CHAPTER TWO

Origins, Alliance, and Failure

1920–1930

The 1920s were a tumultuous decade for the CCP. Through collaboration with the GMD, it rose from insignificance to develop into a significant mass party and then was almost completely destroyed. Internal and external factors contributed to its growth, and the fate of the fledgling party was tied not only to its cooperation and rivalry with the Nationalists but also to the internal battles within the Communist Party of the Soviet Union between Stalin and Trotsky. To survive, the CCP learned, it must develop a disciplined organization to replace the loose collection of radical, small study groups that had formed to explore a new path forward. And when the Nationalists turned their military force on them, the leaders of the CCP realized the importance of possessing an independent military force. Finally, Mao Zedong grasped the vital revolutionary potential of the peasantry once mobilized by the party. These factors were important for post-1949 rule.

The CCP emerged from a world in turmoil. Millions had perished in World War I, and out of that war's ashes arose a new Soviet state dedicated to the promotion of global, proletarian revolution. The traditional European powers—Britain, France, and Germany—were weakened after the war. The United States became the most powerful global player, but it did not seem interested in taking on the role of global policeman.

By contrast, the Bolsheviks had no qualms about exporting their revolution beyond their borders. The main revolutionary theater was in the West, yet in the East the potential for revolution was brewing and China was the key country in the struggle between the old and the new. For the Soviets,

revolution in China was a crucial link in the chain of their global strategy to resist imperialism. Consequently, they poured significant personnel and material resources into building a Chinese movement for national liberation, including the establishment of a communist party. The ground in China was fertile for sowing the seeds of radical theories such as Marxism.

The collapsed dynastic system had left behind a political and intellectual vacuum. Although the government in Beijing was recognized by other nations, real power rested with a motley crew of warlords, whose own power was circumscribed by their military strength. Their wars and shifting alliances provided the context within which political groupings had to operate. For young activists, it was a frustrating but exhilarating time as they explored different thought systems that might restore order to the nation. Interest in and sympathy for Marxism grew out of a questioning of China's cultural heritage that was at the core of the May Fourth Movement (1915–1919). Interest in the Bolshevik model intensified following the 1917 Russian Revolution, which offered a possible path forward for the relatively poor and backward Chinese economy. These interests primarily arose among a small intellectual elite who had been active in the study societies that had formed during disillusionment with the chaotic politics of the post-imperial era. However, Marxism was not the predominant intellectual trend. On the left, anarchism exerted greater influence than Marxism, and nascent CCP groups had to struggle against the anarchists to gain a foothold. Liberalism, also inspired by the ideas of John Dewey, captivated some intellectuals.

The fragmented nation allowed space for alternatives to develop, and local environments produced a variety of approaches and policies. First, for the CCP, there was Shanghai, the Paris of the East, an elegant city where foreign concessions afforded protection for radicals to meet and plot their strategies. This was where the CCP was founded and laid out its revolutionary agenda. However, as the 1920s progressed, the Shanghai Municipal Police increased their surveillance of activists in the Shanghai International Settlement, and the party retreated into a clandestine world of secrecy, conspiracy, and fear of betrayal—factors that would shape the future mentality of the CCP. This atmosphere produced a distinctive view of what was necessary to promote revolution as the CCP members worked illegally, scuttling between an array of safe houses.

Second, there was the trading area of Guangzhou (Canton) in southern China. Here the warlord Chen Jiongming and the politician Sun Yat-sen, despite their differences, welcomed the radical thinkers and activists. The


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Krasnoyarsk
Lake Baikal
Irkutsk
S O V I E T U N I O N
Ulaanbaatar
MONGOLIA
Kuitun
Yining
XINJIANG
GANSU
NINGXIA
Hotan
QINGHAI
Xining
Lanzhou
Yellow River
C H I N A
SICHUAN
Chengdu
TIBET
Lhasa
New Delhi
NEPAL
Kathmandu
BHUTAN
Yamuna
Ghagara
Brahmaputra
Kunming
YUNNAN
Ganges
Son
Narmada
I N D I A
Mekong R.
BURMA
Mahanadi
BAY OF BENGAL
Irrawaddy
Godavari
THAILAND

Republican China, 1912–1949

CCP could operate there legally without engaging in clandestine maneuvers. Sun Yat-sen was the founder and head of the GMD and was recognized by those on the left as the leader of the revolutionary movement. The relationship between the CCP and the GMD would define China's history not only in the 1920s but also in much of the period that followed.

Third, there was the area that straddled the Hunan-Jiangxi border, with its history of rebellion and activism. The warlord who controlled most of Hunan tolerated the Communists and claimed to be a socialist. This allowed pro-labor activism, and three key CCP leaders—Mao Zedong, Liu Shaoqi, and Li Lisan—cut their revolutionary teeth there.[1] The three were leaders of the local labor resistance among the coal miners and railway workers in the town of Anyuan. During the 1920s, this area formed a crucial training base for the CCP. In addition to labor activism, peasant associations were established, and after the CCP's catastrophic defeat in 1927, many joined the new Red Army.[2] It became known as "China's little Moscow," and at it is peak one-fifth of its 80,000 inhabitants were CCP members.

These brief vignettes of different revolutionary experiences reveal the complexity of the CCP revolution from its outset. The revolution looked different depending on where one stood, and this dictated different approaches to strategy and tactics. No matter how forcefully Moscow or the Party Center tried to impose uniformity, local demands and conditions could always produce different responses. There was a world of difference between operating illegally in the North and operating openly in the South. These different environments shaped the perception of how cooperation with the Nationalists should be carried out.

Throughout the 1920s these circumstances complicated the CCP's ability to take advantage of opportunities as they arose. The revolution not only looked different, but was also a very different experience, for those in the GMD-protected areas of southern China than it was for those working in the semiclandestine conditions of Shanghai. By the late 1920s Mao Zedong was relatively free of Soviet influences, allowing him greater freedom to develop an alternative approach to revolution that was based in the countryside and supported by armed force.

Laying the Groundwork for a Party

It was a once-popular myth that the CCP was either a Soviet creation from its origins or emerged organically from domestic trends.[3] The reality is more

nuanced. Outcomes depended on complex relations among local innovation, intricate relationships between local actors, and the promptings of Soviet agents not only from the Communist International (Comintern) but also from the Soviet Foreign Ministry and the International Labour Organization. For example, Soviet influence was evident with the formation of the Communist groups in Beijing, Guangzhou, and Shanghai; more indigenous factors were important in Changsha and Wuhan; and a lively group of Communists came together in Chongqing with no apparent contact with the Soviets or the other Communists in China. No account of the CCP's origins can ignore these realities. That said, the Soviets did play a crucial role in the CCP's early years, providing financial and organizational support. Yet there were serious divisions among the various Soviet agencies as well as within the same organization.

Had there not been fertile ground on which the Bolshevik seeds could be sown, the efforts by Soviet Russia might have come to nothing. An intellectual quest for alternatives following the collapse of the imperial system, combined with frustration from post-imperial politics, provided opportunity. The quest for alternatives was boosted by the intellectual experimentation and discovery that took place during the May Fourth Movement, which took its name from the more limited nationalist demonstrations of 1919. The demonstrations were sparked by the disclosure that the Versailles Treaty of 1919 had ceded control of the German concession of Shandong to Japan instead of returning it to China. The shock of this revelation was made all the worse when it became known that Britain, France, and Italy had secretly agreed to this during the war.

Of deeper importance were the attacks on Chinese tradition that had been brewing among radical intellectuals, with slogans that advocated bringing down the "old Confucian shop." The wide-ranging critiques led to a questioning of many traditional practices of authority and behavior, including sexual mores and gender roles that would shape the thinking of early Communist sympathizers. Some of the early Communist leaders embraced feminism and advocated liberation from the repressive institutions of household, clan, and religion.[4] These impulses were repressed as the CCP became more involved in military conflicts with the Nationalists and the Japanese.

Following the collapse of the Qing dynasty, initial experimentation with a republican system ended in failure and frustration. The pull of tradition was too strong, and the natural heir, Yuan Shikai, assumed increasing powers, culminating in his declaring himself emperor in December 1915. His death in

June 1916 prevented further embarrassment but left behind chaos and confusion as military leaders throughout China vied for power, thus ushering in the warlord period. Then began an elaborate merry-go-round of different groups trying to wrest power in Beijing, the internationally recognized capital.

In addition to the actions by Soviet agents, four major changes took place that supported the establishment of a Communist party. First, there was a growing acceptance that Marxism could provide a solution to the dilemmas faced by China. Marxism gradually came to replace anarchism and more moderate forms of socialism among those on the radical left. Second, the intellectuals who formed the Marxist study groups came out of their ivory towers, where they had merely published papers and discussed theories, to become activists. Third, members of the study groups had come together through personal relationships, a fact that frustrated the Comintern advisers as they tried to build loyalty to the organization rather than to a particular individual, region, or educational institution. Those who had cut their radical teeth debating within these intimate groups resisted the tighter institutional structure of a Leninist party. Fourth, there was a gradual acceptance by some that a Leninist form of organization was needed by China to unite internally and to resist external pressures. These four themes would dominate CCP work throughout the 1920s and even beyond.

