committee have proven right. Our views, presented in documents which are familiar, have proven erroneous. Recognizing these mistakes of ours, we for our part will apply all our efforts toward carrying on, together with the whole party, a decisive struggle against all deviations from the general line of the party and above all against the right deviation and conciliation toward it, in order to overcome any difficulty and guarantee the complete and quickest victory of socialist construction.

The fact that this act of contrition on the part of the Right Opposition was published on the very same day that China sued for peace firmly linked international and domestic events in the minds of the Soviet people. Once again, only Stalin's control of the China policy made this possible.

Bukharin's capitulation spelled the end of the Right Opposition as a united movement. With the destruction of Bukharin, Stalin's political victory over both the left and the right was complete. Stalin's policy of collectivization was intensified, however, as part of the USSR's efforts to increase its Siberian population and thereby shore up its East Asian security. Now that his political position was secure, Stalin's primary goal was to return the USSR's Asian relations to the pre-war status quo.

## **Collectivization and the new Asian status quo**

From the end of August through November 1929, the Soviet government tried to negotiate a return to the status quo in its relations with the Nationalist government. Although both sides agreed to hold a peace conference, a deadlock was reached over the issue of nominating a new Soviet manager and assistant manager. To "save face" the Chinese insisted that they be replaced, while the Soviet government was equally insistent that the

previous officials be returned to their posts. Finally, on 26 November 1929, with the threat of an even greater invasion of Soviet troops on their territory, the Mukden government independently agreed. Nanjing was later also forced to accept these terms.

On 22 December 1929, an agreement was signed at Khabarovsk by the USSR and the Nanjing government. China agreed to release all Soviet citizens arrested by the Chinese authorities after 1 May 1929, while the Soviet government agreed to release all Chinese soldiers, officers, and nationals. All workers and employees of the Chinese Eastern Railway were now permitted to return to their jobs, and the consulates of each country could reopen. In addition, the Chinese authorities agreed to "disarm the Russian White Guard detachments and expel their organizers and instigators from the Three Eastern Provinces."<sup>26</sup> This was clearly an attempt to assign blame for the tensions on a convenient scapegoat, in this case the émigré White Russians living in Manchuria.

Contrary to what might be expected, Stalin's collectivization program in Siberia did not halt when a Sino-Soviet truce was reached, but increased even more quickly. In June 1929, the target had been to have a total of 8 million hectares of collectivized land by 1930. In August, Mikoyan spoke of 10 million hectares, in September Gosplan spoke of 13 million, and then revised this number to 15.2 million in October and November. Finally, in December the *Sovnarkom* decided to collectivize 30 million hectares of peasant land and to create state farms on 3.7 million hectares of state land, much of this in the Far East. But in December the movement to collective surpassed even these target figures as the Politburo called for a "great leap forward" in collectivization.<sup>27</sup>

The Politburo initially decided on a "great leap forward" during October 1929, with the decision supported by Stalin, Molotov, and Kaganovich. Before the Central Committee was due to meet on 10 November 1929, a *Pravda* editorial published on 31 October was already calling for the grain procurement teams to assist the collectivization process and further announced: "a mass mobilization of all forces at the disposal of Party and soviet organizations, in order to speed up the rate of growth and hasten the process of socialist reconstruction of the agricultural sector." This plan was directed at collectivizing the kulaks. Since it was assumed that they would resist, if they weren't resisting already, it was re-emphasized: "We must strike at the kulak in every sector of this counter-offensive, using the full organizational resources of the proletarian dictatorship."<sup>28</sup>

On the twelfth anniversary of the Bolshevik revolution, on 7 November 1929, Stalin published an article in *Pravda* entitled "The Year of the Great Breakthrough." In this article he described "the decisive offensive of socialism against the capitalist elements of town and country" that resulted in improved labor productivity and in the accumulation of capital to invest in heavy industry. The breakthrough in agriculture was the development from "small backward individual economy to large-scale progressive collective agriculture."

