

Finding Allies and Making Revolution

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The Early Years of the Chinese Communist Party

By

Tony Saich



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This book is printed on acid-free paper and produced in a sustainable manner.

*This book is dedicated to the memory of
David E. Apter and Fritjof Tichelman*



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Preface and a Note on Sources

My old friend, Professor David Apter, many times encouraged me to publish the introduction to my source book on the Sneevliet Archives as self-standing work. It is a strange feeling to revisit this important topic some 30 years later. I was busy with other projects but with the 100th anniversary of the founding of the Chinese Communist Party (CCP) taking place in July 2021, it seemed a good time to revisit how it all began. A further spur to revisiting the question of the CCP's early years is the release and publication of the treasure trove of documents held at the Russian Center for the Conservation and Study of Modern History Documents, the former party archives in Moscow. It is unlikely that another such trove of documents will be released to help us tell the story of the party's establishment and its early years. These original materials help refine our earlier answers to questions such as the degree to which the Soviets guided the party's establishment, the role that Moscow and its agents played in directing policy and encouraging, or forcing, the CCP to cooperate with the Guomindang (GMD). The documents permit a finer analysis of divisions within the Soviet apparatus about the nature and value of the collaboration, the development of the labor movement and whether it was feasible to create a mass communist party. This volume relies on these documents and those of the Sneevliet Archive, held at the International Institute of Social History in Amsterdam. These latter materials are published in the original language with an annotated translation in two volumes (Saich, 1991). The archives are now open for scholars to consult. When Sneevliet's personal papers were donated to the Institute, they arrived with the obligation that a source publication be published before they could be made available to other researchers. The history of getting them to publication is probably worth a book in itself.

The publication of the Sneevliet materials and those from Moscow have renewed debate about the party's founding and the origins of what later came to be known as the first united front in China. I have included the most important of these secondary analyses into the new book but have relied on contemporary documents wherever possible not only for specific details but also for informing the analysis. These contemporary documents are complemented by newspaper articles by individuals and materials published, or written, by the CCP or the GMD. Of the secondary materials, the work of Ishikawa (2013) stands out as an extraordinary feat of detection.

The Russian-held materials are published in three languages: Russian, German and Chinese (see the bibliography for details). For the purposes of this volume, I have used the German and Chinese publications. When citing

the works, I refer to the document number alone if it is from volume one (1920–1925) and if it is from the period 1925–1927, it is listed with volume two and the document number. This allows the reader to check the usage against the German or Chinese versions and the Russian publication of the materials.

The materials from the Sneevliet Archive are listed by their number in the Archive and can be found in Saich, 1991, as can the cited materials from the van Ravesteyn Archive and those reports that were sent to the Governor-General of the Dutch Indies.

Acknowledgements

The original project to publish the archival materials was facilitated by the International Institute of Social History and special thanks are due to Dr. Fritjof Tichelman, Dr. Eric Fischer and Ms. Ati Horst. Research trips were supported by the Royal Dutch Academy of Arts and Sciences. I owe a special thanks to Dr. Stefan Landsberger for his help and support.

For this new work, thanks need to be given to my new intellectual home at the Ash Center for Democratic Governance and Innovation, Harvard Kennedy School. I found time to read through most of the documents released from Moscow while on sabbatical at the Canon Institute for Global Studies. In particular, Dr. Jun Kurihara provided great support. While I was in Japan, I was very fortunate to visit Professor Ishikawa Yoshihiro at Kyoto University. I benefitted from his knowledge of this period and his encouragement to pursue the project.

I would like to thank Chen Hao for his excellent research assistance and seeking out a variety of important secondary sources. I am grateful to Professor Timothy Cheek for his thoughtful comments that enabled me to tighten the argument, draw out its broader significance and see the woods rather than the trees. Also, he pointed me to some important sources that I had not utilized. As usual, Ms. Nancy Hearst weaved her usual magic with the bibliography. Elizabeth You from Brill helped with the production process. Finally, I want to thank Ms. Qin Higley at Brill for her willingness to support this project and exhibiting the patience to see it through.

Transcription

The system of transcription for Chinese names and places used in the text is the *pinyin* system. This is the commonly used system outside of Taiwan. However, there are a few names with such familiar spellings in English that do not use the *pinyin* system and these have been retained for the convenience of the reader. Below are listings of these names in *pinyin* and their equivalents.

<i>Pinyin</i>	<i>Other familiar spelling</i>
Guangzhou	Canton
Jiang Jieshi	Chiang Kai-shek
Dalian	Dairen
Guomindang	Kuomintang
Manzhouguo	Manchuria
Shenyang	Mukden
Nanjing	Nanking
Beijing	Peking
Sun Zhongshan	Sun Yat-sen
Shantou	Swatow
Tianjin	Tientsin
Huangpu	Whampoa
Wuzhou	Wuchow
Changjiang	Yangtze River

Pseudonyms of Sneevliet while in China

Apart from the name of *Maring* that Sneevliet adopted for his Comintern work he also used the following aliases at one time or another:

Andresen

Martin Ivanovich Bergman

H. Brouwer

Mander

Mr. Philipp

Sentot

Mr. Simons

Joh van Son

Abbreviations

CC	Central Committee
CCP	Chinese Communist Party
CEC	Central Executive Committee
CER	China Eastern Railway
Comintern	Communist International
CPSU	Communist Party of the Soviet Union
ECCI	Executive Committee of the Communist International
FER	Far Eastern Republic
GMD	Guomintang (Kuomintang)
KMT	Kuomintang (Guomintang)
Narkomindel	People's Commissariat of Foreign Affairs
Politburo	Political Bureau
PRC	People's Republic of China
Profintern	Red International of Trade Unions
RCP (B)	Russian Communist Party (Bolshevik)
RSFSR	Russian Socialist Federal Soviet Republic
S.A.	Sneevliet Archive
SYC	Socialist Youth Corps
SYL	Socialist Youth League
UK	United Kingdom
US	United States [of America]

Introduction

Only history can reveal how important seemingly insignificant events may turn out to be. When 13 young Chinese men, all severely disillusioned with China's post-imperial development, met in Shanghai (July 1921) to form a communist party, no one could have predicted that less than 30 years later the party would rule the nation and 100 years later it would command the second largest economy in the world and provide the major challenge to post-World War Two US global dominance. Overseen by a Russian and a Dutchman working on behalf of the new Soviet regime, the participants at the First Party Congress argued about the nature of the party and its relationship to the national-revolutionary movement and the Nationalist Party (the Guomindang, GMD). They were an eclectic group encompassing a wide range of ideas and only two of them (Mao Zedong and Dong Biwu) remained with the Chinese Communist Party (CCP) until 1949. Despite sharp differences about the essence of Marxism and the nature of the party, a party was indeed established and Comintern influence entrenched.

The Dutchman, Sneevliet, was influential in shaping the Leninist form of the party and was crucial in formulating cooperation with the nationalists. He could feel pleased with his work and achievements. Imagine the shock he must have felt when, in August 1923, on his way back to Moscow, he bumped into Borodin on his way south to take over Sneevliet's work. Borodin, a Russian and a member of the Bolshevik party was viewed as more reliable by the paymasters in Moscow. The era of socialist internationalism was drawing to a close with the interests of the Russian state coming to the fore. How did this happen? This work seeks to clarify the shift.

Once the CCP was ensconced in 1949 as the ruling party, official historians followed a narrative that blurred the complexity of the party's origins and the role of the Comintern, which saw China as an important cog in the wheel of global revolution. Initially, the party was not a disciplined organization and, even after the post-1978 loosening of the monolithic narrative, historians have found it difficult to move beyond the official orthodoxy. In particular, CCP historians have stressed the indigenous roots of the revolution as opposed to Soviet writers who selectively released or partially edited documents to highlight the dominant role that the Comintern and its agents played in establishing the CCP and determining its

policies.¹ When interpreting the earliest period of CCP history, the consequences of the fall-out between Stalin and Trotsky and their supporters overseas complicated Soviet writings. Who bore responsibility for the 1927 destruction of the CCP by their nationalist “friends” has caused much ink and political capital to be spilt in answering “whose fault” this was. The CCP blamed Chen Duxiu for his “right opportunism,” as did the Soviets, while others have placed the blame squarely on Stalin’s shoulders.

