

Lesson 15 (The Chinese Communist Party, 1928-1937)

Questions for the Lesson/What you need to know in this lesson:

1. When and how Chinese Communist Party (CCP) was formed?
2. When and how Sun Yat-sen's party was reorganized into Kuomintang (Nationalist) Party (KMT)?
3. Why was the First United Front formed in 1923?
4. Why did the First United Front Collapse in 1927?

IB Questions

Attitudes of the CCP and Kuomintang regarding the First United Front

1. "Neither the Chinese Communist Party nor the Guomindang (Kuomintang) entered the First United Front in 1923 believing that it would survive for very long." How far do you agree with this statement? (M03, Q14) (N11, Q11)

Comparing the attitudes of the CCP and Kuomintang regarding the First United Front

2. Compare and contrast the attitudes of the Chinese Communist Party (CCP) and the Guomindang (Kuomintang) to the First United Front (1924 – 1927). (M08, Q16)

Comparing the aims and policies of the CCP and Kuomintang during the First United Front

3. Compare and contrast the aims and policies of the Communists and the Nationalists in China during the First United Front established in 1924. (M09, Q16)
4. Compare and contrast the aims and policies of the Chinese Communist Party with those of the Guomindang during the First United Front (1924-1927). (N14)

Reasons for the failure of the First United Front

5. Why did the First United Front (1924–1927) between the Chinese Communist Party and the Guomindang (Kuomintang) fail? (M12)

A. Overview

In the wake of the intellectual revolution, two major political events developed as repercussions of the Bolshevik Revolution in Russia. One was the rise of the Chinese Communist party and the other the reorganization of the Nationalist Party. Both developments played a major role in shaping the course of the contemporary history of China.

B. Background for the formation of Political Parties in China the 1920s

Lenin's theory of imperialism made sense to Chinese radicals. Chinese writers like Liu Shipei in 1908 had already anticipated important elements of the theory, where he favoured revolution of the "whole people", all the world's oppressed people rose up in revolution, depriving the powers of their ill-gotten gains and encourage Western peoples to overthrow their own governments. Liu had understood imperialism as a combination of state power and racism as well as capitalism and in this Liu was closer to the views of scholars today.

Chinese were consumed with the problem of foreign imperialism from the turn of the century, fully aware that unlike some of its neighbours China did not – fully – become part of any particular Empire. No Chinese government from the late Qing until the founding of the People's Republic in 1949 could claim genuine sovereignty over the whole of the country. They were constrained by internal weakness but they were also constrained by the unequal treaties, the presence of foreign military forces in the cities and on the rivers and railroads, and the domination of foreign ownership of the key elements of modern industry: banking, utilities, mining, shipping and railroads.

By many measures the foreign presence was dwarfed by the size of China (Peter Zarrow – for counter argument to Hsu's argument, for explaining with empathy shown for China's context). Chinese governments would not or could not do everything that the foreigners wanted; the foreign powers themselves were divided and to a degree the Chinese did continue to govern themselves.

But the dynamics of imperialist expansion operated in China as they did in full-fledged colonies. Though Western capital looks small against China's overall economy, it bought a lot of government. Furthermore, it was directed at the key points of the Chinese economy especially transportation and manufacturing. And China's debtor status severely limited the scope of action available to any Chinese government after the huge Boxer indemnities of 1901. Politically active Chinese of all ideological persuasions and attitudes toward the West were all aware of the realities of imperialism.

In the wake of the May Fourth Movement, initial patriotic energies dissipated. Students were eventually ready to go back to classes, workers could not strike indefinitely, and merchants needed to reopen their shops. **Yet, while anti-imperialist actions disappeared from the front pages, anti-imperialist became more focused in two small political parties. The Kuomintang (Nationalist Party)/also known as Guomindang(KMT/GMD) and the Chinese Communist Party were to lead a new, more disciplined "National Revolution" on the 1920s.** Both became Leninist

parties, tightly structured, centralized (within limits imposed by contending leaders and factions), and ideologically committed organizations. They restricted membership – would-be members had to demonstrate their commitment and loyalty – while **they strove to mobilize mass support.**

The GMD quickly built up its own army and schools, prelude to the military reunification of the country. The GMD and CCP both emphasized correct ideology and loyalty to leaders.

What most distinguished them from Western political parties, however, was not their organization but the political context in which they had to operate. The political realm is an arena of contestation over power and resources: who gets what, when and how. In China, in the early 20th century, politics was an unscrupulous struggle for power and wealth; the machinations of the various camps of the warlords and various constitutions promulgated in Beijing were each more hopeless than the last and each parliament seemed more venal than the last.

C. Rise of Kuomintang Party

The revolutionary government that had come to power in Guangzhou in the 1911 Revolution was dedicated to the radical restructuring of local society. Sun Yat-sen's comrades supported universal schooling, equality for women, compulsory military service and popular mobilization. But as they increased taxes, confiscated the property of guilds and native-place associations and attacked traditional but popular institutions like temples, the Cantonese elites turned against them. The government collapsed in the defeat of the so-called second revolution.