This led Stalin to predict optimistically that “in three years or so our country will become a leading grain producer, if not the world’s leading grain producer.”<sup>29</sup>

At the Central Committee plenum, collectivization was firmly linked to world revolution. Using the recent Sino-Soviet War as his example, Molotov asserted that the capitalist countries were once again preparing war against the USSR. He outlined what measures needed to be adopted in order to prepare for the coming war:

Since our imperialist friends are not quite ready for a direct attack on us, we must take immediate advantage of the situation by making a decisive move in the matter of the economic rehabilitation and collectivization of millions of peasant households. If we are not to miss our chance, we must use every moment of the days, the weeks and the months that lie ahead.<sup>30</sup>

The war with China appeared to validate Stalin’s arguments to speed up the rate of collectivization.

In late December 1929, the final stage of the process of collectivization was achieved. The Politburo sub-committee in charge of the kulak question divided the 650,000 kulak households into three categories. The first category was composed of kulaks who were actively hostile to the Soviet government and totaled some 52,000 heads of households. The second category opposed the collective farms but were “less actively anti-Soviet” and included some 112,000 households. Finally, the third category included the rest of the kulaks, a half a million families in all.<sup>31</sup> It was decided that the kulaks in the first category should be imprisoned or deported to Siberia, and those in the second category moved off their land but not necessarily exiled, while the third category were allowed to remain on their land, although they were subject to partial expropriation.

Molotov also made it clear that by the spring of 1930 he wanted to solve “the problem of collectivization in a number of major agricultural regions: from then on, the problem of collectivization of the USSR as a whole will have assumed an entirely new aspect.”<sup>32</sup> The plenum’s resolutions called for the continuation of collectivization and predicted that after the 1930 grain harvest, some 50 percent of all surplus grain would come from the collective farms. The offensive against the kulaks was to continue, although no mention was made of expropriating the kulaks’ land or expelling them from their homes. An exact timetable for total collectivization was also not set, although it was now portrayed as being a process involving only a few short years, not decades.<sup>33</sup>

At the same time, in a 4 December 1929 report by Litvinov to the Central Executive Committee, he admitted that the conflict with China and the re-establishment of relations with Great Britain were the most important facets of the Soviet Union’s foreign policy. He called the USSR’s recent relations with China over the previous “few years” as one of “unilateral and

collective farms and state farms in the areas of complete collectivization, the kulaks were no longer necessary and the expropriation of their land should begin immediately:

Now dekulakization in the areas of complete collectivization is no longer just an administrative measure. Now, it is an integral part of the formation and development of the collective farms. Consequently it is now ridiculous and foolish to discourse at length on dekulakization. When the head is off, one does not mourn for the hair.<sup>40</sup>

With this call to action all kulaks that were listed under category one—an estimated 52,000 families or as many as a quarter of a million people—were deported to Siberia. The Sino-Soviet War had shown the necessity for sponsoring mass migration to the underpopulated Far East. One important, albeit unmentioned, goal of the gulag system was to help protect the USSR's vulnerable Far Eastern borders. Alexander Solzhenitsyn has estimated that during collectivization at least five million peasants were sent to camps in Siberia.<sup>41</sup>

Such policies were a direct consequence of Stalin's abuse of the China policy: the increasing Far Eastern tensions in 1929 were themselves due to the adoption of aggressive policies by the Soviet government. First the United Opposition, and later to a much smaller degree the Right Opposition, vocally opposed Stalin's return to an era of "Red Imperialism." To a large degree, the issue of Soviet imperialism was being debated during the factional battles over the China question. For Stalin, therefore, the development of the Siberia labor camps was to serve a dual purposes: first, many of his political rivals—or suspected rivals—were "liquidated" during the 1930s' purges by being exiled to Siberia; second, the camps played an essential role in helping to prop up the USSR's Siberian defenses, initially against China, but later against Japan, by sending millions of Russians into exile into the unfortified regions directly to the north of the disputed Sino-Soviet border.<sup>42</sup>

As this book has attempted to show, while widespread descriptions during the late 1920s and early 1930s of Stalin as "paranoid" are almost certainly correct, his concerns were not just with domestic events in Russia but also included the USSR's foreign relations, especially with Asia. In fact, Stalin's fears were directed at the USSR's Asian neighbors, including Nationalist China and Japan. To a large degree, Stalin's concerns were justified, and were based on his constant misuse of the China policy to destroy his domestic political rivals, including most importantly Leon Trotsky and Nikolai Bukharin. The Conclusions will strive to discuss some of the long-range consequences of Stalin's factional policies on both the USSR and China.