The myth that the CCP was either a Soviet creation from its origins or was simply an outgrowth of China’s domestic development has long been punctured by the work of those such as Hans van de Ven (1991) in his path-breaking work on the CCP in the 1920s, Arif Dirlik (1989) on Soviet influences and my earlier documentary history of the CCP (1996). What has emerged is a far more nuanced picture of the complex relations between local innovation, the intricate interrelationships between the local actors and the promptings of Soviet agents not only from the Comintern but also from Narkomindel (the Russian Foreign Ministry) and the Profintern (the International Labor Organization). No account of the origins of the CCP can ignore this reality and the role the Soviets played in the foundational years of the CCP. These Soviet organizations themselves did not work in harmony and even within the same organization there were conflicting views.

The book makes four claims. First, from its origins, the revolution in China was part of a global movement at the core of the struggle between the new Soviet state and the established imperial powers. The theories of anti-imperialism, anarchism and socialism found a receptive audience among a very small group of intellectuals, who were bitterly disillusioned with China’s current situation. Anti-imperialism inspired those disturbed by the nation’s humiliation at the hands of the foreign powers. With the emergence of a working-class, others were attracted to a Marxist analysis of classes and class struggle. Eventually, this was extended to account for exploitation in the countryside by the “landlord class.” Japan was the initial source for radical ideas but was soon displaced by other sources in English and from Soviet Russia. For the Soviets, China was an important cog in the movement of anti-imperialism. Soviet actors viewed China as a key link in their strategy to break the chains of imperialist domination. Soviet Russia sent a significant number of agents to gain intelligence and spread the word of the new Soviet state.

1 For a succinct statement of the opposing views that still conclude that the establishment of the CCP was an inevitable product of the post-May Fourth violent contradictions see Tian Ziyu, 2009.

Second, the two most enduring legacies from this period are the use of the united front and the introduction of the Leninist party, which was adopted not only by the CCP but also the GMD. The united front has been used by the CCP, and other communist parties, to assemble a coalition to survive against a more powerful enemy and, after taking power in 1949, to work with groups important to CCP policy. Although the first united front ended tragically in 1927, the approach was revived in 1937, when an alliance was formed with the GMD to resist the Japanese invasion. In 1939, Mao Zedong announced that it was one of the “three magic weapons” that would bring the CCP to power, together with armed struggle and party building. After 1949, the united front approach was used to build bridges to non-CCP individuals, the party deemed important for meeting its goals, such as scientists. It was important in the early 1950s until Mao radicalized policy, casting aside cooperation in favor of class struggle. The united front was revived under Deng Xiaoping to help the CCP meet its reform goals. Domestically, the manifestation of the united front is the Chinese People’s Political Consultative Conference, which seats a wide range of useful and influential individuals. Externally, united front work is carried out by the CCP’s United Front Work Department. Under current General Secretary Xi Jinping, the Department has been active in promoting China’s views abroad, working with Chinese overseas, and trying to draw in sympathetic foreigners to provide support.

While it is debatable whether a CCP would have emerged eventually, it is certain that without Soviet ideological and financial support, it would not have come together so soon and thrived so well. Certainly, it would not have assumed the Leninist form so quickly. The release of both primary sources and secondary analyses now allows us to bring greater clarity to the founding of the CCP, the interactions with Soviet Russia and the debates about collaboration with other social forces, most of which were not available when the original collection of the Sneevliet Archives was published (Saich, 1991). Most important is the publication of the Comintern archival materials that provide a treasure trove of new documents allowing us to refine and even redefine earlier conclusions.² Pantsov (2000) has used these materials effectively to review the 1920s with a special focus on the increasingly divergent views of Stalin and Trotsky on the “China question.” Similarly, the archive editing group (Leutner, Felber, Titarenko and Grigoriev, 2002) have used the materials to fill out our understanding of the 1920s. Ishikawa (2013), in his detailed study, shows the

2 For this work, I have relied on the German (1996 and 1998) and Chinese versions of the materials (1997 and 1998). The Russian language materials for Vol 1 and 2 were published in 1994 and 1996.

early influence of Japanese socialist and communist thought on Chinese radicals and has clarified a number of outstanding issues around the formation of the CCP.

An initial point of frustration for the Comintern and other Russian advisors was the traditional Chinese preference to place their trust in personal relationships as opposed to the early Bolshevik focus on the preeminence of the organization and the need for discipline. For those who had just experienced the exhilarating atmosphere of the May Fourth Movement (1915–1919), not only had they opposed imperial pretensions in China but also had pushed forward an array of solutions to China's problems. Bolshevik discipline was difficult to digest. Indeed, delegates to the First Party Congress (1921) held a wide range of views, including some participants who had been attracted by anarchism, social democrats and those with an ill-defined liberal bias. The groups that formed the basis of the CCP grew out of the study societies that formed before and after the collapse of the Qing Dynasty and "they were not fully communist" (Cai Hesen, 1926, p. 8) and did not operate within a national framework. For these study societies, regional or educational linkages were important (Vera Schwartz, 1990, pp. 69–71). Not surprisingly, those who had cut their intellectual teeth debating national issues within these intimate groups did not accept readily the tighter institutional structure offered by a Leninist organization.

Third, while Soviet Russia promoted national liberation over proletarian revolution and interacted with a range of prospective partners, the specific form of the united front was determined by the actions and persistence of the Dutchman, Sneevliet. He used his position as Lenin's emissary to the Far East to gather intelligence, which he used to sell his tactic in Moscow. In China, he used Leninist organizational discipline to push through his approach against the opposition of some of the Chinese comrades. For many in the CCP, Sneevliet represented Comintern authority, a higher power that while alien, some felt compelled to defer to. Thus, how Sneevliet interpreted Comintern policy and articulated it was crucial to policy evolution. While resolutions were passed in Moscow and some CCP members such as Zhang Guotao, ferried messages between Russia and China, it was Sneevliet who operated closest to the ground.

This brings us to the fourth key claim concerning the role of the individual in history. While objective factors such as the role of the foreign powers, foreign capital and the growth of a labor movement laid the groundwork for the nationalist sentiment that grew after the fall of the Qing Dynasty (1911–1912), the role of the individual in shaping history cannot be ignored. The primary focus of this work remains on Sneevliet (alias Maring) but, unlike the earlier

work, pays greater attention to the role and views of Voitinsky, Chen Duxiu and, to a lesser extent, Zhang Guotao. The analyses of the Dutchman Sneevliet were crucial in shaping the fledgling party and he was instrumental in cajoling the party to work with the nationalists to form a “bloc within.” His view of tactics and strategy was deeply contested not only within the ranks of the CCP but also within the Comintern. The sharpest disputes centered around the degree of independence that the CCP should retain in working with the GMD and who should lead the young labor movement. The two most influential activists, Sneevliet and Voitinsky, the head of the Far Eastern Bureau of the Bolshevik Party, clashed over these two key questions.

Both were constrained by the general outline of the policy approved by Lenin and other participants at the Comintern's Second Conference (1920). This outlined the revolutionary strategy for work in the colonial and semi-colonial countries. Sneevliet and Voitinsky had to find their way within the complex Chinese reality while working within the constraints that all expats find themselves in when representing a Metropolitan Center. Sneevliet was strong-willed, capable of inspiring in others feelings of intense loyalty or opposition. He worked from his own experiences in the Dutch East Indies as much as from the directives that he received from Moscow and this was the “truth” that he brought to China. His conflicts with Chinese communists reflected something deeper than just his character, reflecting the deeper issue of the conflict between the CCP's desire for independence and the centralized leadership system of the Comintern. While Voitinsky enjoyed a better relationship, it was still one with a “mother-in-law” (Yao Jinguo, 2003, p. 69).

For Sneevliet, the challenge was especially acute as he tried to mesh the reality he witnessed on the ground with the aspirational and ideologically determined constructs put together in Moscow to promote the international movement. This became more complicated as Russian national interests in diplomacy began to clash with internationalist aspirations. This was evident in debates about what to do with the Chinese Eastern Railway and the legacy of the Karakhan declaration (1919).