Back in Guangzhou in the late 1910s, Sun tried to establish a new government that did not recognize the legitimacy of the warlord regimes in Beijing. In fact, he claimed to be the legitimate government of the Republic of China. More practically, he hoped Guangzhou would become a model of good government and a base for the military reunification of China. Sun recognized the need for military support.

Although Sun spoke in the name of the Republic, Sun's small Guangzhou-based government was simply not politically significant in national terms. Although Sun's idealism might seem to have set him apart from the other warlords, ideals alone without the means to carry them out, may be dismissed as mere propaganda. But his significant break from being associated with warlordism came in his organization of a new Party – the Kuomintang. No warlord had a political party as extensive or as well organized. The Kuomintang soon developed an ideology designed to appeal to progressive patriots; the means to promote social mobilization, especially of workers and students in Guangzhou and Shanghai; newspapers and schools and its own military. It was ideally positioned to ride the crest of the nationalist upsurge of the 1920s.

The Kuomintang Party was born on 10 Oct 1919 – the 8th anniversary of the 1911 Revolution amidst the tumult of the May 4th Movement. It might be seen as simply a new form of the associations Sun had been organizing since the 1890s. The Revive China Society, the National Alliance, the Chinese Revolutionary Party; one after another Sun had built insurrectionary organizations around himself. His lack of

leadership had been one factor behind their repeated failures. Organizationally, the KMT stood between the loose structure of the National Alliance, (founded in 1905 out of various revolutionary organizations) and the cultist Chinese Revolutionary Party (1913, where members vowed personal loyalty to Sun). The KMT, however, was to develop an elaborate, if elastic, ideology and its own military wing.

D. The Formation of the Chinese Communist Party (CCP)

Chinese awareness of Marxism probably began around 1905 when the *Min-pao* published a biography of Karl Marx in its second issue. In early 1908 the anarchist journal, *Journal of natural justice*, published translations from the Japanese of Friedrich Engels's 1888 "Introduction to the Communist Manifesto" and excerpts from Engels's "The origin of the Family". But at this point of time the influence of Marxism remained small until the May Fourth period when the Bolshevik Revolution dramatized the power of such an ideology.

Many Chinese intellectuals had lost faith in the West after the Versailles pronouncement on Shantung and thus ideas and ideologies critical of the West found new favour and powerful elements among the intellectuals were drawn to the utopian socialism, the anarchism and the revolutionary philosophy of Marx. Socialism was appealing because it provided a practical philosophy with which to reject both the traditions of the Chinese past and the Western domination of the present.

The intellectual appeal of Marxism-Leninism, the voluntary offer of friendship by the Soviet regime, and the practical success of the Bolshevik Revolution combined to create a powerful ideological impact in China. Marxist and Leninist study groups began to spring up and the National University of Peking, where intellectual curiosity and freedom of expression were most pronounced, became a hot bed of radicalism. As early as the middle of 1918 the librarian Li Ta-chao professed his conversion to Marxism and hailed the Bolshevik Revolution and founded the New Tide Society.

No less potent than the Marxist impact was the stunning effect of the May Fourth incident on the Chinese intellectuals. Whereas formerly many of them embraced Western democracy, liberalism and internationalism without being overly concerned with imperialism, they now decisively cut off their dependence on the West and vowed to take China's fate into their own hands. Political activism was the new catch word.

In Peking another group was gathering around Li Ta-chao, whose Marxist Research Society was replaced by the Society for the study of Marxism. By March 1920 the various Marxist groups had united in Peking to form the Peking Society for the Study of the Marxist Theory. It was *Voitinsky*, an agent of the Third Communist International or Comintern who conferred with Li about organizing a party and also with Chen Tu-hsiu, who became the second most important convert to Marxism, and organized a Marxist Study Society in 1920 and a Socialist Youth Corps in August.

The upshot of these critical conferences was the decision to establish a branch party in Shanghai under Chen and another one in Peking under Li. In July 1921 the founding meeting of the Chinese Communist Party (CCP), since called the First Congress of the Party, was held. The expression of Chen in the south and Li in the north underscored the absence of a tight unified party organization at birth. Not only did they

form two regional foci, but Ch'en and Li also differed considerably on the revolutionary role of the workers and the peasants. Ch'en rejected the idea that the agrarian sector could take the lead in reforming the Chinese society. But Li stressed the importance of the peasantry where in an economically backward and semi-colonial China, the peasantry constitutes more than 90% of the population and occupying the principal position and agriculture is still the basis of the national economy and thus felt that the peasantry is the important forces of the revolution.

Li's view offered a powerful alternative and strongly influenced the thinking of his young assistant, Mao, whom he introduced to Marxism in 1918 and whom he inspired with the Populist, nationalistic views on the peasant role in the revolution. After Li's execution by a warlord in 1927, it was Mao who carried on the peasant struggle and put his mentor's ideas into practice.