# Conclusions

## China and the victory of “Socialism in One Country”

The Chinese Communist revolution during the 1920s was a failure. In large part, this was due to the Soviet government’s policy of putting its own interests before those of its Chinese ally. Time after time, the Comintern ordered Asian Communists into action—Nanchang, Canton, and Bargu being the three best examples—based on the special needs and specific timing of Bolshevik leaders in Moscow, not on the local requirements of the Asian revolutionaries. In 1929, this was to happen yet again, when the CCP was ordered to support the USSR against China during the Sino-Soviet War.

As a result of this strategy, Stalin was able to use his control over the China policy to eliminate completely the United Opposition and the Right Opposition, and thereby confirm his position as the most powerful Bolshevik leader. Stalin was also able to finalize his plans for “Socialism in One Country” by using events in Asia as an excuse to conduct radical collectivization, adopt the first Five-Year Plan, and create the gulags. Once again, China was the unwilling springboard for carrying out these Soviet reforms.

The Soviet Union is usually seen through a European lens. However, as this work has tried to show, such a lens can distort the real history of the 1920s. In 1929, the development of the Comintern during the 1919–29 period was broken down by the *Communist International* in an article entitled “The Comintern in the East” into two distinct periods. The first was characterized “primarily by open battles of the proletariat in the European capitalist countries” between 1919 and 1924. These European uprisings ended in failure. So the Comintern turned to what they thought was more fertile ground in the colonial and semi-colonial countries: “The distinctive characteristic of the second five-year period appears to be the development of waves of revolutionary insurrections and battles of the colonial peoples.”<sup>1</sup>

The most important of the colonial revolutions was in China. In November 1925, Gregory Zinoviev, the head of the Comintern, first placed the revolution in Asia ahead of revolution in Europe because it would “undermine the foundations of world, and especially English, imperialism.”<sup>2</sup> The development of the Chinese Communist Party’s United Front with the Guomindang would be the first blow against imperialism and so was of utmost concern to

the international Communist movement as a whole. The Soviet leaders were so assured of the inevitability of undermining the British that they projected a future world conflict in which the socialist camp, led by the USSR, would oppose the capitalist camp, initially led by Britain but eventually led by the United States. This division into two opposing camps would become the basis of the Cold War.

The year 1927 was the turning point for the Soviet Union’s China policy. Interest in the Chinese revolution was at an all-time high. As mentioned above, quantitative evidence of China’s importance is indicated by the fact that in 1927 the official journal of the Comintern, the *Communist International*, published 75 articles about China—or over 25 percent of all the articles published during that year—and over 60 percent of all the editorials during that year discussed the situation in China.<sup>3</sup> In addition, journals such as *Bolshevik*, which was first issued in January 1927, included extensive discussions of the revolution in China, while the journal *Materials on the Chinese Revolution* was fully devoted to the topic.

Control of the Comintern’s China policy quickly generated controversy. After the defeat of the socialist revolution in Germany in 1923, and as a result of Lenin’s death and the ensuing power struggle within the Bolshevik party in 1924, the Comintern policy in China became one of the major foci around which the different factions battled. As the revolution in China developed, the debates over how to guide this movement became more and more controversial. The United Opposition, led by Leon Trotsky, Karl Radek, and Gregory Zinoviev, were already fighting for control of the Bolshevik party with Joseph Stalin and Nikolai Bukharin. Determination of the Comintern’s China policy soon became little more than a pawn fought over by these two factions.