For our story, most important was the growing influence of Marxism as an integrated system of thought and a guide to action among a small group of intellectuals. The attraction of Marxism when combined with the organizational power of Leninism appeared to provide a pathway to redemption that neither anarchism nor liberalism could offer. Leninism's appeal was heightened by its linking China's struggle for national salvation with global liberation from the forces of imperialism, casting China as a key component in an international movement for emancipation. That said, it is debatable how sophisticated the understanding of Marxism and Leninism was among the early CCP members. For those who stuck with the party after its establishment, they were Bolsheviks before they were Marxists. Much has been made of Mao Zedong's adaptation of Marxism to China's conditions (the Sinification of Marxism), but from the beginning the young intellectuals interpreted Marxism in terms of their own intellectual heritage. In its Leninist form, Marxism offered a pathway to the wealth and power they yearned for. While acceptance of the Leninist form of the party was indisputable, CCP members were skilled at selectively adapting those elements of the ideology that suited their circumstances, while rejecting others.[5]

Although Mao Zedong claimed that Marxism entered China from Russia, intellectuals in Japan were the prime source for the radical ideas within East Asia. Many early works were translated from Japanese by Chinese who had studied there. The fascination with Japan grew as young Chinese tried to come to terms with their nation's traumatic defeat in the Sino-Japanese War (1894–1895), which had been fought primarily over supremacy in Korea. Searching for the key to Japan's success led to an interest in the Meiji Restoration and resulted in travel to Japan, where some discovered radical ideas.

By 1919 Marxist and socialist thought were gaining traction among the radical intellectual elite, and Leninism's attractiveness was increased by the victory of the Russian Revolution and the actions of Soviet agents. Articles published in *New Youth,* which would become the major CCP magazine and *The Communist* (a journal established in November 1920) shifted from translations of Japanese theoretical works to works written in English that were more focused on action rather than on theory: how to confront imperialism and how to carry out a socialist revolution. This shift in emphasis created divisions within the radical camp and brought about a clear split between those attracted to anarchism and those who were striving to understand the Bolshevik revolution and the Leninist organizational form. The two key figures in the early Communist movement, Chen Duxiu and Li Dazhao, readily adopted the ideas of Marxism and Leninist organization.[6]

The shift was rapid as young people experimented with different ideas. In this context, Chen and Li were important as elder statesmen of the leftist intellectual arena. Their prestige drew in acquaintances and former and current students to the small radical movement. Enthusiasm for Soviet Russia was strengthened by the Karakhan Declaration, which appeared to renounce all former czarist territorial claims in China, thus distinguishing the new Soviet regime from the other foreign powers. The declaration was passed on July 25, 1919, and was published in March 1920. It renounced the unequal treaties with Russia and promised the return of the Chinese Eastern Railway without requiring any compensation from China. This crucial artery became a focal point of subsequent disagreement as the Soviets backed away from this agreement. When the declaration was published in the Soviet press, the rejection of compensation was excluded, and in late 1922, when the Soviet foreign affairs representative, Adolf Joffe, was confronted about the claim, he denied that any such offer had ever been made. The following year, Karakhan himself, after whom the declaration was named, denied making such a generous offer.[7]

Soviet Creation or Chinese Invention

For as long as the Soviet Union existed, official historians dueled with those in China about the origins of the CCP. Selected and abridged documents were released to argue their respective cases. Not surprisingly, Chinese historians stressed and continue to stress the indigenous sources of the party's origins. Historians promulgated the phrase "Chen [Duxiu] in the South and Li [Dazhao] in the North" to explain the roots of the small groups that came together to form the CCP, with the two most influential early Communists using their contacts to develop the early groups.[8] With the opening of the Comintern China archives, we can now reach a more accurate assessment. Reality was more complex, but Soviet engagement was crucial.

Although Chen and Li were key figures laying the theoretical foundations for the party, it was a Russian, Grigori Voitinsky, and a Dutchman, Henk Sneevliet (alias Maring),[9] who brought to China concepts of Leninist organization. Crucially, Sneevliet devised the specific Communist tactic of collaborating with the Nationalists to expand the CCP's influence.

Voitinsky was not the first to visit China with a mission to assess its revolutionary potential, but his mission, which arrived in April 1920, was the most crucial.[10] He traveled as a journalist, a common cover for Soviet agents working overseas and one later also adopted by the CCP. With the groundwork laid for more direct engagement and the growing sense among a small group that China's salvation was linked to the global need for emancipation from imperialism, Voitinsky had raw material with which to work. Assigned for Comintern work in the East, he had crucial influence on CCP policy throughout the 1920s and was the Comintern representative in China when Chiang Kai-shek struck in 1927.

Voitinsky's mission was to scope out leaders of the revolutionary movement and bring together those in North China who professed anarchist and Communist views. Initially he was not tasked with founding a party, but he quickly shifted his views to realign them with those of the Comintern to push for a more orthodox party rather than an assembly of radical elements. Voitinsky undertook three tasks that established the foundation for the CCP: he met with notable figures among the radicals and reported their views back to the Comintern,[11] he promoted materials on the Bolshevik movement, and most importantly, he engaged in organizational work to plant the seeds of the notion of forming a Communist party by establishing the Shanghai Revolutionary Bureau as the core of the party. The bureau was composed of five

members, including himself and Chen Duxiu, and three departments: publication, information and agitation, and organization; there was a sub-bureau in Guangzhou. In all probability, "The Manifesto of the CCP" (November 1920) was published by the bureau, well before there was an actual CCP. The manifesto proposed a radical, orthodox view of the party's objectives but exhibited little feeling for the realities of China. Common ownership was proposed, private property was to be abolished, as was the state (reflecting the influence of anarchism), and society was to be classless. Class struggle led by the CCP would defeat capitalism and, via the dictatorship of the proletariat, would lead to a society governed by a soviet.

Voitinsky left China in January 1921, but his short visit yielded important progress. The foundations for the Communist Party had been put in place and the idea of a national congress was floated. In Shanghai, Voitinsky had nurtured a small but strong nucleus of comrades and tutored them on the importance of organization and propaganda when developing a revolutionary party. Organization and propaganda would remain core elements of CCP work, albeit with varying degrees of success and intensity. The importance of Voitinsky as a catalyst is revealed by the fact that following his departure, momentum stalled due to time pressures, inadequate resources, and internal squabbles about the nature of the party. The arrival of his replacements, Henk Sneevliet, on behalf of the Comintern, and Vladimir Nikolsky, sent by the Far Eastern Secretariat to oversee the First National Congress of the CCP, got work moving again. The two played major roles during the congress, drawing up plans and covering the expenses, and Sneevliet was instrumental in shaping the first period of cooperation with the GMD.[12]

The First Party Congress: Going It Alone?

The congress, which convened in Shanghai from July 23 to August 5, 1921, marked a crucial milestone. Thirteen Chinese delegates, joined by Nikolsky and Sneevliet, represented small groups in Shanghai, Beijing, Wuhan, Changsha/Hunan, Guangzhou, Ji'nan, and those Chinese studying in Japan. The thirteen delegates, chaired by Zhang Guotao, a later rival to Mao Zedong for party leadership, represented a grand total of 53 members. In secret, they gathered at a member's house in the French concession on Rue Wantz (now 76 Xingye Road). Indicating the precarious nature of underground work, the meeting was interrupted by a mysterious figure who entered the house, thus causing the meeting to adjourn and subsequently retreat to

South Lake in nearby Jiaxing, Zhejiang province. The congress elected a provisional Central Executive Bureau—Chen Duxiu (secretary), Zhang Guotao (organization), and Li Da (propaganda)—to liaise with the regional branches.

At the time, the congress was not regarded as a big deal. The two most important figures in the Communist movement, Chen Duxiu and Li Dazhao, did not attend, and Sneevliet dismissed its significance. The spirited and animated debates focused on the nature and role of the party, and whether it should join with other social forces. The fluidity of the views of the founders is reflected in the fact that of the thirteen delegates, only three attended the Second Congress and only two were still members in 1949.

The participants divided into two main camps. The majority continued the harsh rhetoric and exclusionist stance of the November 1920 manifesto. They called for the overthrow of the capitalists by the revolutionary army of the proletariat and they were hostile to any form of collaboration with other groups, especially the "yellow intellectual class." Members were to shun joining the National Parliament. Soviets would form the main organizing principle within the party, operating as a secretive entity along hierarchical lines. The minority rejected such activism and wanted to take a more academic approach, sensing that it was too soon to become involved in the labor movement. The best strategy was to equip the intellectual elite with an understanding of Marxism, and only then could workers be organized and their class consciousness raised. This measured approach would permit more time to reflect on the comparative values of Bolshevism and German Social Democracy. Rather than a tight Bolshevik organization, the minority preferred a looser organization that would recruit students, intellectuals, and all who believed in and were willing to promote Marxism. The revolution would be a long process, and participation in a "bourgeois" government was perfectly acceptable. This approach was rejected, with the final decision barring CCP members from holding posts as government officials or as parliamentary representatives.

Sneevliet sought to persuade participants that it was essential for the small party to ally with the national revolutionary movement, best represented by the GMD. Driven by his practical experience in the Dutch colony, he drew on the decisions of the Comintern's Second Congress, held in July–August 1920. The theses adopted contained contradictions that would lead the CCP down the road to calamity in 1927. The important role of the movement in the East was to overthrow imperialism as an integral component of

the global proletarian struggle. Lenin emphasized that it was necessary to enter into a temporary alliance with bourgeois democracy, while maintaining the independence of the proletarian movement. Meanwhile, temporarily, the bourgeoisie would lead the revolutionary movement. When operationalized, this approach was a continual source of contention not only within the Comintern but also within the CCP. The key questions were: How much independence should the labor movement enjoy? How could the party prevent proletarian interests from becoming subsumed under those of the bourgeoisie? and How temporary was temporary?