E. Reasons for the formation of the First United Front, 1923

Sun Yat-sen's reasons for the acceptance of the First United Front

(i) Need for Reorganization of Party

The Nationalist Party Reorganization, 1923-24

The Bolshevik Revolution not only influenced the establishment of the CCP but also prompted the reorganization of the Kuomintang Party (KMT/Nationalist/Guomindang (GMD)). Sun Yat-sen, father of the Chinese Revolution, had long been disappointed by the lack of unity and discipline within his party, and by western reluctance to assist him in developing China. Ever since the founding of the republic in 1912, Sun was continuously frustrated by flagrant acts of insubordination and the open obstruction of the South-western military governors who had earlier pledged their allegiance. Just as he attributed the Russian success to good party organization and strict discipline, Sun blamed his failure on poor discipline, slack organization and inadequate indoctrination. He was anxious to reorganize the KMT after the successful Soviet model and to seek Soviet aid for his National Revolution.

(ii) Sun Yat-sen's disappointment with the West

Equally annoying was the Western support of the warlords and their lack of interest in Sun's international development plan for China. As early as 1913 the Western imperialist had patronized Yuan Shih-kai with a 25million pounds loan from the Five-Power Banking Consortium with which he crushed the second revolution that was aimed at overthrowing his regime. After Yuan's death the imperialist supported the various overlords, fomented civil strife and turned a deaf ear to Sun's pleas for assistance.

In addition the international situation of the 1920s also had an impact on the political developments in China. In the post-WW1 period, there was a move to preserve the capitalist world order and the trajectory in which the western powers moved and made decisions, agreements and treaties, only served to ratify imperialism in China. The Paris Peace Conference, which ignored China's rightful claims in Shantung, and the Washington Conference of 1922, which smoothed Anglo-American relations with Japan more than it solved China's problems, were further proof of Western insincerity.

Throughout the republican period, Sun was plagued by the threefold problem of foreign imperialism, party disunity and civil strife, from which he could find no escape and solution. Sun realized that he had to abandon his hopes of international cooperation under the Washington system of post-WW1 period and begin to speak the language of anti-imperialism.

(iii) Soviet offer of friendship

The intellectual and psychological appeal of Marxism was further strengthened by the Soviet offer of friendship and the enticing Leninist theory of imperialism. Its readiness to renounce the old Tsarist special rights and privileges in China, although it was altered to proposal to negotiate the abolition of the unequal treaties in the 1920s, the Soviet overtures was perceived as a radical departure from the behaviour of the imperialist powers. Sun thus found the success of the Bolshevik Revolution doubly inspiring and the Soviet offer of friendship and abolition of the unequal treaties refreshing and gratifying.

The Comintern came to save the Sun, whose party was at the mercy of larger warlord armies, and relied on the neutrality or support of rival militarists from the southeast, southwest and central China – who preferred that a relatively powerless KMT control the important port of Guangzhou than the one of the rivals and a KMT that was plagued by factional rivalries despite claims to ideological certainties. Sun had rejected Russian overtures in 1920 and 1921, but by 1923 he had nowhere else to turn reading the needs of the KMT.

The Soviets sent Mikhail Borodin an experienced diplomat, to help Sun reorganize the KMT and General Galen to help train a party army. Some 40 Soviet advisers came with them. The August 1923, Sun dispatched a young general, Chiang Kai-shek, to study first-hand the Soviet military system, the political indoctrination of the Red Army and the methods of discipline in the Bolshevik Party. After returning home, Chiang was commissioned by Sun to found the Whampoa Military Academy outside Canton.

The Comintern and Sun reorganized the KMT along Leninist lines: with more centralized and stronger leadership. With Comintern help, then, Sun came to control an efficient political machine for the first time in his life. In addition, something like 3 million rubles (2.7 million yuan) was given to KMT between 1932 and 1927, and the Comintern sent well over a hundred advisers. Aid included the gift of some arms and the sale of more. From Sun's point of view the price the KMT had to pay was not great. At a time when the KMT was hard pressed to survive even in Guangzhou, Soviet aid was of immediate significance. Since Sun could find no other allies, he accepted the Soviet's help and the United Front.

(iv) Rise of Nationalistic feelings in China

The rise of fervent nationalism and buoyant public spirit of the younger generation after the May Fourth incident was yet another reason that influenced Mao. Sun and his supporters came to realize that the student movement had created new political possibilities. The democratic and nationalist thrust of May Fourth seemed compatible with Sun's Three People's Principles which encompassed nationalism, democracy and people's livelihood. Since both forces shared his objectives of anti-imperialism

and anti-warlordism, he was ready to introduce new blood into his somewhat aged organization. Hence, he felt that all Chinese, including the Communists, had a right to participate in his National Revolution. Sun also developed the notion that, once the KMT seized power, a “revolutionary period” would follow and this would be a time of political tutelage as the people were prepared for constitutional government. This time the mistakes of 1911 would not be repeated, and the revolutionaries would not lay down their arms.