In China, the Comintern representatives worked closely with the recently founded Chinese Communist Party so as to rein in the national liberation movement under the control of the Communists. The power struggle in Moscow blinded the Bolsheviks to the real needs of the Chinese Communists. Therefore, the China policy proved to be disastrous, resulting in the purge of the Chinese Communists by Chiang Kai-shek and the Guomindang in 1927 and the massacre of an untold number of Communists and their supporters. Worse yet, the failed uprisings at Nanchang, Canton, and in Bargu were timed to benefit Stalin’s destruction of his domestic opponents in the USSR, rather than to bring the Chinese revolution to a successful conclusion. As a result, the Chinese revolution experienced a spectacular collapse.

The CCP’s defeat had an immediate and enormous impact on the Soviet Union. Because of its own security concerns, Stalin’s support for China’s revolution had to be “on the cheap,” since he was not willing to go to war with the Western nations. One former Chinese student, who was studying at the Sun Yat-sen University in Moscow during this time, has analyzed Stalin’s actions as follows:

supported the bourgeois nationalist revolution, recoiled in embarrassment from the social revolution which should have crowned and completed it, the promotion of revolution no longer occupied a central place in its agenda. World revolution continued to figure in a perorations of Comintern pronouncements on every solemn occasion; it was no longer thought of as the primary condition of the survival of the regime. “Socialism in one country” had taken its place.<sup>6</sup>

By 1929, the Soviet Union had adopted Stalin’s domestic policies, striving for an independent development of socialism to make the Soviet Union into a bastion for Communism. Concern over future conflict in the Far East was one of the reasons for the intensification of the anti-kulak purge, as thousands of peasants were sent to Siberia. Many of these peasants were transported to the Far East during the late summer and fall of 1929. When they arrived their housing and supplies were totally inadequate for the approaching Siberian winter. Many of the Russian exiles died.

Stalin did not care. In the wake of the 1929 Sino-Soviet conflict he considered the mass migration program imperative to firm up the Soviet infrastructure in Siberia, initially to oppose any possible aggression from China, but later from Japan. The second Five-Year Plan, which was adopted in the early 1930s, also proposed that Siberian industrialization be a major goal of Soviet development. These events were a direct result of the fear that a war in the Far East inspired in the Bolshevik leaders, and especially in Stalin.

The loss of China also signaled a major shift in Moscow away from sponsoring international revolution. The failure of the Communist revolution in China “dispersed the last lingering hopes among Russians for the extension of the international revolution on which Lenin had so heavily counted ... [and] drove Russia into a frenetic drive for self-sufficiency.”<sup>7</sup> After the defeat in China, top Bolsheviks began to express a different view of foreign revolutionary movements, claiming that: “One Soviet tractor is worth more than ten good foreign Communists.”<sup>8</sup>

By the end of the 1920s the need to create a strong Soviet state to act as a bastion for Communism took precedence and domestic concerns began to outweigh foreign policy considerations. Accordingly: “World revolution became an article in a creed ritualistically recited on solemn public occasions, but no longer an item of living faith or a call to action. The place left vacant in the ideology of Comintern was taken by defense of the Soviet Union.”<sup>9</sup>

Stalin’s policies were fated to have an enormous impact on the CCP. The study of the origins and formation of the Chinese Communist Party during the 1920s has generally been divided into two camps: those scholars who believe that the Communist International’s involvement was central to that development, and those scholars who believe that Chinese Communism developed after 1927 as a result of mainly internal forces.<sup>10</sup> As this work has shown, however, Stalin’s influence on Chinese Communism during the late

1920s and into the early 1930s was decisive; the course of China’s history would not have been the same without it.

Although the Comintern continued to direct the actions of the Chinese Communists from 1927 until the early 1930s, the 1927 defeat was a crucial turning point in these two parties’ relations, as Mao Zedong and other Chinese leaders began to formulate their own revolutionary philosophy. In particular, the social base on which the Chinese revolution rested diminished throughout the United Front period to the point where, by the end of 1927, only a handful of proletariat and masses of peasants were left.