Despite the stress on struggle and action, one of the most effective areas of Communist work was education—setting up workers' clubs and schools for workers and their families. This is hardly surprising, given that most of the early party members were drawn from the intelligentsia and education was their trade. In addition, the role of a teacher held a venerable place in the Confucian tradition, and while teachers impressed local workers, they also used this traditional access to inculcate Marxist ideas and proletarian consciousness. The pioneer was Luo Zhanglong, who oversaw a workers' school on the important Beijing-Hankou Railway line.[13] Others were impressed, and future CCP leader Li Lisan learned from Luo Zhanglong and set up a school in Anyuan. The Communist-run school system in Anyuan was crucial to local CCP success in recruiting members and sympathizers. By 1925 there were seven schools under the auspices of the Communist-run workers' club, where 1,500 workers and 2,000 children were studying.[14]

Conflicting Views in the Alliance

Sneevliet's proposal for cooperation was bitterly contested and open to different interpretations, which had significant strategic consequences. The key question was who the alliance should be formed with. Soviet agents sought cooperation with a variety of individuals, not only Sun Yat-sen, the leader of the GMD, but also Chen Jiongming, the powerful warlord in Guangdong, and Wu Peifu, the power in the North. Some in Moscow saw Chen Jiongming and Wu Peifu as better options. The comrades in Guangzhou favored cooperation with Chen Jiongming rather than Sun Yat-sen. Those CCP members such as Zhang Guotao who worked with the labor movement were opposed to CCP members joining the GMD as individuals to form a bloc within. Key disputes centered on the level of cooperation and whether it was possible to build a mass Communist party. Given the slaughter

when the CCP was defeated in 1927, one can point to the inherent contradiction in the Comintern's policy, but in 1920 it was not obvious and most delegates to the Comintern's Second Congress were far more interested in developments in the West than in wrestling with any contradictions. For Sneevliet, Voitinsky, Mikhail Borodin (Sneevliet's Bolshevik party successor in China), and the Chinese comrades, the issue of how to operationalize the seemingly simple formula within China's complex reality would lead to continual conflicts about the way forward.

Sneevliet created the tactic of a bloc within the GMD, with all CCP members joining the GMD as individuals. Sneevliet's extended trip to southern China during the winter of 1921–1922 impressed upon him the potential for a successful national revolution. He traveled during the great Hong Kong seaman's strike, which resulted in victory for the workers and significant wage increases. Sneevliet contrasted the GMD engagement favorably with the lack of activity by the CCP and their stumbling efforts at labor organization in the North. Reporting his views to the Comintern in July 1922, he claimed that the CCP had no significant proletarian base, not even in Shanghai, and he saw little chance for the development of a revolutionary socialist movement. On other occasions, he even noted that the Communist Party had been born too early by foreign means. Sneevliet's positive view of the GMD and the weakness of the CCP was shared by others.[15] To head off criticism of cooperation with a bourgeois party, Sneevliet claimed that it was not a party but rather a four-group bloc, comprising the intelligentsia, the emigrants living in other colonial countries, the soldiers in the army of the southern government, and the workers. This loose coalition meant that the CCP could work within the GMD openly and disseminate socialist propaganda while building up its strength among the working class.

Sneevliet returned from his trip to the South convinced of the correctness of his vision for China's future, but he found himself opposed, both within China by Chen Duxiu and Zhang Guotao and in Moscow by key Comintern leaders, including Voitinsky, who had received reports painting a more negative picture of the GMD and of its leader Sun Yat-sen.[16] Before reporting to Moscow, Sneevliet shared his views with his Chinese comrades, who did not receive them well. Chen Duxiu complained that outside of Guangzhou, the GMD was regarded as a "political party scrambling for power and profit" and that the comrades from Guangdong, Beijing, Shanghai, Changsha, and Wuhan who had met to discuss cooperation had unanimously rejected Sneevliet's ideas. Chen Duxiu asked Voitinsky to present the Chi-

nese views to the Executive Committee of the Communist International (ECCI), should it discuss Sneevliet's ideas.[17] While Chen reluctantly fell in line with Sneevliet's approach, others dug in. Sneevliet returned to China from Moscow and used his prestige, together with Comintern support, to push CCP members to accept the tactic of forming a bloc within the GMD instead of working alongside as a bloc without. This rapprochement paved the way for the groundbreaking Sun-Joffe Statement of January 26, 1923, which authorized collaboration between the GMD and Soviet Russia. For Sun, it meant that his movement could receive Soviet financial support. Joffe, the key Soviet envoy to China, had requested that the Soviets provide two million gold rubles in financial support, and on March 8, 1923, the Politburo (Political Bureau) of the Russian Communist Party (Bolshevik) approved the request.

The Third Party Congress: Let's Collaborate, Perhaps

While momentum was moving forward in China, opposition was growing in Moscow, providing support to those in the CCP who were still uncomfortable with the idea of a bloc within. Cooperation again proved controversial at the Third Party Congress, which met June 12–20, 1923. In addition, measures were proposed to create a more orthodox Leninist party structure. The Central Executive Committee (CEC) was asserted to be the most powerful organization and was granted the task of enforcing congress decisions and examining and deciding on the policies and actions of the party. Anarchism was to be combatted and the party was to operate under "centralized and iron-like laws." Such statements had little practical effect. Opposition to the form of cooperation with the GMD persisted, and the party once again fell into disarray.

The situation was so dire that Chen Duxiu tendered his resignation as party leader. He had attempted to be loyal to Moscow while trying to deal with the reality on the ground, but obedience to the Comintern was paramount, as the party was not viable without Soviet financial support. Between October 1921 and January 1922, of the 17,500 yuan spent, 16,555 yuan had come from the ECCI.[18]

Before the Third Congress convened, any optimism that CCP members might have felt was extinguished by the crushing of the northern railway workers' February 1923 strike. The sobering defeat revealed that the CCP had not developed strength within the working class, and it led CCP members

to be more sympathetic to the idea of working with the GMD. Before the strike, CCP engagement in labor activity had been rising. Of particular note was the successful, peaceful miners' strike in Anyuan, Jiangxi province, which resulted in not only economic gains for the workers but also official recognition and support for the Communist-controlled labor organization. The action had been led by three future CCP leaders: Liu Shaoqi, Li Lisan, and Mao Zedong. Li Lisan raised the slogan "Once beasts of burden, now we will be men," which appealed to the pervasive calls at the time for human dignity.[19]

These successes provided support to those in the CCP and in Moscow who thought that a mass Communist party could be developed based on the proletariat. CCP strength was in the North, among the railway workers and the miners of Hubei and Hunan, not in Shanghai where workers' organizations were underdeveloped. In fact, in the fall of 1922 the Labor Secretariat had moved from Shanghai to Beijing. Naively, the CCP leadership thought this would bring the movement under the protection of sympathetic warlord Wu Peifu. It is true that the number of strikes had been rising, but for the most part they were focused on material issues and did not raise class consciousness. To rectify this, at a January 1923 meeting it was decided that future political struggles should be waged based on opposition to imperialism and warlordism and in defense of the right to strike.[20] The increasing activism made Wu Peifu realize that the workers' actions might threaten the vital Beijing-Hankou Railway. The tense standoff along the railway was broken in the early hours of February 7, when troops under Wu Peifu broke up the strike, killing ten workers and wounding thirty. The severed head of one of the strike leaders was hung on a bamboo pole to instill fear in the hearts of others. This was merely the first of a series of betrayals that followed the CCP's placement of trust in sympathetic collaborators.

The idea that the working class could provide a base upon which the CCP could build the revolution had been dispelled, and pessimism prevailed. The CCP lost around 90 percent of its support, and only in Hunan did the labor unions escape persecution. The ensuing terror led the CCP to be more sympathetic toward the GMD and toward the possibility of building a revolutionary base in the South. The CCP moved its headquarters via Shanghai to Guangzhou, where it could operate in the open.

The massacre provided a somber backdrop as the party met in Guangzhou to hold its Third Congress. Yet the defeat did not quell the disputes over the nature of collaboration with the GMD. The basis for the discussions at the

The author with Luo Zhanglong, leader of the February 1923 Railway Workers' strike, in 1988.

congress was the Comintern's January 1923 resolution, agreed upon in Moscow by Voitinsky and Sneevliet and under Bukharin's promptings.[21] The message was clear: the CCP had to cooperate with the GMD. The weakness of the labor movement meant that a national revolution was the priority, and therefore CCP members would remain in the GMD. Yet room for disagreement persisted, as the CCP had to organize the workers, enlighten them, and create professional unions. This would provide the basis for a strong, mass Communist party. Confusingly, this work was to be conducted independently, but, at the same time, it was not to disturb the national revolutionary movement. The CCP was not to become entirely entangled within the GMD and was not to "furl its own banner."[22]

Based on the Comintern's January 1923 resolution, Chen Duxiu, supported by Sneevliet, presented a set of ideas to the congress that called on the CCP to keep the GMD on the revolutionary road and to create within the GMD a left wing of workers and peasants. The CCP was to continue to organize the workers, but CCP interests would rest mainly with the national movement. Zhang Guotao took special exception, accusing Sneevliet of

trying to liquidate the CCP. Sneevliet criticized Zhang for his leftist tendencies and his illusions that a rapid development of a mass workers' party was possible.