Sunism did not provide the new KMT with immediate appeal. For several years the Party remained small and ineffective. At first, it was not clear that the KMT would be different from the parliamentary parties of the early Republic. Yet by 1923 it was attracting students who had participated in the May 4th Movement. Hundred moved south to become part of the “national revolution.”

(v) Rise of Chinese Communist Party (CCP)

Sun, very realistically, believed that any rapid, independent growth of the CCP under the Soviet aegis, with its commitment to class struggle, would ultimately undermine his own cause of National Revolution and hence it would be wise to absorb them into his party and assimilate them in time. Practically, Sun wanted to utilize the CCP's ties with the labor and agrarian movements and Soviet aid in reorganizing the KMT. Furthermore, Sun had considerable concern about possible Soviet aid to some warlords. Li and Ch'en had been instructed by the Soviets to develop connections with Wu P'ei-fu and Ch'en Chiung-ming, both avowed enemies of the Nationalist Revolution. A policy of friendship and alliance with the Soviets and the CCP would undercut these warlords.

(vi) Sun believed that he and his party will be able to control the communist in their party

For all his eagerness to seek Soviet aid, Sun refused to substitute Communism for his Three People's Principles nor would he surrender the power of leadership to Marxist discipline and order. He left no doubt that the KMT occupied the leadership position in the National Revolution and that it was the communists who entered the Nationalist Party, not vice versa. Moreover, they entered as individuals, not as a group, to avoid the situation of bloc within or a party within a party.

In addition, the Chinese Communists agreed to abide by KMT rules and policies. On Jan 1924, Li tactfully declared that members of his CCP had entered the KMT to devote themselves to the revolution, without any ulterior motives to advance the Communist cause. Li reiterated that as long as the Communists remained in the KMT, they would obey the latter's orders and accept its disciplinary action. He emphatically disclaimed any intention of infiltrating or subverting the KMT from within

(v) Sun's leadership

There were of course KMT members who though not averse to the Soviet alliance, were reluctant to the Soviet alliance were reluctant to accept the CCP. Sun had to explain that since both the KMT and CCP were committed to anti-imperialism and anti-warlordism, it behoved them to join hands in the common struggle.

The KMT's alliance with the Soviet Union specified that Russia would not try to convert China to communism and that it continued to renounce the Tsarist treaties. In return, Sun accepted that the Chinese Eastern Railway would continue to be managed by the Russian and that Soviet troops could remain in Outer Mongolia. More importantly, Sun agreed to allow CCP members to join KMT as individuals. He would not accept formal alliance between CCP and KMT as between two equal entities. Furthermore, he even had some hopes that in due time then small number of Communists might be effectively submerged within the substantially larger Nationalist ranks.

On Jan 12, 1923, the Comintern instructed the Chinese communists to enter the Nationalist Party and take part in Sun bourgeois democratic revolution.

Soviet's Reasons for the acceptance of the First United Front

(i) Lenin's Theory

Lenin's imperialism and Russian revolution had political consequences. Lenin believed that, since capitalism now depended on imperialism, anti-imperialist movements threatened the entire world capitalist order. World revolution would begin in the colonies. In the wake of Russian Revolution, Lenin found the Comintern (Third Communist International) in 1919 to help the national struggles of the oppressed nations. By striking the capitalist Powers where it hurt – their colonial enterprises, sources of raw materials, cheap labour and markets – colonized peoples would be allying themselves with the industrial proletariats.

What this meant for the oppressed nations themselves was that local revolutions should not be limited to their own proletariats. According to Lenin's analysis, in societies still dominated by peasantry and crafts production, proletariats were still tiny. Lenin fully expected the struggle in Asia to be mainly waged by the bourgeoisie and the peasantry. Lenin was to support Asian communist parties and he was even more eager to support stronger bourgeois movements as long as they are anti-imperialist.

The Comintern, following the Leninist theory of imperialism, demanded that Communists support all Asian nationalists, even if they were bourgeois. The smaller CCP therefore should form an alliance with the larger KMT, sacrificing its own revolutionary plans for the time being.

(ii) KMT sees a mainstream of Chinese Nationalism

In ideological terms, the Comintern's representatives in China decided that the KMT was not purely a bourgeois party, but rather a blend of the intelligentsia, overseas Chinese workers, and soldiers. Already, then, ideology was being shaped to meet organizational needs rather than the other way round – though the KMT was indeed much more of a blend of various forces than the bourgeois party that Communists later claimed it to be.