There can be no better illustration of the internationalist fervor giving way to Russian national interest than the aforementioned meeting between Sneevliet and his successor, Borodin. In August 1923, on his way to Moscow, he met Borodin, who was on his way to Guangzhou to push forward collaboration between Sun Yat-sen, the CCP and Soviet Russia. The message could not have been clearer and the shock was evident. Despite his hopes, Sneevliet was not going to return to China to work on the tactic he had championed. The internationalist was replaced by the Bolshevik party member and the preeminence of the Russian national interest was coming to the fore.

Sneevliet and Voitinsky were neither the first nor the last who thought that they could “change China.” Sneevliet’s belief led him into conflicts both within China and with Moscow. His lack of familiarity with Chinese customs and manners caused him problems and frustrations throughout his stay. As with others working for international organizations, Sneevliet had to explain the reality on the ground in terms acceptable to a framework laid down externally. He had to relay his work to the Comintern using Lenin’s language on revolution in colonial and semi-colonial countries and the framework of the Theses adopted at the Second Congress. The Theses required communists to support the “national-revolutionary” movement.

Within the CCP, it fell to party leader, Chen Duxiu, to accommodate the Russian demands and those of his fellow CCP members such as Zhang Guotao, who were highly critical of the form of collaboration with the GMD and sought to lead the emerging proletarian movement. The interaction between Sneevliet’s view and those of Voitinsky, Chen and Zhang determined the nature of the CCP and the initial form of cooperation with the GMD. Their different backgrounds influenced their approaches. Chen had developed his politics in opposition to Imperial rule and was critical of early Republican politics. At the same time, he was a product of the small study society milieu that developed during this opposition. The study societies relied on the importance of personal relations and networks. These networks formed the basis for the collection of individuals who came together to form the core of early CCP membership. By contrast, Sneevliet brought with him experience in both the Dutch labor movement and work in the Dutch colony of the East Indies where he had engaged with a nationalist movement opposing a colonial power. Unlike Chen, he believed strongly in the Leninist party organization and the need for party discipline and coherence. Zhang Guotao was heavily involved in the Northern fledgling labor movement and was bitterly opposed to the subjugation of the CCP to the GMD, stressing the importance of the independence of the labor movement. Voitinsky had experience of work in the United States and Canada and his early work with the Communist Party of the United States influenced his ideas for the CCP. These experiences were instrumental in revamping the radical journal *New Youth* (*Xin Qingnian*) to become a platform for the CCP, providing for the dissemination of various articles from the American left. To his mind, Sneevliet became too accommodating to the GMD and his subordination of the CCP to the national movement frustrated the development of a “mass based proletarian party.”

Despite, or perhaps because of his experiences, Sneevliet became deeply disillusioned with his time in China. He was neither the first nor the last foreigner to be puzzled by its complex realities. Sneevliet and Voitinsky, as with

Borodin after them, are in a line of foreigners who came to China to “save” the country and offer advice on how it should conduct its affairs, often seeking to remake the nation in a foreign image. The Jesuit Schall (1592–1666) was a “harbinger of things to come” and hoped to bring acceptance of “Western values” (Spence, 1969, p. 5). Sneevliet and Voitinsky came to China to spread their understanding of another international credo that of a secular internationalism rather than one of religious belief. Like Schall and his fellow Jesuit Verbiest (1623–1688) with their technical ability to read the heavens, or the American soldier of fortune, Ward (1831–1862) and “Chinese Gordon” (1833–1885) with their military prowess, some radical Chinese youths were attracted by their vision and the practical achievements of the Russian Revolution.

They wrestled with understanding and propagating the ideology that underpinned the system. However, the idea of the revolutionary party and basic tenets of Marxism were only readily accepted once they were adapted to suit the realities of a poor, agrarian country. Those who adhered to the internationalization of early Bolshevism and its Trotskyist interpretation fell by the wayside or were “excommunicated.” Those who adhered to Marxism in its pre-Bolshevik form had long been expunged from relevance. Bolshevism and the Leninist party attracted those early CCP leaders who stuck with the party as it offered a guide to action in a “backward” nation. Yet, even basic concepts were not absorbed easily and it was not until the rupture with the GMD in 1927 that organizational discipline and the role of ideology dominated over personal dynamics and interpersonal relations (van de Ven, 1991). Of course, the dominance of the organization over the individual did not survive for long once Mao Zedong began to consolidate his power from the mid-1930s, culminating in the cult of the individual in the post-1949 era.

The infatuation of foreigners with the idea of shaping China did not end after the CCP took power in 1949. While the Russian Bolsheviks hoped to build a Soviet-style society and economy that would make China a reliable “little brother” (Bernstein and Li, 2010), the United States lamented the “loss of China” (Newman, 1992), as if it was ever America’s to lose. Moreover, once Kissinger diplomacy opened the way to diplomatic relations, all US Presidents have sought engagement with China to make the nation “more like us,” a phenomenon criticized as the “Starbucks Fallacy” (Mann, 2007). World Bank and Western mainstream economists have peddled the wares of a liberal economic model with remarkable success but have remained frustrated by the continued role of State-Owned Enterprises and state intervention in markets, not to mention the frustration of politicians and academics that economic reform has not resulted in significant political reform. These examples might seem far from Sneevliet, Voitinsky and China in the early 1920s. However, they represent

similar expressions of the desire to mold China's trajectory and, while some exerted significant influence, supporters have departed frustrated, wondering why can't the Chinese be more like us?

To complicate matters further, within Soviet Russia, there were differences about the relationship with the nationalist movement, including who was the "best" nationalist and who should lead the labor movement. In addition, there was the growing importance of Soviet foreign policy in China as conducted by Narkomindel. In principle, the aims pursued by the Comintern and Narkomindel should not have been in conflict. In reality, on certain issues, they not only had differing but also conflicting policies. It was not the case as claimed by some that all actions in China emanated from the Politburo of the Soviet Communist Party with the Comintern and Narkomindel as the two arms for implementation (Ma Guifan, 2003). Relying on the Sneevliet-Joffe correspondence, Yao (2003) concludes that the Comintern was subordinate to Narkomindel. Such judgement is complicated by the fact that Sneevliet worked for both organizations.

The Russian leaders had to act both as revolutionaries and as Russian nationals, consequently they found it necessary to devise separate channels for their diplomatic and their revolutionary activities. The attempt to separate the Comintern from Narkomindel was not so easy to achieve and on occasion "lines were crossed with embarrassing results" (Whiting, 1954, pp. 34–36). For Whiting, the Comintern had a basically anti-bourgeois predisposition that clashed with the more pro-bourgeois views of Narkomindel. These differences led to conflicts over China policy and guided the different actions of the two bodies. Sneevliet worked amidst these differences and collaborated with Narkomindel representative Joffe to try to square the circle. Thus, Sneevliet labored as a spider in a web that was not entirely of his own weaving. He could shape the web but he could not exit from it and it framed the possibilities for effective action. The same was true for Voitinsky and, indeed, all the Soviet advisors.

The ramifications of these early debates, how they were framed and the decisions taken haunted the CCP, its relations with Moscow and increasingly politics within the Communist Party of the Soviet Union. For Stalin, the nationalist movement as led by the GMD-right would be squeezed like a lemon and then flung aside when no longer useful. Yet, in April 1927, it was Chiang Kai-shek who ordered his troops to enter Shanghai and take it by force if necessary. This brought the latent contradiction in the united front from its inception to the fore. All acknowledged a time would come when the interests of the bourgeoisie at the head of the nationalist movement would clash with those of the vanguard of the proletariat. At this point, the representatives of the proletariat

were to disband the temporary cooperation and take over leadership of the revolutionary movement. Exactly when this would occur was difficult to judge. With Chiang Kai-shek's actions, the arrest and slaughter of many Communist Party members were the most tangible results of the cooperation.

Yet, initially the united front proved very successful for the small group of communists. Sneevliet could feel proud of the results of his vision. The Northern Expedition swept all before it and within the united front, and outside of it, the communists increased in strength and influence. Indeed, the very success of the communists was one major reason for its undoing. The increasing revolutionary activity in the countryside unsettled some GMD leaders who did not favor the complete break-up of the traditional power structure in the countryside. This, combined with the growing power of the workers' movement, caused some within the GMD to reconsider the cooperation and to move swiftly to crush the party before it could develop a strong, independent power base. The scale of the disaster had far-reaching consequences and was a major point of contention between Stalin and Trotsky in their struggle to succeed Lenin. Stalin's support for the united front and his enthusiasm for continued cooperation with the left-wing of the GMD based in Wuhan meant that any serious discussion of the tactic and its shortcomings was precluded. The Chinese communists were inhibited from conducting a serious analysis and Chen Duxiu was made the scapegoat for the tragedy. The casting of Chen as the devil in the piece was aided by his later involvement in the Chinese Trotskyist movement.