Zhang Guotao raised three issues: Did the GMD represent the national movement? Would it be possible to reorganize the GMD? and Was there an alternative to this mode of cooperation to promote the revolution? He feared that if all CCP members were to join the GMD, then CCP interests would be ignored unless the GMD were to be reorganized—which he did not think was possible.[23] In Zhang's view, the CCP's key task was to build the labor movement, and not to support the GMD in the North where it was weak. Sneevliet defended his and Chen's views and claimed that the only question to be debated concerned implementation, not the principle of whether or not to join the GMD. He argued that an independent labor movement was not possible and that Chen Duxiu's ideas provided the only correct guidance on how to collaborate with the GMD. The ensuing vote was close (21 to 16), indicating substantial opposition to this form of collaboration. However, the result of the votes for the new CEC revealed a decline in personal support for Zhang Guotao, as he received only 6 out of a possible 40 votes, whereas support for Chen Duxiu was unanimous. At its first meeting after the congress, the CEC elected a five-person Central Bureau, with Chen Duxiu as chair, Mao Zedong as secretary, Luo Zhanglong a labor activist, and Sneevliet's German interpreter as party accountant.

The congress manifesto stressed the need to rally around the GMD as the central force in the national revolution. The weakness of the working class ruled out the possibility of developing a mass Communist party. Within the GMD, CCP members were to attract radical elements who would then help to expand the party. Progress was not smooth, however, and the resolution was barely implemented. The Central Bureau moved back to Shanghai as it felt that the party could not achieve much with Sun Yat-sen remaining in the South. The CCP wanted to develop new organizations or bring about radical change within the GMD and create a new national party. The one region that was positive about cooperation with the GMD was Guangzhou. The Comintern and Bolshevik emissary Borodin had arrived there in early October 1923 to replace Sneevliet as Stalin's man in China. The shift from the globe-trotting Dutchman to the Bolshevik party man signified the emergence of Russian national interests at the expense of proletarian, world revolution.

Alliance Fuels the Growth of the CCP

There is no doubt that the united front with the GMD initially was beneficial to the CCP. Membership grew from just under 1,000 in January 1924 to almost 55,000 by April 1927. However, from the beginning the policy was fraught with tensions over maintaining CCP integrity and supporting growth of the GMD. Disagreements continued about the role of the labor movement, the degree of CCP autonomy, and to what extent the CCP should build its own strength in those areas where the GMD was not strong. The CCP's capacity to act independently of Soviet advice was limited by the general esteem for Moscow's agents—and their financial support, without which the CCP would not have been able to operate. Problematically, there was no unanimity in Moscow about the relationship between the GMD and the CCP and the balance between promoting the national revolution and the development of a mass Communist party. Resolutions often embodied contradictory views, allowing the comrades in China to pick and choose whichever approach they favored. This uncertainty led to a series of CCP resolutions that sought to define the nature of the GMD: at times it was viewed as homogeneous, while on other occasions it was said to comprise a left and right wing, or a left, right, and center. The different analyses of the nature of the GMD and the potential for promoting the national revolution can be clearly seen in the differences in the approaches of those working in Guangzhou and those working in Shanghai. The trajectory of the revolution looked very different for those working clandestinely out of safe houses in urban, foreign-dominated Shanghai compared to those who were operating under the security umbrella of the GMD military, where the CCP could openly mobilize. Borodin even went so far as to state that there were "two lines" in the Chinese revolution.[24]

The CCP's success during the first years of cooperation set the stage for its later repression. It must have been obvious to all involved that, sooner or later, the interests of the national revolution led by the bourgeoisie and those of the proletarian revolution led by a party promoting the interests of the workers and peasants would clash. Stalin anticipated that, when the time was ripe, the Nationalists would be squeezed dry like a lemon and tossed aside. Yet, beginning from the slaughter of the CCP sympathizers in Shanghai in April 1927, it was the CCP that was squeezed so hard that it barely survived. Divisions within the GMD and the concentration of military power in the hands of Chiang Kai-shek sealed the CCP's fate.

In addition to the unresolved challenge of cooperation, there were also organizational problems. Throughout the period, the CCP adopted various resolutions to tighten up the organization and to shift it away from the small-group mentality, which had been crucial to its origins, to become a disciplined Bolshevik machine. To dilute the influence of the intellectual elite within the party, more workers and peasants were recruited and membership criteria were relaxed. Workers were not expected to understand the intricacies of Marxism, but they were seen as natural fodder for the CCP. Class consciousness and loyalty to the party were sufficient. The influx of new members, in turn, led to a new set of problems as complaints began to spread that many members lacked both theoretical sophistication and practical experience. Slowly but surely, in a country that was overwhelmingly rural, the realization dawned that the peasantry had a role to play as members of the revolutionary fold. One such early theoretical advocate was Chen Duxiu, while Peng Pai began rural organization in South China even before Mao Zedong championed a focus on the peasantry.

Under Borodin's guidance the reorganization of the GMD along Leninist lines went well. Financial support from Soviet Russia helped, but both as a Russian and as a party member, Borodin enjoyed a higher status than his predecessor, Sneevliet. With Sun Yat-sen's willing support, the reorganization culminated in January 1924 with the First National Congress of the GMD. The Congress Manifesto fell in line with the Comintern's view that stressed the anti-imperialist and anti-warlord nature of the current struggle, calling for far-reaching economic, political, and social reforms. Communists were well represented in the GMD leading bodies. Three Communists were elected to the twenty-four-person CEC and headed the organization and the peasant bureau. The policy of cooperation seemed to be working.

This did not appease everyone in the CCP or the Comintern. Voitinsky remained concerned about the capabilities of the GMD in general and about Sun Yat-sen in particular. Yet the initial responses were positive. In November 1923 the CCP CEC adopted its most positive view of the relationship, calling on all those who had not yet joined the GMD to sign up and help the GMD form organizations in places where it did not yet have any. The focus of work was the nationalist movement, with labor, peasant, student, and women's work all subordinated to meeting this goal. The strategy of subversion from within was clearly established. The CCP was to maintain its secret organizations within the GMD party branches, but it was to seek a central position within the GMD.

Yet vacillation continued, and even Borodin discovered how frustrating it could be to work with Sun Yat-sen. In February 1924, Borodin criticized Sun's utopianism and neglect of the mass movement when speaking about the organizational and ideological confusion within the GMD.[25] Suspicion about the true nature of the GMD was quickly revived, and the CCP remained aware that a majority in the right wing of the GMD remained opposed to CCP entry into the party. Thus, in May 1924 an enlarged meeting of the CCP CEC shifted the emphasis of its work by defining a friendly left wing and a more hostile right wing within the GMD; no longer was it a homogeneous organization. The meeting defined the CCP as the "left," setting the stage for a struggle with the GMD right. However, the CCP did not wish to push things too far, rejecting an open struggle in favor of criticism in the press that would keep the GMD on the correct revolutionary path. In late July the party published this new analysis in a secret circular, calling for strengthening the left and hinting that perhaps a new GMD could be formed. The analysis was based on Borodin's view that there were three groups attending the First Congress of the GMD: a right of thirty to forty people, an extreme left of about the same number, and a center (the majority), control over which was the object of struggle: Sun's task was to hold this party together.[26]

A Rising Tide for Labor

The bullish attitude toward progress was reflected at the CCP's Fourth Congress, held in Shanghai on January 11–22, 1925. This was compounded by the sense that serious divisions were weakening the grip of the warlords. In early 1925 the GMD broke with the northern warlord Duan Qirui, leading to differences over whether Sun Yat-sen should engage with Beijing. The Party Center wanted Sun to stay in Guangzhou to consolidate the gains there, while Borodin and the Guangzhou comrades felt that going to Beijing would help bring the movement to the national stage. Further, the Guangzhou group correctly sensed that the mass movement was on the rise and that it would be possible to work within the labor movement more effectively. This appealed to the sentiments of the key Comintern figure, Voitinsky, who not only attended the Fourth Congress but also had a major influence on the congress documents, which reflected his emphasis on the need to independently step up work in the labor movement.[27]

The congress embodied this spirit as it prepared for the rising tide of labor activism. The Fourth Congress resolution depicted the period of

warlord-dominated politics as coming to an end, providing an opportunity to expand the movement, as witnessed by demands for a National Assembly that had "spread all over the country like a surging wave." The labor movement was defined as the "foundation of the nationalist movement." In a fateful turn of phrase, the CCP was to benefit from a closer relationship with the Comintern, "the supreme commander of the world revolution." Importantly, in the review of work on the nationalist movement, the congress acknowledged both leftist and rightist mistakes but saw the latter as the most dangerous. Its dangerous tendencies included ignoring CCP work by focusing too much on building up the GMD, aiding the entire GMD rather than exploiting the differences between the left and the right, and downplaying the role of class struggle. The national revolution was not to be characterized as representing the interests of the bourgeoisie. Leftist mistakes included excluding classes other than the proletariat.