In the spring of 1921 the Comintern's Dutch agent, H. Maring, met with Sun in Kiangsi and was most impressed with his nationalist spirit and his nationalist spirit. Sun on his part was gratified to learn of the Soviet New Economic Policy which he likened naively to his own Industrial Plan. Maring was convinced that KMT was the mainstream of Chinese nationalism and that the nascent CCP should expand its influence through

utilizing the established base of the KMT. He then urged the CCP to join the KMT on the grounds that it was bourgeois party per se but a coalition of all classes. Ch'en and Li reluctantly gave in to the pressure and in August 1922 the CCP Central Committee resolved to permit individual Communists to enter the KMT. Li took the lead in joining the Nationalist Party through the introduction of its senior member, Chang Chi.

Neither the KMT nor the CCP was enthusiastic about an alliance. Many in the KMT feared that the obviously different goals of the CCP would divide their movement or even hijack it, while many in the CCP feared the loss of their autonomy. Nonetheless, the Comintern insisted. The Comintern expected KMT to strengthen itself organizationally, to pursue anti-imperialist policies, to prepare for agrarian revolt and to support the workers' movement.

(iii) Comintern recognized that nascent CCP needed a base

On Jan 12, 1923, the Comintern instructed the Chinese communists to enter the Nationalist Party and take part in Sun bourgeois democratic revolution. Ch'en accepted the order most reluctantly, for he feared for the KMT's corrupting influence on the worker and peasant members of the CCP. It was only due to the pressure of the Third Internationale that the CCP grudgingly recognized **the necessity of carrying out its activities within the KMT.**

Indeed, as Leninism itself had recognized China was not ready for a revolution of the proletariat which, defined as the urban industrial working class, was too small and instead, given its backward economy it was only ready for a kind of popular, multi-class revolution. The KMT as a multi-class party and an older party than CCP itself, which would thus provide CCP with a base.

(iv) Soviet had no other alliance

The new Soviet Union denounced imperialism without qualifications, In March 1920 it publicly renounced all the unequal treaties signed between the Tsarist government and the Qing. All Chinese patriots, leftist or not, were impressed. Extensive discussions happened between Soviet agents such as Voitinsky and Hans Maring in 1920 and 1921 and since the Soviets too could not find any northern warlords interested in an alliance with the Soviet Union and with no real communist movement to speak off, Sun looked like the Comintern's only hope for an alliance.

Chinese Communist Party's Reasons for accepting the First United Front

(i) Role of Comintern in the formation of the Chinese Communist Party

It was with the encouragement of Comintern advisers did a small group of Chinese intellectuals founded the Chinese Communist Party (CCP) in 1921. It was the Chinese who built the CCP, but the role of Comintern advisers was essential.

The Chinese radicals had already formed Marxist study groups; by late 1920s some of these were being converted into underground cells like in Shanghai, Wuhan, Guangzhou as well as in Japan (overseas students in Japan and France) and devoted

themselves to study of Marxism and the Russian revolution, to translation of Marxist works and having public discussion of socialism.

The formation of a disciplined party over the course of 1921 and 1922 was a process of winnowing, even of purging, not growth. Anarchist, guild socialists, and even Marxists who did not want to accept party discipline, either left voluntarily or were purged from membership. New members were recruited from workers, especially in the Shanghai union movement, and also women and youth. But the ideological and personal requirements for membership in the CCP was strict. Only a few of the May 4th generation were initially interested. One who was, Mao Zedong, who over the years abandoned anarchism and turned to Marxism-Leninism. Mao attended the first Party Congress that established the CCP in July 1921.

This secret meeting in Shanghai, of some twenty men representing local cells, adopted an official platform. Ironically, the founders of the Party Chen Duxiu and Li Dazhao were unable to attend and about half of the representatives at the first congress had dropped out within a year. Chen Duxiu was elected general secretary in absentia, but it was clear that neither he nor many of the other original members of CCP members regarded Party work as their primary responsibility or source of identity – yet.

By the second Party congress in 1922 the winnowing process was producing a more cohesive, if smaller, organization. Twelve delegates represented some 195 members across China and they committed themselves to working closely with the Comintern, including sending members for further training in Moscow. Soviet representative, Voitinsky held frequent meetings with Chen Duxiu and other radicals in 1920, presented the Russian Revolution as a model for the Chinese to follow, treated the Chinese radicals with great respect, and guided the formation of the communist cells into a party that would be committed to political action.

Many of these Chinese communists came from provincial China. Chen Duxiu, Li Dazhao and Zhang Shenfu stand out as the only major intellectuals involved in the early CCP. Nor did many of the other members come from powerful families or have brilliant universities careers. Rather many came from areas somewhat outside the rapidly modernizing and Westernizing metropolitan areas (though not the truly remotest parts of the countryside). Mao himself came from such background. Friendships and provincial connections were a major part of the recruitment process.

The debates between communists and anarchists and other socialists served to define Chinese Marxism. It was not that the CCP's leadership wanted to purge their membership so much as the process of defining a coherent Marxist identity inevitably did so. Communist may have been a minority among radicals – themselves a minority – but they already possessed a notable presence due to their organizational presence. They were committed to building an effective revolution. The emergence of an organizational and ideological identity that demarcated the boundary between Communist and non-Communist. Of course disagreements within the CCP continued along ideological, personal and factional lines and local branches operated with some autonomy.