This work explains how cooperation came together given the reality on the ground and the conflicting perspectives in China and in Moscow. How did the communists find themselves in this united front of a "bloc within" the Nationalist Party? What role did Sneevliet, Voitinsky and Chen play in bringing about this cooperation? How serious was the opposition within the CCP and in Moscow? Chapter 2 looks at the two key developments that were crucial in enhancing Soviet influence and providing the basis for establishing a communist party: the penetration of Marxist/socialist ideas among radical intellectuals and the actions of Soviet agents. Marxism became more attractive after the victory of the Bolshevik revolution, laying the basis for the Soviets to step up the pursuit of their interests in the context of the global challenges they faced. Even before the Voitinsky's visit (April 1920), Bolsheviks had been busy laying contacts with potential partners in China. Policy for the colonial world was codified at the Comintern's Second Congress (July–August 1920), providing the broad framework within which Sneevliet would operate.

Chapter 3 looks at the germination of communist cells within China and the impact of Voitinsky's first visit. The building blocks for the CCP were the

numerous small groups that had come together in China, some through Soviet promptings and some without. Voitinsky provided the impetus to pull these groups together through a party congress.

Chapter 4 covers Sneevliet's first trip to China. On arriving in China, the CCP was in disarray but the Congress did convene. Together with Nikolsky, Sneevliet helped prepare the Congress, which they attended. He made little progress in advancing his agenda to form a liaison with the national-revolutionary movement. His trip to South China convinced him of the correctness of his approach to revolution. There he met Sun Yat-sen and witnessed the Hong Kong Seamen's strike in which the GMD played a major role in contrast with the sleepy CCP. A united front with the GMD at its core was the way forward.

Convinced of his strategy, Chapter 5 recounts how Sneevliet sought to persuade the Chinese comrades to share his vision of collaboration with the GMD, a vision not easily shared by all. In July 1922, he delivered his analysis to the Comintern, outlining the strengths and weaknesses of the GMD and where it fitted into the grand scheme of revolutionary strategy. With the failure of revolution and uprisings in the West, the Comintern was more willing to consider strategy in the East and endorsed Sneevliet's ideas. He stressed, as did others, the immaturity of the CCP and the weakness of the young labor movement. The GMD offered more fertile ground for action and could be developed into a revolutionary mass party. As a result, the CCP would have to work within the GMD to push forward the national-revolutionary movement.

Returning to China, Chapter 6 outlines Sneevliet's push to quell CCP opposition not only to working with the GMD but also to members joining the GMD as individuals. At the Hangzhou Plenum (August 1922), he invoked Comintern discipline to force his views on a reluctant CCP. While these events were taking place, Soviet envoy, Joffe, arrived in Beijing and together with Sneevliet, they deepened relations with Sun Yat-sen, while trying to build an alliance between Sun and Wu Peifu. This culminated in the Sun-Joffe Agreement (January 1923), opening the way for significant Soviet aid for the nationalists.

On arriving in Moscow in December 1922, Chapter 7 outlines the growing opposition to the approach of the "bloc within." Voitinsky, Radek and others raised concerns about the relationship with the GMD and Sneevliet's too close relationship with Sun Yat-sen. They favored CCP independent leadership of the labor movement and thought that the development of a mass revolutionary party was feasible. Despite this opposition, Sneevliet received confirmation for his approach to continue. Yet, ambiguities remained and the opposition in Moscow fed through to the colleagues in China.

As Chapter 8 shows, on Sneevliet's return to China, the CCP was again in disarray, caused this time by the crushing of the February 1923 railway workers'

strike by the Northern warlord, Wu Peifu. This ended the belief that Wu might serve as an ally in the national-revolutionary movement. Cooperation with the GMD again proved divisive but, despite dissenters, the tactic was passed by the CCP's Third Party Congress (June 1923). As Sneevliet began to work more closely with Sun Yat-sen, his frustration increased with Sun's obsession about a military solution to China's problems, a resistance to using propaganda to push forward the national-revolutionary movement and his reluctance to reorganize the GMD. By the time he left, Sneevliet had strong opponents in China and Russia. As the Soviet national interest became more assertive over the demands of global revolution, the Dutchman Sneevliet was replaced by a trusted Russian, Borodin.

The Epilogue outlines briefly the tensions in the united front that led to its demise in 1927 and the debates that followed about who had been at fault for pursuing the strategy even after the dangers to the CCP had become apparent. While Stalin's insistence on continuing the cooperation was to blame, it was not the sole cause of the tragedy and even the "opposition" in the Bolshevik party raised their criticisms too late to be of any practical help to the CCP.

Searching for Allies: Soviet Interests in China

The world was in turmoil. The “Great War” had just limped to its end, causing untold deaths and carnage, leaving the traditional European imperial powers exhausted. The United States was emerging as the most powerful nation in the West but was cautious, to say the least, about assuming the role of global policeman. By contrast, the Bolsheviks had seized power in old Russia and had no qualms about exporting their revolution beyond their borders. For their leaders, enthused with revolutionary vigor, the main theater was to be in Europe with the East little more than a sideshow. Yet, in the East the seeds of unrest were sprouting. The Qing Empire had collapsed in 1912, leaving a political and intellectual vacuum that competing forces and ideas sought to fill. Politically, the nation was divided among warlords, whose power extended only so far as their military resources could stretch. For young intellectuals, it was a frustrating yet exhilarating time as they experimented with a wide range of thought systems: anarchism, liberalism, and socialism to underpin the structures to restore the nation’s former glory. The search for wealth and power was on. Into this environment stepped a few Soviet agents and a Dutchman, Henk Sneevliet (alias Maring), who would have the most significant impact on China’s future.

It is within this evolving global context that the origins of the Chinese Communist Party (CCP) and its First United Front with the Guomindang (GMD) must be viewed. Although weakened, the various international powers were active in China and had carved out concessions, which were an affront to patriotic pride. Indeed, when the former German concession was granted to Japanese control after the war, nationalist resentment was heightened, sparking the May Fourth demonstrations of 1919. These demonstrations, in turn, capitalized on the mounting rejection of China’s treatment by the imperialist powers and the increasing influence of radical ideas seeping into China from overseas. The Bolsheviks, shortly after taking power, set up the Third Communist International (1919) to unite progressive forces around the world and to promote revolution overseas. The goal was to realize Trotsky’s vision of a global dictatorship of the proletariat. Ultimately, this served Soviet Russia’s own national goals as the country sought to break free from its international isolation. Once the initial enthusiasm for a revolutionary break-through in the economically advanced West dimmed, attention shifted to the East, where imperialist links were thought to be weaker.

What happened in China would be crucial. In no country was the potential to break the chains of imperialism greater than here. If China could be captured for the revolution, the path through East and Southeast Asia could be pried open. Agents of the new Soviet regime, whether from the Comintern, Narkomindel or the Profintern, began the work of locating revolutionary partners in the East. The activities spread beyond China, with Shanghai seen as the center for promoting revolution not only in China but also in Japan and Korea. From the beginning, the new Soviet regime sought out “progressive elements” in China with which to work to break out of its isolation and spread the revolutionary message to a receptive audience. These activities resulted in the creation of the CCP and the First United Front.

Historian Elleman (1995, 1997) claims that the idea of the united front predated the Comintern and from as early as 1918 it was a key component of Russian policy in China. Thus, the hunt for progressive allies predated the founding of the CCP in 1921. An alliance with the nationalist leader, Sun Yat-sen, was proposed by Russian officials in the summer of 1918, even before the Comintern developed its policy prescription in the spring of 1919. The intention was to form an alliance between the Bolsheviks and Sun, not between the CCP and the GMD. Thus, the “Comintern helped found the CCP during 1921, and then ordered it to enter into an alliance with the GMD during 1922, to augment the ability of Sun Zhongshan [Yat-sen] and the GMD to marshal public opinion in support of Soviet diplomacy” (Elleman, 1995, p. 451). This contains a kernel of truth but oversimplifies the reality on the ground. Elleman makes the valid point that the new Soviet leaders saw cooperation with Sun *and* with others as crucial to promoting their national interest and breaking the grip of anti-Soviet forces globally. The need for national survival contained the seeds that grew into the domination of Russian national interest over a global alliance of the proletariat and the colonial and semi-colonial nations—“red imperialism.” This transition, as we discuss in Chapter Seven, was highlighted by the evolution of policy towards Outer Mongolia and the Chinese Eastern Railway (CER).