Now the GMD was seen as comprising not two but three groups. In addition to the left and the right, there was a center composed of "those revolutionary elements among the petty bourgeois intellectual class." Though small in number, the group occupied leading positions in the GMD. Work in the GMD was to reject class conciliation, stress class struggle, expand the left, and support the center when it clearly opposed the right.[28]

The party was correct about a rising tide in the labor movement, and this led the CCP to believe even more strongly that the working class could shoulder the responsibility of the revolution. The congress saw the movement entering a new phase that would provide opportunities for the national revolution to expand, but it was critical of the Guangzhou comrades for allowing this work to overshadow the independence of labor. Consequently, the CCP's main task was to organize labor unions and spread propaganda that had a class perspective. Workplace branches were the key to carrying out party policy. This approach left the party well positioned to take advantage of the next tide of activism. It was not long in coming.

Sun Yat-sen died on March 12, 1925, and as talks collapsed in Beijing, the upsurge in nationalism culminated in the May Thirtieth Movement. It was especially strong in Shanghai, where the party was able to capitalize and expand its influence.[29] The movement began quietly in February with a strike at a Japanese-owned textile mill in Shanghai, but it escalated dramatically on May 15 when one of the strikers was killed by a factory guard and a number of others were wounded. Injuries and arrests spread across Shanghai, and on May 28 the CCP, together with other organizations, coordinated

demonstrations that would take place on May 30. Reacting to this threat, the International Settlement Police fired on the demonstrators, wounding many and killing ten. To try to take control of the movement, on June 1 the CCP set up the General Labor Union, headed by labor activist Li Lisan. Li, a future CCP leader, had already spearheaded the successful September 1922 Anyuan miners' strike. As the movement rumbled on into July, it did not lead to the expected revolutionary outcome, and by mid-September the General Labor Union was closed down and the CCP was driven underground.

A major problem was maintaining funding and relief for the strikers, which progressively diminished the longer the strike went on. Most of the support came not from the Soviets via organizations in China but rather from patriotic citizens and the General Chamber of Commerce. This indicates that support was inspired by nationalist outrage rather than by socialist solidarity. The movement did spread to other cities, most notably with the Hong Kong–Guangzhou strike, which lasted from June 1925 until October 1926. Thus, Communist influence spread as membership grew, but it sent warning signs to opponents within the GMD. One clear indication of what was to come was the crushing of China's "Little Moscow," when the local elite launched an all-out military attack on the Anyuan Workers' Club and its associated schools. Three workers were killed, some 10,000 were dismissed from work, and 2,000 were sent home to their native villages.[30]

Despite this setback, enthusiasm and a bullish attitude permeated an enlarged meeting of the CCP Central Executive Committee in Beijing in September–October 1925, which concluded that the working class had clearly demonstrated its leading role in the national revolution. However, the meeting warned that a balance had to be struck between promoting the workers' economic demands and engaging in political struggle, which was not to be forgotten. Indeed, the party in Anyuan was criticized for not conducting sufficient political work and for not preparing a secret organization to withstand attack and establish a foundation for a Bolshevik mass party.[31] However, the bravest and most loyal workers, armed in groups of 10 or 100 under a military committee, were set up under the CEC. The CCP was articulating its shift from an open, educational role to an emphasis on military and class struggle.

Party numbers were clearly expanding and this required attention. The strike led to a significant change in the composition of the party. In May 1925, of the 297 members, 57.3 percent were defined as working class; by September 1925, of the 1,080 members, 78.5 percent were defined as working

class.[32] The task of the CCP was to accelerate its transformation from a small group to a centralized mass party. This meant that membership criteria were relaxed even further. For example, the probation period for workers and peasants was reduced to one month, while intellectuals still had to wait three months, although even this was a reduction from the previous six-month probation period. Workers did not have to understand Marxism—as long as they displayed class consciousness and loyalty to the party, they could be admitted.

Organizationally, the CCP had already adopted new statutes at the Fourth Congress, in January 1925, with organization designated as the most important issue for the survival and development of the party. As before, the hope was that this would help the party break away from its mentality of operating as small propaganda groups. The statutes adopted what would become and remain to this day the most important organizing principle of the party: the branch as the fundamental building block. Formerly a cell required five members, but the new branches only required three members. The idea behind this was to shift the party from being area-based to being based on occupation to help strengthen party work among the proletariat.

By the time of the enlarged meeting of the CCP CEC, the growing importance of the peasantry was recognized. To mark this, the workers' and peasants' committee was divided into two committees, although the peasants' committee was actually established in November 1926, with Mao Zedong as secretary. The meeting called for a military committee, and the following month Zhou Enlai, China's future premier, was named as its head. Following continual promptings from the Comintern, a serious organization was coming into being, with its leaders trying to break with old traditions to create a centralized Leninist party. This attention to organization was strengthened by the return of Chinese students from Moscow. The moves to centralize and unify party organization soon faced stress from the challenges of developing a mass party while maintaining cooperation with the GMD and the challenges of increasing pressure from the GMD right.

Tensions within the party had already surfaced at an October 1925 meeting when the Shanghai Party Center criticized the approach to work in Guangzhou. Naturally, work in Guangzhou was acknowledged as important for the national revolution, but the comrades there were criticized for not expanding the ranks of the CCP during the "revolutionary upsurge." Their tendency to work as individuals among the workers, peasants, and soldiers rather than making clear their party affiliation meant that people did not understand

that the CCP was distinct from the GMD. The party simply appeared to be a "shadow" wearing a GMD mask. The most important task now was to rapidly expand the CCP, with the aid of a commissar sent from the Center to improve organizational work. While Borodin in the South was establishing a strategy to gain power within the GMD, Voitinsky and Chen Duxiu in Shanghai were thinking of a weaker bond and the possible development of independent CCP power. The earlier assessment that there was a center in the GMD was rejected, with the CCP now recognizing only a left wing and a right wing. The strategy was to help the left and to fight the right. The previous classification of the leaders of the GMD as the center had led CCP members to ignore the party's own positions and simply become members of the GMD left, giving the false impression that the GMD left was synonymous with Communist.[33]

Warning Signs Flashing

The shifting strategy was becoming embroiled in debates in Moscow and in divisions within the GMD. Under Borodin's direction, actions in Guangzhou seemed to move beyond Stalin's intention to operate within the GMD while not neglecting CCP work for the subsequent opportunity to develop the revolution. Those in Shanghai under Chen and Voitinsky were beginning to think about the possibility of independent CCP activity outside of the framework of cooperation with the GMD. This approach would be developed further by Leon Trotsky and the opposition in Moscow as they struggled against Stalin. Indeed, Chen Duxiu was later a leader of the Trotskyite movement in China.

The increasing influence of the CCP had an impact on the thinking of its opponents within the nationalist movement, but the warning signs were initially ignored. Although it is true that the left strengthened its position after Sun Yat-sen's death, other events had more serious repercussions. In August 1925 one of the most influential figures on the left, who was sympathetic to the Communists, was assassinated, and in late November 1925 a group of opponents met in the Western Hills just outside of Beijing. The group called for the expulsion of Borodin from Guangzhou and even the expulsion of the Communists from the GMD. Earlier in August an influential GMD theorist had correctly anticipated the CCP strategy of infiltration and called for GMD organization to be strengthened to resist CCP influence.

The warning signs were again missed and discounted further by the successful, from the CCP's viewpoint, convocation of the Second Congress of the GMD in January 1926. The meeting reinforced the GMD left and the idea of cooperation with the CCP. CCP members occupied three of the nine positions on the GMD Standing Committee. The CCP responded enthusiastically in February 1926, presuming that left-wing control of the GMD was a reality. As the meeting was convening, Stalin was consolidating his views and his position in opposition to Trotsky.[34] In April 1925 Voitinsky had already sent an optimistic account to Moscow, cautioning that Stalin was building his views based on reports from Borodin. He described the CCP as developing its own strong independent organization, while enjoying freedom in the GMD.[35] Subsequent developments confirmed Voitinsky's views.

Despite Voitinsky's concerns, the February meeting swung support behind those in Guangzhou, helped by Chen Duxiu's absence due to illness. The increasing isolation of the proletariat after the high point of the May Thirtieth Movement meant that Shanghai was no longer seen as the hub of the revolution, and the importance of GMD work in Guangzhou assumed greater importance. Whether to move the Party Center to Guangzhou or to Beijing was discussed, with a preference for Beijing so that work could take on a national character. The impending Northern Expedition by GMD troops, launched in July 1926 to unify China, was regarded as a crucial vehicle to expand the influence of the national revolution and thus it was to be supported. With the working class taking a backseat, the role of the peasantry was accorded greater importance. With the bourgeoisie showing its true colors, it was now patently obvious that only an alliance of workers and peasants could bring about the success of the national revolution. Voitinsky now bought into the view of the left's dominance within the GMD, and he reported to the Comintern that the CCP was directing the GMD, which actually was a "popular democratic party."[36]

The next warning sign came soon after the meeting on March 20, when Chiang Kai-shek declared martial law following the Zhongshan Incident, claiming that the Communists had used the Zhongshan gunboat to kidnap him. It is unlikely that there was any such plot, but Chiang exploited this story to appeal to the GMD right and to reduce the influence of the Communists before the Northern Expedition set out. Soviet advisers and a number of Communists were placed under house arrest. Borodin, on his return to Guangzhou from Russia on April 29, 1925, negotiated their release, but he had to make some serious concessions—including abandoning separate CCP

organizations in the GMD, supplying a list of all CCP members in the GMD, no longer serving as a bureau chief, and restricting CCP membership on executive committees to no more than one-third of the total members. Finally, Borodin was forced to support the Northern Expedition, something he had previously opposed. In return, Chiang would restrain the GMD right. In fact, Chiang was limited in what he could do, as he was still dependent on Soviet financial support and materials. Thus, Chiang made it clear that his actions were not directed against the Soviets. The Soviet advisers and the CCP members may have been encouraged to accept a short-term retreat because they had the impression that many of Chiang's colleagues did not agree with his actions.