In addition, the Chinese Communists and the Comintern faced continual tensions as the CCP members were not passive agents of Moscow. They emerged as leaders who made decisions according to local conditions and Comintern itself was aware that the Chinese would need to develop their own policies rather than imitating the Russian Revolution.

But basically you decided you were either a Communist or not. If you were, then you recognized a chain of authority that went through your local branch up to CCP headquarters in Shanghai and ultimately Moscow. The CCP thus had to follow Comintern orders, especially in its nascent years, and this was so in the case of CCP acceptance of the First United Front.

(ii) Nascent CCP needed a base (see above)

Overall:

The KMT-CCP collaboration was a marriage of convenience, each needing but distrusting the other. The KMT desired Soviet aid in revitalizing the party, in developing a party army and in carrying out the National Revolution. It also aspired to the utilization of Communist ties with the workers, peasants, and the masses. On the other hand, the **Comintern and CCP wanted to use the KMT base to expand their influence and eventually to subvert it from within. Hence, cooperation lasted as long as it was in the interest of both.** Sun's stature and prestige were decisive factors on holding together the various elements, but once he passed away, divisive forces were unleashed and loomed increasingly large on the horizon.

F. Reasons for the Collapse of the First United Front

(i) The bone of contention from the outset was the question of dual membership and its corollary of the bloc within

Sun had admitted Communists in the interest of the revolution without seeming to realize that all the implications of this actions. He assumed that since the Comintern had favoured such a collaboration it would help him control the Communist members, and perhaps even instruct them to obey him. What he did not realize was that the real intention of Moscow was to graft the young CCP onto the established body of KMT so that it could subvert it from within, seize the proletarian hegemony and squeeze out the rightist like lemons.

The Nationalist had admitted the Communists as individuals and expected them to accept the KMT leadership and obey its orders, but the Communist Party demanded that its members take orders from itself and form a secret bloc within the KMT. Despite joining the KMT as individuals, the fact remained that the CCP did not dissolve itself nor did its members who entered the KMT lose their Communist membership. There was, in fact, a Communist bloc within the Nationalist Party. Only publicly did the CCP acknowledged the KMT as the leader and central force of the National Revolution. Hence, the folders of dual membership were expected to be nominal KMT members

but real CCP members. Conflicting orders naturally led to friction which involved the sensitive question of discipline.

(ii) Political Factions within KMT

The KMT remained highly factionalized despite effort at making Party discipline absolute and the effort at reorganization to ensure top-down decision making. **Many of its older members distrusted the Communists. They would go along with Sun, but they did not like it.** They opposed KMT's apparent turn to the Left and saw the Communists more as rivals than allies. Even though Sun brought all his prestige and authority to the United Front, KMT's opposition to the Communist bubbled up frequently before and after Sun's death in March 1925, until it collapsed in a bloodbath in 1927.

In August 1925, some 15 rightist KMT Executive and Supervisory Committee members left Canton for Western Hills, outside Peking, to hold a Fourth Central Executive Committee on Nov 23 in front of Sun's coffin. Here, they issued a proclamation calling for the expulsion of the Communists from the KMT and the dismissal of Borodin, the Soviet adviser. The KMT left wing at Canton accused the Western Hill group of lacking the legal quorum to pass valid resolutions. It called its own Fourth Central Executive Committee meeting, and adopted resolutions to censure the Western Hill faction and to call a Second National Congress on Jan 1926. At this Congress, Borodin's domination was formidable and the Communists won new memberships on the KMT Supervisory Committee and increased memberships on the Central Executive Committee. Of the latter's nine-man Standing Committee, 3 were communists and 3 were fellow travellers. At least 5 or 6 out of 9 ministries came under the communist control: Organization, Propaganda, Overseas, Youth, Workers and Farmers. Facing these developments, the Western Hill group set up its own party headquarters in Shanghai to signify a split with Canton.

Hence, the First United Front was causing a split within the KMT party itself and was providing opportunities for the communist within to dominate.

(iii) Warship Chung-shan Incident, March 1926

On March 20, 1926, captain of Chung-shan, under communist influence, unsuccessfully attempted to kidnap Chiang Kai-shek, who in turn dismissed the captain and all Soviet advisers and party representatives in the First Army and its affiliated military establishments. It was in a sense the first step in Chiang's break with the Communists, yet in the interest of the impending Northern Expedition no open schism was announced. **Nonetheless, some restrictive measures were taken against the Communist.** On May 15, 1926, the KMT Central Executive Committee passed 9 resolutions to limit communists to no more than a third of all committee memberships, to exclude them from department directorships in the central party headquarters, and to prohibit KMT members from accepting Communist memberships. **Although the CCP Central Executive Committee rejected these decisions and resolved to organize its own military forces, Stalin, not wishing to precipitate a split at this point of time, ordered it to tolerate the resolutions in order to remain within the KMT.** And for the KMT, it was only after the Nationalists

had successfully imposed these restrictions on the Communist that Chiang set out his Northern Expedition in 1926.