Crucially, Sun was not alone in attracting Russia’s interests and agents. Russia sought out other key figures for collaboration, such as the warlords Wu Peifu in the North and Chen Jiongming in the South. These early manoeuvres were not to form a united front but rather they represented appeals for a looser alliance to support Russia and resist imperialist ambitions in China. Further, these early interactions did not propose the option of a “bloc within” for the united front. Finally, this line of reasoning does not take into account how individual perceptions and preferences shaped the precise form of cooperation and its implementation. The nature of the alliance was disputed hotly in

China and by those in the various Soviet agencies. The perceptions of specific individuals, such as Sneevliet, were crucial in shaping the form of cooperation.

Two developments paved the way for a broad group of nationalists to accept cooperation and for a very small group of radical intellectuals to form a communist party. First was the introduction and gradual acceptance of Marxist ideas and the second was the activity by Soviet agents and supporters in China.

In China, there was fertile ground with a group of intellectuals attracted to radical solutions to resolve China's plight. Marxist thought was appealing as was, later, the idea of Bolshevik organization. The collapse of the imperial system left not only a political and organizational vacuum but also intellectual space for competition from new ideas as young radicals wrestled with the means to salvage China's future from its recent humiliations. There existed already a propensity to link national rejuvenation with global or international salvation and this added to the appeal of the form of Leninism that reached China. A Leninist movement could connect with national salvation while linking the struggle in China to a movement with greater global significance. Thrown into this mix was the impact of the Karakhan Declaration (1919) that seemed to mark out revolutionary Russia as different from the other imperialist nations that were busy carving out spheres of influence in China.

With the old system of ideas broken apart, young radicals were open to new ideas. Not only had the Bolsheviks been probing contacts in the country but also Marxism had been circulating in intellectual circles since before the May Fourth Movement. Yet, by no means was Marxism the dominant train of thought among radical intellectuals and even as it gained traction, young intellectuals interpreted it in accordance with their own intellectual heritage. "Taking the usual syncretic approach to Western ideas, the intellectuals did not treat Marxism as an inclusive doctrine, but one allowing them to be selective in accepting and rejecting its specific ideas" (Luk, 1990, p. 16). What began to emerge was a mixture of deterministic readings of Marx, the internationalist line of the early Comintern and nationalist and even populist strains of thinking that would become more evident as Mao Zedong began to develop his brand of Chinese-style socialism. The spread of Marxist ideas was distinct from grasping the fundamentals of Bolshevik organization and it is debatable how much the early CCP members understood the Bolshevik fundamentals. Given the early debates and arguments, the answer is not much!

Yan Fu, in 1895, was one of the earliest writers to think about socialism even though he was not a supporter and very soon radical thinkers began to combine national rejuvenation with the idea of a new global community.¹ For

1 Yan refers to socialism as "the party of those who would equalize the rich and the poor." His thought remained committed to a form of liberalism that was infused with Darwinism

example, Kang Youwei (1902 [2010]) wrote of the “great unity” (*datong*) that described a common future for humankind. Anarchism dominated early twentieth century radical discourse. Proponents rejected the idea of the state, one reason why they bridled against Marxism and especially Leninism, visualizing a future without national territories. Given their predisposition, it should come as no surprise that the early converts to anarchism did not develop a strong political movement but they exerted a strong influence on intellectual trends.² Bernal (1969) saw anarchism triumphing over Marxism in the intellectual arena in 1907 but Dirlík (1993, pp. 83–88) shows that a clear distinction between anarchism and socialism was not drawn until 1913, while a distinction between anarchism and Marxism was not clarified until the early 1920s. Clearly, anarchist concepts were important for interpreting responses to the October Revolution (Luk, 1990, pp. 17–19).

What is clear is that before the formal establishment of the CCP, radical thinkers and activists drew their inspiration from numerous diverse sources. While Bolshevism, filtered through the prism of the Russian Communist Party, eventually came to dominate the CCP, ideologies including anarchism remained influential as did socialist thought and pre-Bolshevik Marxism. This variety of ideas was promulgated through the experiences of those who studied in Japan or from translations of Japanese texts and articles. As with anarchism, key terms and concepts were translated from the Japanese. Later, as more Chinese went to study in Europe and Soviet Russia, they became important nodes for transmitting radical ideas into the Chinese intellectual community. Despite this, many joined the CCP first and Marxism came to them later.

While CCP historians stress the crucial importance of the indigenous origins of the CCP together with the rise of the labor movement and Soviet historians stressed the importance of Bolshevism and Comintern promptings, there were multiple influences, sometimes complementary, other times contradictory. In later reminiscences, Mao Zedong (1940) claimed that the Russians had brought Marxism to China but, as Ishikawa (2013, pp. 8–9) argues persuasively, thinkers in Japan played an important role in disseminating radical ideas. For Ishikawa, the “Chinese communist movement must be addressed within the context of socialist intellectual trends in East Asia.”

(Schwartz, 1964, pp. 63, 273). Yan Fu saw inequality as a product of self-selection. Reacting against the interest in socialist thought, he made his opposition clear with his critique of Rousseau and socialism. Clearly, showing that he was not familiar with the writings of Marx, one key reason he gave was that it denied the role of conflict in human history, Yan Fu, February 1914.

2 See, for example, the anarchist publication *Minsheng* [The People's Voice], which ran from August 1913 until 1916.

Chen Puxian was especially important in facilitating the understanding of Marxism, which, in turn, provided the fertile ground on which the seeds of the CCP could be sown. Chen Puxian made use of *Chenbao fukan* to spread ideas from Japan so that key concepts could be adopted from the Japanese.³ In addition to Chen's work, influential figures promulgating Marxism, such as Li Hanjun and Li Dazhao, also derived their formative understanding through Japanese sources. Li Dazhao, who is usually viewed as the father of Marxism in China, was the most important figure, mainly because of his article "My Marxist Viewpoint" (*Wode makesizhuyi guan*, May 1919). His Marxist theory was an adaptation of Kawakami Hajime and Fukuda Tokuzō, the former's influential article having been translated by Chen Puxian in *Chenbao fukan* (Ishikawa, 2013, pp. 33–34). Indeed, in 1920, Li had become a member of the Japanese Socialist League, formed in December 1920, and in March 1921 he helped establish a Marxist Study Group.

The influence of Japanese thought was even more evident in Shanghai where Chen Duxiu was the key figure in creating the communist small group, although he was not a key figure in the early promotion of Marxism. This honor fell to a group of individuals who had lived or studied in Japan and formed the core of the later Shanghai Communist Small Group. Others, such as Dai Jitao, were affiliated with the GMD, although Dai had been an early member of the Shanghai communist small group. Dai had been most influential during the May Fourth Movement in propagating Marxist ideas and conveying them to Chen Duxiu (Li Da, 1955 [1980], p. 7). Most likely, the first Chinese translation of the *Communist Manifesto* was based on a Japanese version (Ishikawa, 2013, pp. 50–54). Finally, the initial works on Marxism that those in the Shanghai Marxist Study Group absorbed all came from Japanese sources (Shao Lizi, 1980, pp. 192–93).