Chiang's actions heightened the divisions within the CCP and Moscow about the nature of the relationship. Publicly, following Comintern advice, the CCP accepted the various measures passed by the GMD CEC. But beneath the surface, responses differed. The Guangzhou comrades favored a tough response against Chiang by attempting to take over the GMD from within. Chen Duxiu, not for the first time, contemplated withdrawal, perhaps prompted by Voitinsky, who had suggested it in April 1926.[37] In June 1926 a compromise was reached within the CCP in favor of a bloc without to replace the bloc within, a suggestion rejected by the Comintern.[38] Reports from the Soviet advisers working in Guangzhou placed blame on their own failings and those of the CCP members who only paid attention to their own organization and did not try to build up the GMD left.[39]

Only one week before the Zhongshan Incident of March 13, the Sixth Plenum of the ECCI had decided that the collaboration should be maintained, and it praised the government in Guangzhou as the model for a future China. While critical of any attempt to dissolve the Communists into the GMD, the plenum warned of the leftist mistake of believing that the revolutionary-democratic stage could be skipped in favor of immediately implementing proletarian dictatorship and ignoring the peasantry, "the most important and decisive factor of the national-liberation movement."[40] Given this, it is not surprising that the Comintern sought to play down the significance of the Zhongshan Incident. At the plenum, the suggestion for a bloc without was rejected.[41] The differences over collaboration now played directly into the disputes between Stalin and Trotsky, and the alternative approach was again definitively rebuffed by the Soviet Politburo.[42]

That some within the GMD were concerned about the role of the CCP and the intended Bolshevization of the national movement did not go

unnoticed by the Soviet advisers, including Borodin, who noted that there were some who genuinely feared that the CCP might take over the party.[43] However, given that Trotsky was beginning to think that a bloc without might be more acceptable, Stalin insisted that the policy remain. Even Voitinsky fell in line and must have baffled Chen Duxiu by insisting that any notion within the CCP about leaving the alliance should be resisted. The CCP was to remain in the alliance, but it was to work to expand the GMD left.[44] His knuckles having been rapped, Chen told CCP members to pursue an approach along the lines laid out by Sneevliet, which, of course, he had earlier opposed.

Thus, cooperation continued, though the idea that the CCP might seize power through a mass movement was dropped. Meeting in Shanghai in July 1926, the CCP CEC adopted more moderate motions and even the bourgeoisie was depicted as an important part of the movement, having demonstrated "a capacity for leadership." The Northern Expedition was referred to as a "defensive war" against hostile forces in Hunan and Guangdong rather than as a "real revolutionary" action.[45] The CCP accepted the views of the Soviet advisers that the fault rested with the Communists themselves and their overzealous efforts to take over the GMD from within, a clear criticism of the Guangzhou comrades. Yet again the nature of the GMD was redefined, now as consisting of four blocs: the reactionary right, the new right composed of the reform movement of the bourgeoisie (including Chiang Kai-shek), the left composed of the resistance movement of the middle and small merchants, and the workers and peasants represented by the Communists.

Criticism of those in Guangzhou was clear, and Shanghai was restored to its place as the "heart of the nation's anti-imperialist movement." Despite all that had happened earlier, there was still a belief that a genuine Communist Party could be created in Shanghai, and the party committee was instructed to concentrate on local movements to win over the middle and petty bourgeois masses. Not surprisingly, Borodin disagreed, refusing to accept that Shanghai could become the revolutionary base because he believed that the imperialists were too heavily entrenched there. Compromise was inevitable unless open conflict were to break out. As a result, Borodin proposed establishing bases elsewhere and strengthening work in the Northeast, where the power of the imperialists was weaker and where the Soviet Union could more readily provide support.

While those in Guangzhou thought that the national revolution had almost run its course, meaning it was time to launch the proletarian move-

ment, Chen Duxiu felt that the task was far from over as two-thirds of the country was still under the control of the warlord cliques. To support his view, Chen presented his interpretation of Sun Yat-sen's legacy, which has remained the CCP's standard interpretation to this day, as consisting of three fundamental policies: allying with Soviet Russia, allying with the CCP, and supporting the workers and peasants. Further, he accused Borodin and the others of suffering from a "left sickness." Chen was clearly learning from the Soviets the language of how inner-party struggles should be waged. Even though Chen Duxiu supported Stalin and the Comintern's approach, within a year he would be denounced as a "right opportunist" for pursuing these same policies. The Comintern's Seventh Plenum, held in November–December 1926, deemed that continued cooperation with the GMD left was necessary to complete the national revolution and that the CCP was to take control of the social revolution.

The CCP found itself between a rock and a hard place, fighting off attacks from the GMD right while wrestling with how to move forward with rural mobilization without alienating important groups. For a brief period the balancing seemed to work. In December 1926 the GMD CEC moved the seat of its government to Wuhan rather than to Nanchang, where Chiang Kai-shek was based. Chiang's legitimacy was challenged further in March 1927, when he was placed under the leadership of a revived Military Council and the post of CEC chair was abolished and replaced by a seven-person Presidium of the Political Council. Wang Jingwei, the leader of the GMD left, emerged as the temporary winner of these measures, and the Communists took over the posts in charge of labor and agriculture. The high-point of collaboration culminated on April 5, 1927, when Wang Jingwei and Chen Duxiu issued a joint statement confirming GMD leadership in the national revolution, with the CCP having no intention to overthrow it—proletarian revolution was not part of the program. Things did not end well for Wang.

The Northern Expedition was pushing forward, and in Shanghai a general strike was called on March 21. This was the "third armed uprising" organized by the CCP. The first two (in October 1926 and February 1927) had been crushed within a day. By the time of the third strike, the CCP had learned that military training was essential and that they could not rely on itinerant and unemployed workers; instead they had to use factory workers who might exhibit greater loyalty. By the time the Northern Expeditionary Forces arrived, the city, except for the International Settlement and the

GMD sympathizers turn on the CCP, Shanghai, April 1927.

French Concession, was under the control of armed militias.[46] On top of this, on March 26 troops loyal to Chiang Kai-shek entered the city. In a clear warning sign, Chiang withheld recognition of the provisional municipal government that had been established on March 29. Energized, the Soviet Politburo pushed for a more aggressive approach, calling for the GMD right to be excluded and removed from leadership positions. Receiving reports that Chiang was engaging in a coup, the Soviets called for resistance and the militias were instructed not to hand over their weapons.[47] The euphoria was short-lived. On April 12, Chiang Kai-shek's troops set about eliminating all Communists in the areas under his control. Although as a result he was expelled from the GMD, with the left-wing government in Wuhan displaying sympathy for those in Shanghai, it was too little too late. Chiang set up his own government, with its capital in Nanjing. The earlier warning signs either had not been taken seriously enough or had simply been ignored. The White Terror was brutal. Martial law was declared in Guangzhou on April 15, and a call was issued for all Communists in the area to be arrested.[48] In Beijing, the party had been broken earlier, on April 6, when warlord troops entered the Soviet embassy, seized documents, and arrested suspected Com-

munists. Among those caught up in the swoop was Li Dazhao, who was executed on April 28.

Heads in the Sand: From Worse to Worst

Bizarrely, this repression did not mark the end of attempts to collaborate with the GMD. At the Fifth Congress of the CCP, which ran from April 27 to May 9, 1927, members tried to make sense of what had happened and where the party should go next. It was a traumatic period that led to more failures for the party, rendering it ineffective in the cities, almost destroying the party, and driving the remnants of the party into inhospitable areas where it was more difficult for Chiang Kai-shek's forces and his partners to pursue it. Ever the optimists, the CCP claimed that Chiang's betrayal had brought the revolution to a new stage, and the delegates discussed how to move ahead with the peasant movement without disrupting cooperation. Clearly, the bourgeoisie had betrayed the revolution, and while membership was now smaller, quality was higher! In the CCP's analysis, the four-class bloc was replaced by a united front of workers, peasants, and the petty bourgeoisie. From the defeat of the militia in Shanghai, the party drew the lesson that it should strengthen work in the military. Those bourgeois elements who remained had to be watched carefully and expelled if they exhibited counterrevolutionary tendencies. Stalin and his supporters in Moscow shared this enthusiasm. In May 1927 the ECCI agreed with the CCP's assessment that the break with Chiang was positive, and it called for a continuation of the alliance, within which the rural revolution would take center stage.[49]

Amazingly, Chen Duxiu told the party to prepare to seize power as it was no longer an opposition party but instead would lead the revolution.[50] They were to create a "revolutionary democratic regime" in GMD-controlled areas, albeit an objective that was still far off. Overestimating the revolutionary potential had become endemic in the CCP, and much of this was prompted by directives from Moscow. Apart from any other reason to follow Moscow's advice, the CCP remained totally reliant on the Soviets for financial support. In addition to the funding sent to China, by 1930 the Soviets had spent five million rubles on training Chinese comrades at the Communist University of the Toilers of the East. Although the CCP might have opposed specific Comintern agents, they would never oppose the power center in Moscow.[51]

In terms of the labor movement, the debacle was given a positive spin: the rise in revolutionary activity among the proletariat was said to have caused

the bourgeoisie to betray the revolution. As a result, the party set the optimistic objective of pursuing nationalization and worker participation in management to hit back at the bourgeoisie. How on earth they intended to carry this out was unclear. What was important was that now that the revolution was in abeyance in the urban areas, the treatment of the peasantry had become even more important for the future of the revolution. However, the need to continue the alliance with the GMD meant policy would err on the side of caution. Previous rural policy was denounced for being too rightist, but policy was still to move from rent reduction to land confiscation, with protections for small landlords. The proposal to confiscate all land was rebuffed, as was the moderate proposal that only land belonging to the enemies of the GMD should be confiscated.