After the Nationalist purges of 1927, even the proletarian base began to disappear, and Zhou Enlai reported in September 1930 that while the proletariat made up 10 percent of the Chinese Communist Party in 1928, it was only 3 percent in 1929, 2 percent in 1930, and had virtually disappeared entirely by the end of that year.<sup>11</sup> Although it is often portrayed that Mao and his followers purposely chose to emphasize peasants, in fact the CCP found itself in a position where it had little choice but to rely on the peasantry to carry out the further stages of the Communist revolution. Trotsky even warned that this might happen in 1928. This development proved to be very important to the CCP’s future revolutionary path.

Finally, the period of isolation that followed the defeat of the Chinese revolution gave the Chinese Communists the freedom to develop independently of Soviet control. During much of the 1930s, the CCP was cut off from Moscow. Later, after their 1949 victory, this period of solitary development would prove to be very important in giving the CCP an independent position in the worldwide Communist movement. To the Chinese leaders—like Mao Zedong—the hardships that the CCP had endured meant that China deserved equal standing with the USSR.

But for all of these positive aspects, Stalin’s decision to utilize the China policy to destroy domestic rivals had even greater negative effects. The defeat of the Chinese revolution during the late 1920s inadvertently led to the deaths of thousands—some have suggested tens of thousands—of Chinese Communist cadres and sympathizers. This destruction was not carried out for China’s sake, or even for the sake of the Communist movement as a whole, but in order to help Stalin win his factional battles in Moscow. The Chinese Communists would neither forget, nor forgive, the enormous toll Stalin’s policies required of the CCP.

Instead of being given credit for its sacrifice, the CCP was repeatedly criticized by the Comintern. The defeat of the Chinese revolution was blamed on CCP leaders, such as Chen Duxiu. After the CCP came to power in 1949, the memory of this early period could not help but have a detrimental effect on the course of Sino-Soviet relations. Not only did Mao think that the USSR should treat China as an equal, but in many ways he thought Stalin owed China a debt of gratitude. But Stalin refused to repay this debt. Arguably, such divisions would lead to increased friction between Stalin and Mao during the early 1950s.

# Notes

## Introduction

- 1 Many scholars have discussed this early period of supposed “equal” Sino-Soviet relations; see Edmond O. Clubb, *China and Russia, the “Great Game”* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1971), 210; Roberta Allbert Dayer, *Bankers and Diplomats in China 1917–1925: The Anglo-American Relationship* (London: Routledge, 1981), 183; Bruce A. Elleman, *Diplomacy and Deception: The Secret History of Sino-Soviet Diplomatic Relations, 1917–1927* (Armonk, NY: M.E. Sharpe, 1997), 247–48; Immanuel C.Y. Hsu, *The Rise of Modern China* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1990), 515; Harold R. Isaacs, *The Tragedy of the Chinese Revolution* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1938), 63–64; Louis Fischer, *The Soviets in World Affairs* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1951), Vol. II, 54; Sow-Theng Leong, *Sino-Soviet Diplomatic Relations, 1917–1926* (Canberra: University of Hawaii Press, 1976), 176; Nicholas V. Riasanovsky, *A History of Russia* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1963), 568; Morris Rossabi, *China and Inner Asia: From 1368 to the Present Day* (New York: Thames and Hudson, 1975), 254; James E. Sheridan, *China in Disintegration: The Republican Era in Chinese History, 1912–1949* (New York: The Free Press, 1975), 142; Jonathan Spence, *The Search for Modern China* (New York: W.W. Norton, 1990), 307; Allen S. Whiting, *Soviet Policies in China, 1917–1924* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1954), 251; and Victor A. Yakhontoff, *Russia and the Soviet Union in the Far East* (New York: Coward-McCann, 1931), 139.

