CAN CHINA UNITE?

BY MARK GAYN

Touched off by some tough talk from the usually docile People’s Political Council, clamor for reform rolls through China, voiced by businessmen, government and military leaders and the Communists. An authority reports on who is asking what.

O n a rainy morning a few months ago, somber men in dark gowns filed into a building in downtown Chungking. They shook the water off their oilied-paper umbrellas, gravely looked about, exchanged ceremonious bows with friends. These were the members of the People’s Political Council, come for its third session in six years.

This time, as in its early days, the council held no power and enjoyed no privilege save that to speak, question and recommend. But now disaster knocked urgently on China’s door, and the council was no longer timid. It wanted action.

For two weeks, the council met. It listened to Chiang Kai-shek and some of his key cabinet members. It received reports on the progress of the Communist-Kuomintang “peace talks.” And it spoke itself, with bitterness and passion, with disregard for the feelings of those who held power, with an insistence that sent a shiver through Chungking.

Much of what was said in that small hall did not appear in public print. But by word of mouth, it became known that Finance Minister H. H. Kung had been handled roughly. Army leaders, too, had been assailed. “The report says we are going to train crack troops. How many? How well? It says we are going to look after the well-being of the draftees. How? We want definite plans, not just vague promises!”

One after another, the delegates rose to make pointed attacks: “Corruption of officials, especially of district officials, is staggering.” “To read the government reports is just like reading an old thesis submitted for the imperial examinations during the Manchu Dynasty. I am afraid that next year . . . the government will submit the same report. We usually talk big and do nothing.”

Angrily, the men cited detail after detail: “Gasoline in Chungking is as precious as blood. Why is it wasted to provide transportation for the wives and girl friends of officials on shopping tours?”

“In ancient times we had a tradition of giving aid to the poor. Now the so-called New Life Movement (sponsored by General and Madame Chiang Kai-shek) has a center here; and the Kuomintang Youth Corps has just spent millions of dollars to build a Youth Hall. . . . But young men who took the college entrance examinations at Shapingpa recently died of hunger and exposure because they had no food and were forced to sleep in the open.”

The men argued, accused, passed resolutions, made recommendations which no one expected to be headed. But this time something did happen. The two men the council attacked most bitterly, Finance Minister Kung and War Minister Ho Ying-chin, were dropped a few weeks later. Some of the reforms the council urged became the basis of government-backed plans.

The explanation was simple. Greater pressures than the council were at work; the spectacular Japanese gains, American influence, the growing Communist strength, the signs of dangerous disinterest in the south. But the council had done an uncommonly courageous and able job in voicing the necessity for change.

One task it had accomplished was to correct the distorted picture of China presented to the American public. In this picture, the Chinese political crisis was portrayed as a conflict solely between the Kuomintang and the Communists. The council helped to show that not only Kuomintang antagonists like Truong Chinh were fighting the Kuomintang dictatorship.

Across China, in the south, the influential Democratic League drew up its Principles, based partly on Anglo-U.S., partly on Soviet Russian ideas. The latest draft called for the establishment of free speech and assembly and academic thought. But it also urged reforms in the system of landholding and the distribution of daily necessities. The opening sentence of the principles could have come out of the American Constitution: “In a democratic state, the people are the masters.”

These are potent words in China. They were echoed at a mass rally in Chungking. The speaker was the picturesque, simple-minded General Feng Yu-hsiang, whose name can be found in every Chinese history book:

“One reason we suffered a setback in Hanoi is that our soldiers made themselves the enemies of our own people. We cannot draft army recruits and let them die of hunger if we know the true meaning of democracy. We have an old saying that good leaders must live by the hardships of their men. Our military leaders have all failed in this. Unless we make far-reaching reforms now, we will very soon see the disintegration of our country.”
A candid Kuomintang official told an American friend that the resentment against the government was so widespread that a free, universal election would be held. Four out of five would probably vote against it. Except for the Communists, the resentment has been largely unorganized. Most of the minority parties have been driven under­ground. Public assembly is dangerous unless sponsored by men too important to fear arrest. The press is rigidly censored, and critical speeches even by such eminent government leaders as Sun Fo are often suppressed.

But if the Communists are not the only opposition, they comprise its major element because they are strong and well-organized, and Communist sympathizers have come to include a spectacular variety of political hues. The Communists also offer a well-thought-out program, a tight and well-disciplined political machine, leadership and a huge army. What goes on in Communist territory is no longer a secret. In the last seven months, American military officers, officials and correspondents have visited the so-called Red Border Region, have studied the facts with deep and sometimes hostile interest and emerged with voluminous reports. Many of these have been critical: none has failed to point out the striking contrast between the picture in Chungking and in Communist territory.

"We have come to the mountains of North Shensi," said one correspondent, "to find the most modern place in China." An American officer summed up in a single word: "Exhilarating."

Communism in China was nurtured on battle. For eighteen years, the Communists have been at war with the Kuomintang, for nearly eight with Japan. "One cannot help coming to feel," said one observer, "that this movement is strong and successful, and that it has such drive behind it that it will not be easily killed."

But in the growth from an underground party to a state within a state, the Communists have undergone a metamorphosis. They are no longer Red. Their program and objectives today find their closest U.S. parallel in our Farmer-Labor Party of the twenties.