Despite previous rhetoric and measures directed to the need for better organization, Chen Duxiu declared that this was the worst component of party work. The small-group mentality had never been overcome and the splintering of the party meant that unless this mentality was changed, the CCP would never amount to more than a group of provincial parties. To improve the situation, a Politburo replaced the CEC, and the Central Committee (CC) was to be expanded. For training, Chen suggested setting up a party school. Following the congress, the new Politburo promulgated new statutes. They spelled out in more detail the organizational structure of the party and, for the first time, asserted that democratic centralism was the guiding principle of the entire party. Further, the party set up a Standing Committee to oversee day-to-day work and a central supervisory committee to oversee party discipline. Now, on paper at least, the CCP was looking like a true Leninist party. The next step would be the use of "line struggle" and ideology to resolve disputes within the party. This would not be long in coming.

Despite the enthusiasm, disasters continued. Even the left-wing GMD government in Wuhan became frustrated with CCP activities among the peasantry, blaming the CCP for what it viewed as the movement's excesses. At the same time, many peasants were frustrated by what they saw as CCP attempts to rein in their actions and leave them at the mercy of vengeful warlords and even GMD troops. Repression of the Communists continued, and the events of the summer of 1927 made a mockery of the continued alliance with the GMD. Among the notable disasters was the Horse Day Massacre on May 21 in Changsha when Communist-led mass organizations were crushed by the local GMD garrison commander. The masochistic tendencies of the CCP to preserve the alliance with the GMD is revealed in a joint

CCP-GMD investigation, which concluded that misguided leaders had caused the peasants to break loose from control and to unleash a reign of terror.

This gesture and similar ones—such as acknowledging the leadership of the GMD in the national revolution, the Communists giving up government posts, and requiring mass organizations to submit to GMD leadership—did little to allay concerns within the GMD about the true intentions of the CCP. This was not helped when, in early June 1927, the newly dispatched Comintern envoy, M. N. Roy, showed the leader of the GMD in Wuhan, Wang Jingwei, the contents of a telegram from Stalin that clearly laid out the strategy. The Communists were to reorganize the left, expel the reactionary leaders such as those who maintained contact with Chiang Kai-shek, and then prepare concrete steps for a revolutionary army. This was all to take place under the Nationalist Party leadership. New leaders were to be drawn into the party from the workers and peasants to replace the old GMD leaders who were "vacillating and compromising."[52]

Not surprisingly this did not go down well with Wang Jingwei, and things rapidly collapsed. By the end of June the workers' militias were being disarmed, the trade unions were shut down, and the Communists were arrested. The Soviet envoys, Borodin and Roy, fled Wuhan, and on July 15 the Political Affairs Committee of the Wuhan GMD announced an end to cooperation. Following this, on August 1 the Communists launched the Nanchang Uprising, and on August 5 Wang Jingwei launched a major purge of Communist activists.

In the middle of this debacle, on July 12 Chen Duxiu resigned from his post following Comintern instructions and a new five-person provisional Standing Committee of the Politburo was selected. On the following day, the Standing Committee issued its criticism of the Wuhan government. Clearly, the Comintern and Stalin were not going to take the blame for the disasters of 1927. Stalin placed the blame on Borodin, Roy, and the Chinese leadership. Chen Duxiu and the leadership were blamed for their "right opportunism," even though on at least three occasions Chen had called for changing the nature of the alliance. It was not until September 1927 that Stalin accepted that the future struggle would be led by the CCP.[53]

The common assessment has been to dub the disaster as Stalin's failure in China, a view strongly supported by the Trotskyites. But within the Comintern or the Bolshevik party, was there a credible alternative? This is highly unlikely, given not only the politics within the Soviet party but also the tardiness with which the opposition formulated its critique of Stalin's approach.

By the time the opposition was able to articulate an alternative, they could not get their views known or debated because Stalin and his supporters had such strong control over the party apparatus and its publication outlets.

Only after the alliance had begun to collapse did the opposition pull its views together. Trotsky wrote, falsely, in 1931 that "the entrance of the Communist Party into the Kuomintang [GMD] was a mistake from the very beginning." His contemporaneous writings show that he fully supported the basic principles of the united front as outlined in 1922 and only in April 1926 did he begin to oppose the dominant view, probably sparked by the March 1926 Zhongshan Incident.[54] However, it was not until June 1927 that Trotsky was able to persuade his fellow oppositionists that the alliance had run its course. It was clearly a case of too little too late. At a time when an alternative might have made a difference, there was no effective tactic to pursue. By late June it was unlikely that the logistics and support could have been put in place, or that the Comintern workers in China and the CCP leadership could have been brought on board to prevent the GMD left wing from turning on them.

The CCP remained optimistic, and it spent the final years of the 1920s looking for signs of a revival of revolutionary potential, yet all attempts at insurrection were defeated. The first assessment of what had gone wrong was conducted at an emergency conference convened in Hankou on August 7 by the newly arrived Comintern agent, Vissarion Lominadze. The new strategy finally marked the end of cooperation. The previous leadership was blamed and criticized for opportunism in dealing with both the GMD and the mass movement and for failing to carry out Comintern policies effectively. Yet cooperation was still to be sought, when possible, with elements of the GMD left wing. This token gesture has often been ascribed to the need to protect Stalin, but there was a basis in China's reality. Not all those in the GMD were happy with the actions of Chiang Kai-shek and Wang Jingwei, and there were deep personal ties that overrode immediate political loyalties. For example, Song Qingling, Sun Yat-sen's widow, became a counterpoint to her sister, who was married to Chiang Kai-shek, and some in the GMD later became CCP military leaders. For the party as a whole, the CCP was to prepare for life underground by forging "strong, secret organizations."

Insurrections: Another Policy Failure

Far from licking their wounds and retreating, the new party leader, Qu Qiubai, proposed a series of insurrections to initiate a peasant uprising. This approach followed the failed Nanchang Uprising and laid the groundwork

for the Autumn Harvest Uprising. The emergency conference held on August 7, 1927, is perhaps most noteworthy for Mao Zedong's famous dictum "Political power grows out of the barrel of a gun."

As with the Nanchang Uprising, the Autumn Harvest Uprising ended in failure. The plan was to launch the movement based on peasant associations in four southern provinces (Hunan, Hubei, Guangdong, and Jiangxi), with the goal of redistributing the land of the larger landlords. Not surprisingly, only in Hunan, where Mao Zedong was in the lead, did the uprising make any headway, but even there it was defeated, and Mao and the Hunan Front Committee decided not to follow the orders of the Party Center to attack the provincial capital of Changsha; instead they decided to pull back to the remote mountain refuge of Jinggangshan.

Again, such failures did not dampen enthusiasm, and in November 1927 the provisional Politburo adopted a more radical policy for work in both the urban and the rural areas. The CCP announced a definitive break with the GMD, which would hold for the next decade. All landlords were to be attacked, no matter how much land they held, and in the cities workers were to seize power at their workplaces. Nationwide insurrections were to be promoted, and the leaders of the failed Nanchang and Autumn Harvest Uprisings, including Mao Zedong, were criticized for lacking determination and "strong revolutionary will."

The only place in China where such demands bore any resemblance to reality was in Guangzhou, where after some initial success the Guangzhou Commune was crushed in December 1929. The Comintern representative had promoted the uprising, but it led to the loss of some 5,000 Communists. Although CCP military leaders, Ye Ting and Ye Jianying, had opposed the uprising, they were blamed for its failure. In disgust, Ye Ting left China for Europe, not to return for a decade. Those who survived were ordered to retreat to the mountain areas. The policies pursued under the latest iteration of Comintern agents and CCP leader Qu Qiubai did result in destroying any remaining links with the urban proletariat, but the surviving troops retreated to a number of rural enclaves where they could survive.

Once again, a new strategy was required, and it was outlined at the Sixth Party Congress, held in Moscow from June 18 to July 11, 1928. In assessing the past, the congress used Stalinist parlance to criticize both Chen Duxiu's "opportunist right deviation" and Qu Qiubai's "putchist left deviation."[55] At least the party had learned how to deflect blame onto individuals and how to conduct inner-party struggle. Now the revolution was between two waves, defined as "bourgeois democratic under the leadership of the proletariat,"

keeping the door open for future uprisings. This created uncertainty, because "new waves" were difficult to detect and the leadership was always on the lookout for their imminent arrival. In practice, this encouraged rash action in support of perceived revolutionary stirrings. Recapturing the urban areas was a priority, but the revolutionary role of the peasantry was stressed—under the leadership of the proletariat, of course. Poor peasants were to provide the movement's backbone, engaging in guerrilla warfare.