## 1 The origin of Soviet factional battles over the China question

- 1 Robert Daniels, *The Conscience of the Revolution* (New York, 1960), 263.
- 2 Ibid., 263–65.
- 3 Ibid., 266.
- 4 Ibid., 263 and 265.
- 5 *Kommunisticheskii Internatsional* (hereafter *Communist International*), 8 (45) (July 1925), 10.
- 6 Ibid.
- 7 L.P. Deliusin, *Agrarno-krest’ianskii Vopros v Politike KPK, 1921–1928* (Agrarian and Peasant Questions in the Policies of the CCP 1921–28), (Moscow: Nauka, 1972), 150.
- 8 *Problemi Kitaya*, 4–5 (1930), 84–104.
- 9 Sergei Dalin, *V Riadakh Kitaiskoi Revoliutsii* (In the Ranks of the Chinese Revolution) (Moscow: Moskovskii rabochii, 1926), 13.
- 10 Sergei Dalin, *Ocherki Revolyutsii v Kitae* (Essays on the Revolution in China) (Moscow: Moskovskii rabochii, 1928).

- 46 Bruce A. Elleman, "The 1907–16 Russo-Japanese Secret Treaties: A Reconsideration," *Asian Cultural Studies*, 25 (30 March 1999), 29–44.
- 47 *Communist International*, 2 (51) (February 1926), 12.
- 48 Ibid., 35.
- 49 *Vidnye sovetskie kommunisty-uchastniki kitaiskoi revoliutsii* (The Outstanding Soviet Communists, Participants in the Chinese Revolution) (Moscow: Nauka, 1970), 35.
- 50 *Communist International*, 2 (51), February 1926, 100.

## 2 Chiang Kai-shek's 1926 political coup and the formation of the United Opposition

- 1 Brian Crozier, *The Man Who Lost China* (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1976), 86.
- 2 Bruce Swanson, *Eighth Voyage of the Dragon: A History of China's Quest for Seapower* (Annapolis, MD: Naval Institute Press, 1982), 156–57.
- 3 Hu Pu-yu, *The Military Exploits and Deeds of President Chiang Kai-shek* (Taipei: Chung Wu Publishing, 1971), 77.
- 4 G. Skalov, *Kantonskaia Kommuna* (Canton Commune) (Moscow: Nauchno-issledovate-l'skii institut po kitaiu, 1929), 295; see also Trotsky Archives, T1466 (15 May 1926) (sic) Comintern Executive Committee "Rezoliutsia Planuma ..." np. 1s 1p 1i and 1 T USSR Foreign/Comintern, China.
- 5 Skalov, 295.
- 6 According to Akimova they left Dongshan on 24 March 1926; V.V. Vishniakova-Akimova, *Dva Goda v Vosstavshem Kitae 1923–1927 Vospominania* (Two Years in Revolutionary China, 1925–27) (Moscow: Nauka, 1965), 240.
- 7 Warren Lerner, *Karl Radek: The Last Internationalist* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1970), 138, citing Radek, "Porazhenie narodnykh armii v Kitae," *Pravda*, 69 (26 March 1926), 2.
- 8 Ibid.
- 9 Trotsky Archives, T870 (25 March 1926) Trotsky TO [Chicherin] [Voroshilov] "Voprosy nashei politiki v otnoshenii Kitaia i Iaponii" np. 11s 11p 1i A (Ms?) Mi USSR Foreign/China, Japan, 2.
- 10 Ibid.
- 11 Ibid.
- 12 Ibid., 5; when discussing this proposal concerning allying with Zhang Zuolin, the committee recommended telling Zhang Zuolin about certain Japanese circles that reportedly wanted to replace him, and to convince Zhang that the Soviet government would not allow this to happen as long as normal diplomatic relations were retained.
- 13 Ibid.
- 14 Ibid.
- 15 Ibid.
- 16 Ibid., 7; this proposal is one of the earliest references to the creation of a state-sponsored program to increase the Soviet population in the Far East, by force if necessary, a program that Stalin initiated during the 1930s with the creation of the gulag prison camp system.
- 17 Ibid., 8; see notes stapled on to main page.
- 18 *Communist International*, 41 (115) (14 October 1927), 18.
- 19 C. Martin Wilbur and Julie How, *Documents on Communism, Nationalism, and Soviet Advisers in China 1918–1927* (New York: Octagon Books, 1972), 226.
- 20 Victor A. Yakhontoff, *The Chinese Soviets* (New York: Coward-McCann, 1934), 12.
- 21 *Problemy Kitaia*, 1 (1929), 8–11.
- 22 Ibid.