The situation was extremely volatile with young Chinese shifting swiftly from one ideological wave to another as they sought to find an effective framework to release China from the grip of the imperial powers and move the nation forward. In 1919, the interest in Marxism and socialism but not yet Leninism began to gain traction, as was best witnessed by the special edition of *New Youth* (*Xin qingnian*) published in May 1919 (Schwartz, 1951, pp. 16–18; Meisner, 1967, pp. 90–91). The edition published from the symposium was not simply an emphatic endorsement of Marxism but rather was "one of critical and detached scholarship" (Schwartz, 1951, p. 16). While Li Dazhao's own contribution (May 1919, p. 521) was quizzical to say the least, he did write that the

3 Literary Supplement to *The Morning Post*. On the broader role of *Chenbao fukan*, see Xiaojin Xu, 2014.

Russian Revolution and other social revolutions were forcing the necessity to study Marxism. Initially, Li Dazhao and Chen Duxiu did not seem attracted to the notion of class struggle as the means to take power and exert control. However, intellectual trends would move quickly and the interpretation of Marxism was conducive to Li Dazhao's own more voluntarist view of human nature and appealed to his global vision.⁴

As Comintern and other pro-Russian activists established contacts, news of the Bolshevik Revolution spread and the sources of inspiration began to shift with English language sources filling the pages of *New Youth* and *The Communist (Gongchandang)*, launched in November 1920). Unlike the theoretical writings from Japan, these sources were action oriented and covered how to organize to oppose imperialism and conduct a socialist revolution. In light of the historical phases, the Chinese communists skipped the phase of the Second International and jumped directly into the Third International under Lenin's leadership. Thus, it is not surprising that the study groups developed into activist communist small groups. In turn, this caused a rupture with those originally attracted to the socialist and anarchist movements and to Marxism's theoretical appeal. This is best reflected in Chen Duxiu's seminal article "Talking About Politics" (September 1920), which reveals his shift from Marxism to its Leninist incarnation (Ishikawa, 2013, p. 76). Influence, inspiration and a guide for action were shifting inexorably toward Soviet Russia.

Very soon, the two key figures, Chen Duxiu and Li Dazhao, were expounding their faith in Marxism and even in the necessity for Bolshevik-style organization. By December 1920, Li Dazhao had already publicly declared his conversion to Marxism. He rejected pre-Marxist theories that were used by the rulers to deceive the people and he wrote that trust should be placed in the materialist conception of history (Li Dazhao, December 1920). By May 1920, (Chen Duxiu, May 20, 1920), Chen concluded that the workers, as the most important class, held the key to the future and in September 1920, he proposed that class struggle was the path to realizing socialism and resolving social problems, with the "revolutionary means" necessary to create the proletarian state (Chen Duxiu, September 1920). Class struggle was the only route to achieving socialism. In a smart piece of intellectual juggling, Chen (December 1920) justified

4 In July 1918, Li Dazhao responded positively to the Russian October Revolution noting its humanitarian spirit and cosmopolitan nature. For Chen Duxiu's views see, Chen, December 1919. At this time, Chen's views resembled more closely those of guild socialism and the influence of John Dewey was clear (Luk, 1990, pp. 31–32). In fact, during these years, Chen went through a range of different philosophical alternatives, including Christianity and even democracy. For an excellent account of the evolution of Chen's thought during this period see, Feigon, 1983.

the absence of a sufficient working-class by claiming that there was a genuine proletarian movement and that, in any case, the advance of imperialism in China was turning the entire population into a working-class!

The question arises of why the acceptance of concepts such as class struggle and a Bolshevik form of organization came about so swiftly. In addition to the gradual introduction of Marxist ideas and their circulation among radical young Chinese, two other factors were important. The first is the March 1920 publication of the Karakhan Declaration (promulgated on July 25, 1919), which renounced all Russia's unequal treaties with China and, in what would become a major bone of contention, the return of the Chinese Eastern Railway (CER) to Chinese control without demands for compensation. Second, following earlier contacts, Voitinsky's arrival (April 1920) was crucial in establishing the CCP, providing Soviet support and promoting the idea of a Bolshevik Party, which could coordinate with Soviet Russia.

1 Early Soviet Activities in China

Voitinsky's mission was defining for the creation of the communist movement in China but the ground had been laid by prior visitors. The Russian agents had dual objectives. First, they sought to prompt revolutionary activities and develop groups sympathetic to the Soviet cause. Second, Russia had to deal with the existing governments in the East and try to detach them, to the greatest extent possible, from joining the Allies, who were threatening the very existence of the new revolutionary state. The two objectives did not always operate in tandem and could produce conflicting priorities. From its earliest days, Soviet Russia had tried to establish contacts with "progressive elements" who might be sympathetic. These contacts certainly preceded Voitinsky's mission and even that of Potapov, who laid the ground for the mission. They provided the basis for the more substantial, subsequent visits and began introducing positive news about the Russian Revolution and Bolshevik activities. The visits were less influential in creating an understanding of Marxism, with little impact prior to the summer of 1920 (Luk, 1990, pp. 33–34). What they did promote were anti-imperialist messages and, especially, anti-Japanese sentiments. This met the dual objectives of Soviet Russia: bolstering its internationalist credentials as different from the colonial powers, while promoting its national interests. These contacts with different Chinese actors led to subsequent debates about who would be the "best" partner for Soviet Russia to ally with.

In 1918, the first example of “the familiar Leninist tactic of dual struggle applied to China” was apparent (Whiting, 1954). Chicherin (appointed the People’s Commissar for Foreign Affairs, March 1918) wasted no time in projecting a sympathetic picture to China and he contacted Sun Yat-sen to promote positive relations. Speaking to the Fifth Congress of the Soviets (July 1918), he made the new government’s first official comments about its attitude towards China. He offered an attractive package, presenting a principled Russia willing to respect China and designed to contrast with the imperialist powers who were benefitting at China’s expense. Russia was willing to renounce Tsarist conquests, all indemnities and even the issue of the CER was placed on the agenda.⁵ Chicherin referred to the CER twice, indicating that if China repaid Russian investment in the railway, it could buy back the CER without waiting for expiration of the full thirty-six-year term to expire. Chicherin hoped that the South would understand the Soviet viewpoint.⁶

In August, Chicherin slammed the Beijing Government as a “creature of foreign bankers,” while reaching out to Sun Yat-sen in the South. In a letter to Sun (August 1, 1918), Chicherin thanked him for his congratulatory letter and thanked Sun for his opposition to the Northern (Beijing) Government, the foreign capitalists and their imperialist governments. He liked that Sun had declared that the Russian and Chinese Revolutions had similar objectives. For Chicherin, their opponents were seeking to prevent the Chinese people from understanding the true situation, claiming that “our victory is your victory, our defeat is your defeat.” He called on Sun to unite closer in the “great struggle for the interests of the world’s proletariat” and he raised the slogan “Long Live the

5 In 1896, responsibility for construction and development of the CER was given to a Russo-Chinese bank. However, in practice this crucial artery, linking Siberia with the Pacific port of Vladivostok was controlled by the Russians and was important for Russian economic penetration and colonization of North Manchuria. Russians filled the key positions and all administrative functions came under Russian control. In November-December 1917, the local Bolsheviks had tried to assert control over the railway by taking over power from General Horvath, a former official under the Tsar and an appointee of the previous Kerensky Government. These attempts were put down and Chinese troops were sent to the area. In January 1918, the Beijing Government appointed a Chinese national as President of the railway thus replacing Russian control with Chinese control.

6 Address to the Fifth Congress of Soviets, July 4, 1918, in *Izvestia* (Delivered Messages) no. 138 (402), July 5, 1918, p. 7, translated in Whiting, 1954, pp. 28–29. According to Leong, 1971, p.3, this was a restatement of the position presented by Voznesensky, chief of the Eastern Department of Narkomindel, to the Chinese legation at Petrograd on January 24, 1918. These earlier contacts were terminated when the Chinese moved out with other Allied missions at the end of February. As Leong points out, the offers made by Chicherin resembled those in the Karakhan Declaration, with the exception that they did not propose giving up the CER but they did offer the possibility of redemption or, failing that, joint management.

Alliance of the Russian and Chinese Proletariat.”⁷ While Chicherin and Sun maintained sporadic communications, relations were not helped by the time it took for communications to reach their addressee, if they arrived at all.