Communist leaders now admit the errors of their infancy. Communism, they have discovered, cannot be platted in present-day China. Forces of history cannot be bucked. Therefore, they profess a readiness to go slow, to encourage private enterprise, to stimulate industry. They even talk warmly of American loans. The confiscation of land and its redistribution among the landless was left by the roadside years ago. Communist slogans have been toned down.

But in giving up their "Redness," the Communists did not abandon their old appeal to the masses. Shrewdly, they have won the people with rural reforms, with the beginnings of self-government, with a program of education and hygiene.

A foreigner reported that in eight months spent in peasant huts and at inns, he had not seen a single bedbug. This, he said, was the result of a Communist antbug campaign. Properly emphasized has been the work of public health. Special attention was paid to the three causes of the small farmers' distress: exorbitant land rents, exorbitant rates of interest, exorbitant taxes. Today land rent has been reduced to 25 per cent of the crop produced, compared with 50 per cent elsewhere in Free China. Taxes have been reduced, standardized and graduated, with the rich paying 30 per cent, the poor none. Interest has been kept down to 20 per cent, as contrasted with as much as 200 per cent and 300 per cent in the rest of China.

While income from land has been kept down, the landlords have been assured, by various local ordinances, of prompt payment. The Communists have not "liquidated" the big landlords, but have tried to create a sense of social responsibility. Land scarcity has been partly met by reclamation. Since the Communists moved into China's barren northwest, they have reclaimed an acreage equal to the state of Wisconsin. This has been accomplished largely by a system of incentives. Farmers tilling new land pay no rent for the first three years, no taxes for five years, and they receive free seed.

A New Era for the Farmer

In eight years the average family plot has been increased from two acres to ten. Yields have also been increased through crop diversification, pest control, prevention of land erosion and relentless, day-in-and-day-out schooling.

Communist agronomists introduced new, harder types of millet. Gradually, wheat became the second basic crop. Cotton acreage has been expanded. Potatoes, sugar beets have sprung up everywhere, engulfing even the grave mounds which are such an integral part of the Chinese landscape.

Next to the sword, the plowshare received the most modern place in China's barren northwest. In the hammer. The Communists placed self-defense. They took the farmers' impotent hate for the Japanese and gave it method and muscle. The farmers no longer have to take abuse and torture from the enemy. Man, woman and child, they have all been organized, trained and armed. Apart from a regular army of 475,000 claimed by the Communists, there is a people's militia of 2,200,000 men and women, that a still larger layer of potential fighters.

Out of this mass of armed men came ceaseless pinpricks which have been a drain on Japan's strength. In defense, the Japanese built walls and dug deep moats along the railroads. They dotted North China with thousands of garrisoned pillboxes. They managed to limit the attacks, but they never stopped them.

Out of the ranks has come the Intelligence section of the Communist Command. Probably no better illustration of this can be given than the story of an American newspaperman who one night slipped past a Japanese-held pillbox in north China. Casualty, his guerrilla guides told him the number of men in the pillbox, their names and their home towns.

This last bit of information was used to "sing" the propaganda aimed at that particular pillbox.

It is not easy for an American to grasp the fact that most of the fifteen Communist Regions lie behind the Japanese lines. This means heartbreaking problems in organization and supply, constant vigilance against a never-ending peril.

When the Japanese move into an area, the Chinese officials flee, and a vacuum results. Sooner or later, Communist agents filter through the enemy lines and begin their work of organization. The villagers are urged to

Mme. Mao Tse-tung left Shanghai stage to wed Communist leader Sun Fo.
The President and the Press
By WALTER DAVENPORT

In his second article on the President and the newspapers, our political expert explains the workings of Mr. Roosevelt's press conferences and discusses trial balloons and other devices that enable him not only to combat, but occasionally to manipulate, the American press.

For three successive Presidential elections—1936, 1940 and 1944—Mr. Roosevelt has won re-election opposed by the majority of America's newspapers. This may correctly be regarded as a considerable shellacking for the press. It can be interpreted as you see fit, provided it is not your aim to demonstrate that the editors and their publishers are ahead of, abreast of, or even that they are following the political will of their readers.

Increasingly Mr. Roosevelt has become more critical of the opposition press and even less solicitous of those newspapers friendly toward him. His criticisms of newspapermen from owners down to their Washington correspondents have become sharper, more frequent and more careless of his own accuracy. That he should show less respect for the vaunted power of the press today than he did when first elected is understandable; no man may be elected President of the United States four times without beginning to suspect that his opposition must be misrepresentative of the people. And you can argue this until your voice fails and convince nobody who isn't already convinced.

For the few statistics we shall use, we've gone to the files of Editor and Publisher, the principal trade paper of American journalism. There it is recorded that in 1932, 55 per cent of the newspapers supported Mr. Hoover who, as you doubtless recall, got only 59 electoral votes. Four years later, 60.4 per cent of the press went all out for Mr. Landon, who got exactly eight electoral votes—Maine's and Vermont's. In 1940, Mr. Roosevelt was opposed by 66.3 per cent of our newspapers and Mr. Willkie got only 82 electoral votes. In 1944, according to the final tabulations of Editor and Publisher, 60.1 per cent of the press, representing 68.5 per cent of the total daily circulation, implored their readers to elect Governor Dewey. Some of the straw-grabbers managed to garner a little cheer because Mr. Dewey did...