(iv) The Northern Expedition and the KMT-CCP Split

The course of the Northern Expedition



Having reorganized the party, Sun was eager to resume the much-delayed Northern Expedition to wipe out the warlords and frustrate their imperialist supporters. But his death on March 1925 aborted the move. While the political power fell on Wang Ching-wei and Hu Han-min, the military power fell on Chiang Kai-shek, the superintendent of the Whampoa Military Academy who was in charge of developing an officer corps to staff the new party army. His cadets were given military training and political indoctrination so that they could correctly instruct the soldiers in the political mission of the revolution.

The cadets rapidly became a powerful military factor. They suppressed the Hong Kong Canton Merchants' Volunteers Uprising in Oct 1924, drove away the rebel governor Ch'en Chiung-ming and frustrated the various southwestern warlords. With Canton relatively safe from hostile forces, a Nationalist Government was established on July 1, 1925 in rival existence with the Peking warlord government. And Wang Ching-wei was made president.

A series of pacification campaigns followed in Kwangtung and Kwangsi, and by Feb 1926 all oppositions in the two provinces had been suppressed. Determined to resume

the Northern Expedition, the Nationalist Government on June 25 appointed Chiang Kai-shek commander-in-chief of the Nationalist Revolutionary army, consisting of 6000 Whampoa cadets and 85000 troops. **On July 27 Chiang set out on his celebrated campaign against the northern warlords, who were deployed as follows:**

The Chihli warlord of P'ei-fu and controlled Honan, Hupeh, part of Chihli and Hunan, the Fengtien (Manchurian) warlord who had established himself in Peking, Sun Ch'uan-fang who had seceded from the Chihli clique and had established at Nanking and dominated 5 southeastern provinces of Kiangsu, Chekiang, Fukien, Kiangsi and Anhwei.

Chiang's strategy was to attack Wu P'ei-fu and then Sun Ch'uan fang and Chang Tso-lin. **Strengthened by Soviet supplies and aided by CCP advance agents who mobilized peasant and worker organisations and fomented strikes and sabotage in the cities, the Northern Expedition forces struck a blitzkrieg from Canton to Central China, taking Wuhan in 1926, Nanchang in Nov, Foochow in Dec and Shanghai and Nanking in March 1927.** Within 9 months the southern half of China was conquered. **The campaign had been a spectacular success but at this point of time an ominous KMT-CCP split developed, which threatened to wreck the party and interrupt the Northern Expedition.**

After the Northern Expedition had begun, Chiang's troop movements was fast and having pacified Central China, the KMT decided to move the government from Canton to Wuhan by Jan 1927.

Chiang, while conducting a successful military campaign, was rapidly building a power base in Eastern and Southeastern China. He had deliberately disregarded Borodin's advice to skip Shanghai in favour of the North, driving instead straight to the gates of that financial center. There the Communist dominated General Labour Union had already staged a debilitating strike, mobilized its armed pickets, fought the local garrison and won control of the city from within. Still hoping to prevent a split, Stalin advised the Shanghai workers to avoid any clashes with Chiang and this enabled Chiang to enter the city unopposed and conquer Nanking and dominate Fukien, Chekiang, and greater parts of Kiangsu and Anhwei. It was apparent that Wuhan and Nanking formed two power centers within the KMT hierarchy and that a split was imminent.

(v) The White Terror, 1927

With the support of the Shanghai-Nanking financial circles, Chiang became more determined to persecute the Communists. A "purge committee" was organized on April 10, 1927, and orders were issued to dissolve the political department of the National Revolutionary. From April 12 on, wholesale liquidation of the Communist began – first in Shanghai, and then in Nanking, Hangchow, Foochow, Canton, and other places. Nationalist troops, police, and secret agents raided Communist cells, shot down suspects on sight, disarmed the workers' pickets, and eliminated the labour unions. When they had finished, a devastating blow had been dealt to China's proletarian vanguard. But Chiang continued to profess

friendship with Moscow all this time – his quarrels were only with the local Communists. **On the other hand, Stalin argued that the Chinese workers were too small and the peasants were not revolutionary and ordered a continuation of the united front**

Nevertheless, the split between the two power centers had widened. Buffeted by Communist protest, the Wuhan government on April 17 dismissed Chiang as commander-in-chief of the National Revolutionary army. Chiang could not care less as with the help of Hu Han-min he organized his own Nationalist government at Nanking a day later.