When they returned to China, the leadership found a better situation than they had left behind. There was a modest recovery in the cities and steady growth in the soviet areas and the Red Army. Mao Zedong and Zhu De controlled a base on the Jiangxi-Hunan border, and other Communists controlled bases on the Hubei-Henan-Anhui border, in east Hunan, and in northwest Jiangxi.

Given its perennial optimism, it is not surprising that the CCP leadership soon saw heightened revolutionary potential. Under the leadership of Li Lisan, by June 1929 policy became more radical following the ECCI's claims that signs of the new revolutionary wave were clearly visible and that a rightist trend should be jettisoned.[56] At its June 1929 plenum, the CCP accepted this judgment but was cautious about when the next wave might arrive.

An October 26, 1929, missive from the Comintern pushed the CCP to pursue a more radical approach and finally in June 1930 caution was cast aside with the party announcing that a new revolutionary high tide had arrived and that the party should give up its "petty bourgeois vacillations." A cautious approach, defined as rightism, was confirmed as the major danger. The challenge for the CCP leadership was to find and catch the revolutionary tide. Despite the Comintern's stress on promoting political strikes and preparing for armed insurrection, this was not viable in urban China. Consequently, the party turned to the soviets in the countryside to provide support to regain control of the cities. The June 1930 plenum set out concrete plans to launch a revolutionary upsurge and to capture the central city of Wuhan as part of the seizure of one or more provinces. The strength of Comintern support was unclear, and appeals for Soviet aid were ignored.

On July 27 Peng Dehuai's troops took Changsha, but they were forced to retreat after only seven days, weakening Li Lisan's position. It is quite possible that Li did not know what was happening in Changsha at the time, and at two Politburo meetings, on August 1 and 3, he rejected Comintern concerns and announced that the nationwide revolutionary upsurge was in-

deed nigh. He then called for the whole party to prepare for an immediate revolution.

The failure was followed by harsh condemnation and further reorganization of the leadership. In August 1930, Moscow sent former leader Qu Qiubai and Zhou Enlai back to China to moderate the policies, but not yet to repudiate them entirely. However, an October letter from the ECCI to the CCP stated that Li's mistakes were indeed those of line rather than tactics and denounced him as anti-Comintern and a "semi-Trotskyite" for his suggestion that actions in China could set off a final, global class war. Comintern influence over the CCP was strengthened by the students returning from Moscow, such as Wang Ming, who would aspire to assume to the leadership. Yet another new Comintern representative, Pavel Mif, under the auspices of the Far Eastern Bureau (FEB) of the Comintern, took almost complete control of the party in late 1930 and early 1931.[57]

The following period marked the high point of Comintern influence as Mif was ordered to organize the CCP's Fourth Plenum, which met in Shanghai on January 7, 1931. Li Lisan was harshly condemned for ignoring the Comintern's policy, resulting in havoc within the party. The Comintern wanted to replace the leadership with younger members who were supportive of the Comintern, but the FEB was cautious, favoring a combination of long-term members who had returned from Moscow, such as Liu Shaoqi, Zhang Guotao, and Zhou Enlai, together with more recent trainees such as Wang Ming. The group that was most obviously excluded from the leadership consisted of those who were running the soviet areas. However, the FEB did see their work as important and set up a CCP Central Committee Bureau for the Central Soviet District, headed by Zhou Enlai, as well as Central Committee bureaus in other areas. In the spring of 1931 the FEB sent more than 60 percent of those working in the Shanghai party organs to the soviet areas, marking the decline of Shanghai's leadership role. In so doing, it eroded the influence of the FEB, and by the summer of 1931 FEB work had effectively stopped.[58] Comintern influence over the CCP would never again be as strong.

Mao Zedong Discovers the Power of the Peasantry

When disaster struck in Shanghai and Wuhan, Mao Zedong was pursuing a different approach based on the Comintern and the party's view of the revolutionary role of the peasantry. Initially the CCP as an organization showed

little interest in the role of the peasantry, and it was not until the Party's Fourth Congress, in January 1925, that it began to pay attention. This was driven by the growth of the peasant movement in the areas under GMD control. The congress criticized the GMD for using the peasantry for its own ends, only organizing them where it needed them for support and not providing them with sufficient protection. However, the congress provided little guidance in terms of what should be done.

The founder of the CCP peasant movement was Peng Pai, who in fall 1922 formed the first peasant association in Haifeng County, in southeast Guangdong. It advocated rent reductions and boycotts of landlords, and provided social relief. When cooperation with the GMD was launched, Peng Pai served as the secretary of the Peasant Bureau and he established the Guangzhou Peasant Training Institute, where Mao Zedong honed his skills. After the failure of the Nanchang Uprising, Peng returned to Haifeng and established the CCP's first soviet government of Hai-Lu-Feng Workers and Peasants.[59] It was crushed in August 1929, but the experience suggested an approach of territorial control backed by armed force, which Mao would champion.

After the party had become radicalized, it turned back to moderation in terms of policy for the rural areas, especially after July 1926. Mao rejected the retreat to moderation. Unlike the Party Center, in his February 1927 report on the peasant movement in Hunan, Mao claimed that any excesses were essential to overcome the power of the gentry in the countryside.[60] Mao paid lip service to the proletariat, but in his report the role of the proletariat is insignificant compared with the potential of the peasantry. In Hunan many of the peasant associations that Mao championed were headed by former Anyuan workers, who had been sent back to their native village following the September 1925 crackdown. At the time of the report, Mao had not linked the power of the peasantry to the establishment of territorial bases and military force; this would come following the defeat at the end of 1927.

Party weakness in the peasant movement was highlighted in a July 1926 report on the peasant movement in Guangdong that pointed out that there were 800,000 peasants in associations but only 600 party members stretched across twenty counties. The phenomenon of counting big numbers and equating them with CCP strength had been present in a report from Chen Duxiu in January 1925, in which Chen announced that some 10 million people were in peasant associations. In reality, given that the peasant associations were in South China, what really held them together was GMD

military power; and once the GMD turned on the CCP and its allies, the peasant associations unraveled. The post-1927 policies of using peasant mobilization to regain a foothold in the cities led to further deterioration of the peasant organizations. However, the move to the more inhospitable areas did lead to the consolidation of the rural bases, defended by military force.

Following the defeats of 1927–1928, Mao retreated to the countryside in the Jinggangshan region, in southwest Jiangxi province, where his small number of troops comprised a mixture of outcasts who were poorly trained.[61] Importantly, in April 1928 Mao linked up with Zhu De's forces to try to expand the base area to cover the Hunan-Jiangxi-Guangdong border region. Mao was appointed secretary of the Hunan-Jiangxi Special Border Area Committee, and in November 1928 he was appointed secretary of the Front Committee, directly under the Jiangxi Party Committee. Before the years of what is referred to as the Jiangxi Soviet (1931–1934), Mao could experiment with policy that would be later codified in the soviet. Initial policy was radical, with all land to be turned over to the Border Area Soviet Government and then divided on a per capita basis to those who supported the regime. This did not go down well, and many peasants bridled at the radicalism; as a result, production dropped and much of the small-scale trading ground to a halt. Thereafter, an increasing militarization of society created uneasy relations between the Red Army and the local population. This caused Mao and his followers to abandon Jinggangshan at the end of 1928 as supplies ran out and the number of troops dropped from 18,000 to about 6,000. As a result, in January 1929 Mao and Zhu decided to move their troops to southern Jiangxi. Policy became more moderate, with only public land and that of the landlords to be confiscated for redistribution. Mao found favor with Moscow. While criticizing the Party Center, the Comintern highly praised the work of Mao and Zhu De, and the FEB viewed them as the most effective Chinese comrades.

Mao rejected the pessimism of the Party Center. He might not have been aware of Soviet support, given his remoteness, his moves, and the slowness of communications, but he did adopt a more aggressive stance. On January 5, 1930, he wrote to Lin Biao, a future military leader, that he did not share the pessimism of Lin and the Party Center. His letter had an evocative title: "A Single Spark Can Start a Prairie Fire." He criticized Lin for thinking that the revolutionary high tide was still remote, and he favored mobile warfare to extend political influence. A proper understanding of the current stage of the revolution would enable Lin to "understand that the development of the

Red Army, guerrilla forces, and the soviet regions is the highest form of peasant struggle" in semi-colonial countries. Mao wrote that his policies, together with those of like-minded colleagues, in setting up the base areas and "systematically setting up political power, and by promoting and expanding this power emphasizing the coordination and organization among the Red Army, the guerrilla forces, and the broad peasant masses, training in the struggle, the pursuance of the rural revolution and the expansion of armed organizations" was the "only way to build the confidence of the masses toward the nationwide revolution."[62] Clearly, Mao was beginning to stake out his own approach to the revolution. Mao's actions were based, not on instructions from the Party Center or from the Comintern, but instead on his own assessment of the realities on the ground. He would now try to develop his strength and his ideas in the sanctuary of the Jiangxi Soviet.

Although the decade ended with a series of disasters, the period established enduring legacies: the structure of a Leninist party, the use of ideology and political line in inner-party struggle, and the experiment of forming a united front with other political and social forces. More importantly, Mao Zedong experimented with combining the revolutionary potential of the peasantry with military strength.