Despite the warm words, Sun probably never received the missive. These complications were all too apparent in an exchange of letters with Chicherin writing to Sun on October 31, 1920, which Sun did not receive until June 14, 1921 and, in his response, replying on August 28, 1921, Chicherin praised Sun as an “anti-imperialist fighter” and stated his hope that trade relations be restored.⁸ Sun noted that this was the first letter that he had received from anyone in Soviet Russia, despite reports to the contrary in the capitalist press. He informed Chicherin of his election as President of the National Government, a government he viewed as both the *de facto* and *de jure* government of China. He was not positive about the potential for trade relations as geographic conditions made them impossible except via contacts through the “windows of Manchuria and Mongolia.” In a common refrain, Sun saw military action as most important as he first had to “put an end to the reactionaries who always appear in every country on the very next day after a successful revolution.” This task would be completed in a relatively short period of time. Nevertheless, Sun did want to establish personal contact with Chicherin and his friends in Moscow. He requested more information about Soviet organization, the military and the education system. He finished with a rhetorical flourish that “Like Moscow, I wish to lay the foundation of the Chinese Republic deeply in the minds of the young generation—the workers of tomorrow.” In a strikingly different assessment of Zhang Zuolin, who controlled the Northeast, than he would later make, Sun described him as the “head of a gang of murderers,” obeying “Tokyo in all important matters that concern Japan.” Zhang’s influence over the Beijing Government caused it to follow Japan’s policy.

These were nice words but by far the most important step was the publication of the Karakhan Declaration, issued by the Council of People’s Commissars to both the South and the North (July 25, 1919) but not delivered to Chinese diplomats until February 1920. This repeated the principles outlined by Voznesensky and Chicherin but in one version of the Declaration at least, abandoned the previously held position on the CER. Policy had demanded compensation for Russia before giving up control over the CER. This version

7 The letter, published in *Izvestia*, no. 53, March 1919, p. 1 is translated in Eudin and North, 1957, p. 217.

8 Sun sent the reply via the Soviet Trade Mission in London because of the communication difficulties. The letter can be found in Degras (ed.), 1971, vol. 2, pp. 51–53 and is taken from *Sun Zhongshan quanji*, vol. 5, 1985. A translation from Russian can be found in Eudin and North, 1957, pp. 219–22.

declared that Russia was willing to renounce the CER “without demanding any kind of compensation.”⁹ One month later, this phrase was dropped when the Declaration was finally published in the Soviet press. Whether this key sentence renouncing the concessions was intended or not became shrouded in mystery and the subject of bitter debate over the following five or so years. In late 1922, for example, when the foreign minister of the Beijing Government asked Joffe to make good on the Declaration’s promise, Joffe denied that any such offer had ever been made and he reminded the Chinese that they had never responded formally to the Declaration (Leong, 1971, pp. 22–23). The same mantra was repeated the following year by the person whose name the Declaration bore, Karakhan.¹⁰

Grand gestures were easy for Russia to make as, despite their push into the Urals beating back Kolchak, they were in no position to carry out any of their promises. However, having entered Siberia, Soviet Russia did see the possibility of restoring connections with China. The Declaration highlighted the contrast between the new Soviet Government and the old ways of the imperial powers. It was intended to show up the shabby treatment of China at Versailles where the allies were proposing the continuation of the Japanese occupation of Shandong. Following Germany’s defeat, the Chinese authorities had fully expected that the province would be returned to Chinese jurisdiction. The actions at Versailles created a strong upsurge in nationalist feeling, best symbolized by the May Fourth demonstration (1919) in Beijing. The fervor of the reaction at home led the government to instruct its delegation in Paris not to sign the treaty. What better time could have existed for the Soviets to score a few good propaganda points off their Western allies?

At least one version of the Declaration did include the disputed sentence, and this rendered Ovseenko’s explanation of 1924 inadequate (Whiting, 1954, p. 31).¹¹ Whiting’s publication caused the Russians to attempt a more credible explanation. In 1958, Kapitsa (quoted in Leong, 1971, p. 23) acknowledged that during the process there was a rough draft that included the disputed phrase

9 The “Declaration to the Chinese Nation and the Governments of Northern and Southern China” was drafted by Vilensky-Sibiriakov and presented by Deputy People’s Commissar for Foreign Affairs, Karakhan. An English translation of this version can be found in Woodhead, 1924.

10 Leong, 1971, p. 23. “Never and nowhere could I have said that all the rights of the CER belong to China,” in a letter to C.T. Wang, November 30, 1923, in Woodhead, 1924, p. 875.

11 Ovseenko (or Ovseyenko) was a prominent Bolshevik who, in the late-1920s, was close to Trotsky. He explained that the original decree had been drawn up at a meeting of Chinese workers in Moscow and then had been arbitrarily re-edited there.

but it was not submitted to the government for approval. Vilensky published this draft in error and it was subsequently received by the Chinese.¹²

Yet, the picture was more complicated (Leong, 1971, pp. 6–11). Material in the Chinese Foreign Ministry (held on Taiwan) shows that more than one version of the Declaration containing the controversial phrase was sent to the Beijing Government and that far from ignoring it, the Beijing Government was quite prepared to deal with it seriously, although their room for maneuver was limited by their relations with the other powers occupying China. Beijing's reluctance to take up official contact was dictated by China's unwillingness to recognize the Soviet regime as the legal government before the Versailles powers did. Sun Yat-sen was also reluctant to display public support for Soviet Russia because of his concern about the reaction of the colonial powers. Eventually, the Beijing Government decided that the risks were too great.

Leong rejects Whiting's view that exclusion of the phrase from the version in the press signified the dramatic shift in Soviet foreign policy (Whiting, 1954, pp. 2–22). The existence of differing versions, more likely, reflected differing views within Narkomindel. Those who were impressed by the revolutionary potential in China favored a strong gesture to gain Chinese support for the Soviet state. This had the additional advantage, shared by all in Narkomindel, of helping to form a Sino-Soviet alliance to ward off the threat from Japan.¹³ Those who opposed, favored following the pre-first Karakhan Declaration policy, i.e. renouncing indemnities and concessions but not the CER. They did

12 In July 1919, Vilensky published an article (*Izvestia*, no. 163, July 26, 1919, p. 1) that included the possibility of transferring the CER to conclude a much needed alliance with China (Whiting, 1954, p. 29; Leong, 1971, pp. 4–5). Whiting argues that the change in the text over the month indicated that Russia had second thoughts about its policy position. Whiting views the inclusion in the text communicated to Beijing in March 1920 as a mistake. The delay and change in the publication of the Declaration was evidence of the “shift in Soviet policy from a new, revolutionary diplomacy of self-denial to a traditional, nationalistic diplomacy of self-interest.” Events in Siberia held the key: the victories over Kolchak in Siberia meant that between its drafting and its publication in August, Soviet officials had realized that they might actually regain a foothold in the Far East. This realization led to the application of a more cautious, nationalistic policy, Whiting, 1954, pp. 32–33. The reassertion of traditional Russian goals at this time meant that it was the victories in the Russian Civil War and not the setbacks in Germany and Hungary that resulted in the new emphasis in Soviet foreign policy. “Defense of this Socialist fatherland appeared to take precedence over advancement of world revolution when the decision to renounce forever all ‘imperialistic’ rights on the CER was abandoned in favor of asserting Soviet Russia's legal heritage of this Tsarist concession in China's territory,” Whiting, 1954, p. 33.

13 Leong, 1971, p. 21, makes the point that Chicherin's July 1918 offer to sell off the Harbin-Changchun section was designed to appease the Japanese threat.

not share their colleagues view of the possibilities of working effectively with Beijing and supported a more cautious approach to the issue of the CER.

The CER proved to be a continuing sore point in Sino-Russian relations and figured prominently in Joffe's negotiations in Beijing later in 1922. In 1924, even when the Russians reached agreement with the Beijing Government about the status and management of the CER, the matter was still not closed. The Russians still needed four months of separate negotiations with Zhang Zuolin, the leader of the Fengtian Clique within whose territory the railroad ran.¹⁴ Differences of opinion persisted within Narkomindel and these affected the work of Joffe and Sneevliet. By the end of 1922, both men were particularly concerned about this aspect of Narkomindel's policy. They saw the question of the CER as hampering negotiations in Beijing and that it was beginning to damage Chinese sympathy for Soviet Russia.