(vi) Role of the Soviets/Stalin

The CCP received an order from Stalin dated Nov 1926 instructing it to intensify its political work in the revolutionary army and to improve its military knowledge so as to be ready for important positions in the army. The Wuhan government was dominated by Borodin, the Soviet adviser, and the KMT left-wing and the two important ministries of workers and farmers were put under the charge of the Communists. **The latter actively carried out Stalin's new order of March 3, 1927, calling for the intensification of mass movements, arming the workers and peasants, mobilizing the masses to embarrass and attack the KMT rightists.** These stepped up activities were most evident in the areas under the control of Wuhan, which included Hupeh, Hunan and Kiangsi.

In the wake of Chiang success in his Northern Expedition as well as extermination of the communists, Trotsky has accused Stalin of flawed leadership in China and in violations of a cardinal Leninist principle that temporary agreement or even alliance with bourgeois was permissible, only if the communists retained their organizational independence and freedom of action. **To vindicate his China policy, Stalin badly needed a victory. Hence, on June 1, 1927, he sent a telegram to Borodin and the CCP asking them to organize a new armed force of 20000 communist members and 50000 workers and peasants, reorganize the KMT at Wuhan, to increase the number of workers and peasant members in the KMT Central Committee. It was in effect a call to raise a separate army and to transform Wuhan into a Communist regime** under the intended puppet Wang Ching-wei, a strategy to destroy the KMT left-wing as well. On July 13, Borodin announced that the Communists would leave the regime, though not the KMT party. The CCP moved its headquarters to Kiu-kiang, Kiangsi, and stepped up its attack on Wuhan.

Wang retaliated by announcing on July 14 that Communist members of the KMT guilty of violating Nationalist policies and ideology by word or by deed would be punitively sanctioned. Yet there were no immediate liquidation nor forcible dismissal of Communists from the KMT party and army. It was not until July 26 that the Wuhan presidium, under increasing Communist excoriation, ordered the ousting of Communists from KMT party and government unless they resigned from their CCP membership. They were also ordered to stop obstructing the National Revolution. Meanwhile no KMT members were allowed to take membership in other

parties. Under these adverse conditions, Borodin had no choice but to leave Wuhan via Mongolia.

(v) CCP's urban uprisings

The CCP staged an armed uprising in Jiangxi, Nanchang led by Zhou Enlai in August 1927. These were the first military clashes between the GMD and CCP and 1st August can be seen as the birthday of the People's Liberation Army. Mao Zedong launched the **Autumn Harvest uprising in Hunan in September 1927**. By this time, there was deep peasant unrest and the CCP hoped to use it. They carried out liquidation struggles where they killed landlords and confiscated their land. But it was a serious failure where over 300000 died as the CCP was too militarily weak. As a result of this failure, Mao lost his Politburo seat and there was a realization that CCP's power had to depend on military strength.

Stalin ordered the CCP to stage an uprising in Guangzhou in December 1927 but it failed to win popular support; nearly 6000 died. As a result, KMT broke relations with Moscow and closed down the legations. It also forced the communist member Chen Duxiu to resign in 1928 and he was replaced by Qu Qiubai and Li Li-san who were Stalinist supporters.

The urban uprisings and its failure only demonstrated that China's society was not ready for revolution. The CCP's failure to win the support of the working class caused it to lose contact with the working class. The CCP unions were not that strong as most of the workers worked in small firms and their employers' lifestyles were not very different. In addition, most peasants still owned their land; the landlords were did not have much land either; not really revolutionary.

Hence, for the CCP the united front still made the most sense.

The final coup de grace fell after the Nanchang Uprising of August 1, 1927, which was carried out by the Communists under the name of the Nationalist left wing. **Wang finally ordered an all-out liquidation of the Communists and reorganization of the front organizations** such as the General Labour Union, the Farmers' Association, the Women's Association, and the Merchants' Association.

Now that Nanking and Wuhan had both liquidated the Communists, the Western Hill faction at Shanghai proposed reconciliation. A special Central Committee was established at Nanking to exercise the power of the party headquarters, and on Dec 10 all differences between Wuhan and Nanking were formerly resolved: Chiang was reappointed commander-in-chief of the National Revolutionary, while Wang announced plans to go abroad.

The Wuhan government was dissolved on Feb 1928. While the domestic conflict was resolved, Chiang resumed his Northern Expedition. As the year 1929 opened, China or he greater part of it, was united by Chiang Kai-shek, after 13 dismal years of civil anarchy. With Nanking as the new seat of government, the old capital Peking was renamed Peiping, Northern Peace.

Conclusion:

In retrospect, the KMT-CCP split testifies to the complete failure of Stalin's policy in China. He had wanted to seize the proletarian hegemony within the KMT and squeeze out the rightist like lemons but little did he realize that the reorganized KMT was no longer loose, inefficient collectivity he once knew. The party structure had been revitalized by Borodin and the party army had been trained with the assistance of Galen. Also, Stalin failed to see that the CCP did not control the army.

Also, Chiang's political acumen appeared to be at its height and he acted with speed and decisiveness, squeezing the Communists out before Stalin, thousands of miles, had a chance to strike.