- 23 *Communist International*, 4 (53) (April 1926), 10.
- 24 Ibid., 12–13.
- 25 Isaac Deutscher, *Stalin: A Political Biography* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1949), 307.
- 26 Lerner, 139.
- 27 *Communist International*, 41 (115) (14 October 1927), 18.
- 28 Isaac Don Levine, *Stalin* (New York: Blue Ribbon Books, 1931), 255.
- 29 Maxim Litvinov, *Notes for a Journal* (New York: William Morrow, 1955), 24; this book has been criticized as a forgery, but corresponds closely with other sources from the time.
- 30 *Communist International*, 11 (85) (18 March 1927), 6.
- 31 *Communist International*, 15 (89) (15 April 1927), 8.
- 32 Wilbur and How, 231
- 33 Yakhontoff, 124.
- 34 *Communist International*, 7 (56) (July 1926), 36–41.
- 35 Ibid., 43–44.
- 36 Ibid., 49–50.
- 37 Ibid., 52–53.
- 38 *Problemy Kitaia*, 4–5 (1930), 94.
- 39 *Vidnye sovetskie kommunisty-uchastniki kitaiskoi revoliutsii* (The Outstanding Soviet Communists, Participants in the Chinese Revolution) (Moscow: Nauka, 1970), 35.
- 40 Dan N. Jacobs, *Borodin, Stalin's Man in China* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1981), 196.
- 41 *Materialy po kitaiskomu voprosu*, 9 (December 1927), 40–44.
- 42 Ibid., 44.
- 43 Tan Ping-shan, *Puti Razvitiia Kitaiskoi Revoliutsii* (Trends in the Evolution of the Chinese Revolution) (Moscow: Gos. izd-vo, 1927), 52–54.

### 3 The Northern Expedition and the United Front

- 1 Eugene Lyons, *Stalin: Czar of All the Russians* (New York: J.B. Lippincott Company, 1940), 167.
- 2 Warren Lerner, *Karl Radek: The Last Internationalist* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1970), 139; see also Leon Trotsky, *Problems of the Chinese Revolution* (New York: Paragon, 1932), 98.
- 3 Isaac Don Levine, *Stalin* (New York: Blue Ribbon Books, 1931), 257.
- 4 Les Evans and Russell Block (eds), *Leon Trotsky on China* (New York: Monad Press, 1976), 256; in all quotes, emphasis is as in the original.
- 5 Richard Gregor (ed.), *Resolutions and Decisions of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union, Volume 2: The Early Soviet Period: 1917–1929* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1974), 287.
- 6 Ibid., 287.
- 7 Trotsky Archives (30 August 1926) [Trotsky] TO (K. Radek). np. 2s 2p 1i T USSR Foreign/China.
- 8 Ibid.
- 9 Lerner, 140.
- 10 *Communist International*, 5–6 (54–55) (May–June 1926), 25–26.
- 11 *Communist International*, 8 (57) (August 1926), 39.
- 12 *Communist International*, 1 (75) (7 January 1927), 15, citing the *Daily Telegraph*, 30 September 1926.
- 13 *Communist International*, 2 (60) (24 September 1926), 3.
- 14 *Bolshevik*, 1 (1927), 16.
- 15 Maxim Litvinov, *Notes for a Journal* (New York: William Morrow, 1955), 38.

- 16 Jane Degras, *Soviet Documents on Foreign Policy. Volume 2: 1925–32* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1952), 133–35.
- 17 *Communist International*, 2 (60) (24 September 1926), 4–5.
- 18 *Liu da yi qian: dang di lishi cailiao* (Before the Sixth Party Congress: Materials on Party History) (Beijing: China Publishing House, 1980), 595.
- 19 Ibid., 596.
- 20 Evans and Block, 114.
- 21 Ibid., 115–18.
- 22 *Communist International*, 1 (59) (15 September 1926), 36–37.
- 23 *Communist International*, 12 (49) (December 1925), 5–23.
- 24 *Communist International*, 2 (60) (24 September 1926), 22.
- 25 Ibid., 29.
- 26 *Xiangdao zhoubao*, 172 (25 September 1926), 1752–54.
- 27 Lerner, 141
- 28 *Communist International*, 6 (64) (22 October 1926), 3.
- 29 Ibid., 28.
- 30 *Communist International*, 7 (65) (29 October 1926), 16.
- 31 Ibid.
- 32 Gregor, 295–98.
- 33 Ibid., 301.
- 34 *Communist International*, 7 (65) (29 October 1926), 3–10; what is remarkable—especially in comparison to later decades of Soviet rule—is how many people voted for the United Opposition.
- 35 Ibid.

#### **4 Rocky shoals ahead—the realignment of forces in the United Front**

- 1 *Communist International*, 10–11 (68–69) (22 November 1926), 3–5.
- 2 Ibid.
- 3 *Communist International*, 14 (72) (17 December 1926), 3–10.
- 4 Ibid.
- 5 *Communist International*, 4 (62) (8 October 1926), 21–24.
- 6 *Communist International*, 13 (71), (10 December 1926), 9–19.
- 7 Ibid.
- 8 *Communist International*, 15 (73) (24 December 1926), 3–11.
- 9 Ibid.
- 10 Tan Ping-shan, *Puti Razvitiia Kitaiskoi Revoliutsii* (Trends in the Evolution of the Chinese Revolution) (Moscow: Gos. izd-vo, 1927), 54–55.
- 11 *Communist International*, 13 (71) (10 December 1926), 3–8.
- 12 Tan, 52–54.
- 13 *Communist International*, 8 (82) (25 February 1927), 13.
- 14 *Bolshevik*, 1 (1927), 3.
- 15 Ibid., 8.
- 16 Ibid., 9.
- 17 Ibid., 9–10.
- 18 Ibid., 10.
- 19 Ibid., 10–11.
- 20 Ibid., 11.
- 21 Donald W. Treadgold, “Russia and the Far East”, in Ivo J. Ledener (ed.), *Russian Foreign Policy* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1962), 554.
- 22 *Bolshevik*, 1 (1927), 11.
- 23 Degras, 144–47.
- 24 *Revoliutsionnyi Vostok*, 1 (1927), 8.
- 25 *Bolshevik*, 1 (1927), 14–15.

- 26 Ibid.
- 27 Ibid., 19–23.
- 28 Ibid.
- 29 *Communist International*, 4 (78) (28 January 1927), 3–11.
- 30 *North China Herald*, 15 January 1927.
- 31 *North China Herald*, 29 January 1927.
- 32 *North China Herald*, 12 February 1927.
- 33 *Documents on British Foreign Policy, 1919–1939—Soviet Union* (London, Foreign Office, 1946), Vol. 9, Series A, Part II, 15.
- 34 *North China Herald*, 4 February 1927.
- 35 *Bolshevik*, 5 (1 March 1927), 74.
- 36 Ibid; see also *Communist International*, 9 (83) (4 March 1927), 10.
- 37 *Bolshevik*, 5 (1 March 1927), 62.
- 38 *Communist International*, 5 (79) (4 February 1927), 3–8.
- 39 Degas, 154–56.
- 40 *Communist International*, 6 (80) (February 1927), 3–10.
- 41 *Communist International*, 9 (83) (4 March 1927), 3–10.
- 42 Sergei Dalin, *Kitaiskie Memuary 1921–1927* (Chinese Memoir 1921–27) (Moscow: Moskovskii rabochii, 1975), 340.
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