2 The Comintern Develops a Strategy for the East

The year 1920 was significant both for Comintern policy towards the East and for Soviet diplomacy towards its eastern borderlands and those countries in the Middle and Far East that were "battling against imperialism." The Second Congress of the Third Communist International was the first occasion at which the Comintern addressed any, let alone serious, attention to the question of the colonial countries and how their struggles could and should be integrated into the strategy for world revolution. Civil war and the expectation of revolution in the West meant that little attention had been paid to the East. However, 1920 marked a "turning point in the history of Soviet nationalities policies" and represented a "decisive shift of emphasis from west to east" (Carr, 1950 [1978], vol. 1, p. 346). The victories over Kolchak and Deniken in the civil war allowed the Russians to expand their random activities to enhance influence and think about more concerted action. For the first time, it became possible to interweave the national policy pursued by the new Russian state within its own borders with its foreign policy of support for national movements in revolt against the imperial powers (Carr, 1953 [1978], vol. 3, p. 259). However, for many delegates, the East remained a sideshow and they counted

14 The united front between the CCP and the GMD facilitated the protocol with Zhang and the 1925 treaty with Japan, which returned majority control of the CER to Russia. This led Elleman to conclude that by 1925 "Moscow's secret diplomacy had allowed it to reclaim the very same imperialist privileges and concessions that the 1919 Karakhan Manifesto had removed." Elleman, 1995, p. 470.

on revolution in the West to solve the challenge of world revolution. While in Comintern circles the “east wind” did not prevail over the “west wind,” some officials, most importantly Lenin, did wake up to the stirring of a new breeze.

Primarily at Lenin’s instigation, the Congress was tasked with considering the national and colonial question. The question aroused little interest and when the findings of the Commission (see below) were announced to the Congress, they met with little enthusiasm. Indian delegate M.N. Roy (1964, p. 384) noted the lack of genuine interest among the overwhelming majority of European delegates, their inadequate understanding, and their desire to move on quickly to other items that were of direct concern. One interested delegate was Sneevliet, who had experience of work in the Dutch Indies as well as with the labor movement in Holland.¹⁵ For Roy, Sneevliet was the only person who did not feel that Lenin had submitted his theses simply out of politeness. Sneevliet was also aware of the lack of interest. He commented that there was a “big proletariat” on Java and that the peasantry, while being proprietors of their land, were in reality “thoroughly proletarianized.” He stated: “I have only given these facts here because I have the impression that, with a few exceptions, even this Congress of the Communist International has not fully understood the significance of the oriental question” (*Second Congress*, 1977, vol. 1, p. 152).

Perhaps the lack of interest explains why the contradictory aspects contained in Lenin’s and Roy’s theses were never properly thrashed out. Lenin was well aware of the contradictions and before the Commission met, he remarked to Roy that new ground was being explored and that final judgement should be suspended pending practical experience (Roy, 1964, p. 381). It was certainly never Lenin’s intent that vague and contradictory ideas formulated in 1920 should become fixed principles by 1926–27.

On July 24, a Commission was appointed to analyze the national and colonial question and to prepare a report for the Congress. Lenin was chair, Safarov was vice-chair and Sneevliet was considered highly enough by Lenin to be

15 Sneevliet was strongly influenced by his practical experiences. Indeed, he attended as a delegate of the communist movement in Indonesia using the alias of Maring, Saich, 1991, vol. 1, p. 12. He was a practical revolutionary who had an instinctive feeling for socialism but who had not engaged in deep theoretical work. He attached great importance to the labor movement and his experiences in the Dutch Indies meant he was very much in line with the train of thought that Lenin was developing. These experiences as a communist working within the nationalist movement stood him in good stead during the Congress and Commission discussions. He could speak with authority on revolution in “backward countries” and of the cooperation between the proletariat and the bourgeois movements. See Saich, 1991, vol. 1, pp. 4–11, Tichelman, 1974, and Saich and Tichelman, 1985.

appointed secretary.¹⁶ The Commission worked quickly and presented its findings on July 26.

As is well known, Lenin and Roy harbored key differences and a lively debate ensued. Unfortunately for future developments, the differences were not fully ironed out, either at the Congress or subsequently. Following the Commission's advice, the Congress voted to approve both Lenin's and Roy's theses.¹⁷ There were differences at both the strategic and at the tactical level.¹⁸ Differences about strategy concerned the place of the nationalist revolution in the "backward" countries in the world revolutionary movement to overthrow capitalism and, in particular, the relative weight to be attached to such revolutionary movements compared to the proletarian revolution in the capitalist countries of the west. For Lenin's taste, Roy's theses were far too Asia-centric, shifting the responsibility for the overthrow of capitalism from the "advanced" West to the "backward" East. Roy strongly proposed that the Comintern accept the dependency of the European revolutionary movement on the success of the revolutions in Asia, pushing to the extreme Lenin's views as expressed in *Imperialism: The Highest Stage of Capitalism*. Lenin identified the national problem as connecting the "advanced" West and the "backward" East. The link between the national question and imperialism meant that revolutionaries could no longer deny the importance of national movements. Movements to overthrow imperialism were an integral part of the broader struggle of the proletariat as the national struggle could only succeed by destroying the colonial system.

At such a forum, it was impossible for Roy's views to prevail and thus he bowed to Lenin's "superior judgement" and accepted modifications to his theses. He toned down his faith in the revolutions in Asia as the key to world revolution. Instead, he proposed the far more modest claim that Asia was an important actor on the world revolutionary stage and that it could play a role in the worldwide victory over imperialism.

16 *Der Zweite Kongress der Kommunistische Internationale*, 1921, p. 101; *Second Congress*, 1977, p. 114. According to Roy, 1964, p. 381, Sneevliet was regarded highly at the Congress, one of the "most outstanding figures" and that his unique experience coupled with a thorough understanding of Marxism allowed him to make valuable contributions to the discussions. Sneevliet (March 1952) recalls that it was Lenin who proposed that he assume the position of Secretary.

17 Carr and Whiting both argue that Roy's theses were not taken seriously either then or subsequently. Carr, 1953 [1978], vol. 3, p. 257; Whiting, 1954, pp. 56, 295–96.

18 For the distinction between the strategic and tactical aspects see Carrère d'Encausse and Schram, 1969, especially p. 5.

There were also differences concerning tactics. The dilemma was how to estimate the role and strength of the proletariat in non-European countries, the strength of the communist parties (if they existed), their possibilities for action and the relationship of the proletarian movement to the national bourgeois movement. Lenin's theses stressed the necessity for the Comintern to enter a temporary alliance with bourgeois democracy in the colonial and "backward" countries. The independence of the proletarian movement had to be preserved, not merged. Despite this emphasis, for a time at least, the bourgeoisie would be in control of the revolutionary movement (Lenin, *Selected Works*, June 1920 [1938], vol. x, p. 237). This was precisely the challenge that Voitinsky, Sneevliet and the early CCP members would have to wrestle with. How much independence was feasible for the proletariat and its party and how could its interests be preserved and not be submerged under those of the bourgeoisie?

The Asian delegates opposed Lenin's interpretation and their principal spokesperson, Roy, argued that two distinct movements were to be found in the dependent countries and they grew "further apart every day." One was the bourgeois-democratic nationalist movement, aimed at establishing a bourgeois order. The other was the "mass struggle of the poor and ignorant peasants and workers for their liberation from various forms of exploitation."¹⁹ Roy objected to the term "bourgeois-democratic," thinking its use would force the communists to support all such movements regardless of their intrinsic merits. In China, this led different Soviet actors to propose support for Sun Yat-sen, Chen Jiongming or Wu Peifu, claiming they were solid nationalists. Roy acknowledged the value of cooperating with "bourgeois national-revolutionary elements" to "overthrow foreign capitalism" as the initial step for revolution in the colonies (Theses 7), as a communist revolution was not feasible (Theses 9). However, Roy added that the most important and "immediate task" was to establish communist parties to organize the peasants and workers and "lead them to the establishment of Soviet republics" (Theses 7). It was important to place leadership in the hands of a communist vanguard to keep "the revolutionary masses" marching along the correct road to meet their goals (Theses 9). Such a view appealed to early CCP members such as Zhang Guotao, who worked extensively with the labor movement and consistently opposed the "bloc within."

Confronted with this opposition, Lenin made concessions without going so far as to alter the meaning of his theses. On July 26, speaking to the Congress,

19 Theses 7. The Theses are translated in Eudin and North, 1957, pp. 65–67. See also *Second Congress*, 1977, vol. 1, pp. 115–18.

he referred to the differences and stated that it had been decided unanimously to use the term “national-revolutionary” rather than “bourgeois-democratic” movements.²⁰ The intention was to distinguish between a “revolutionary, bourgeois movement” that would not hinder the communists from “training and organizing the peasantry in a revolutionary way” (Lenin, July 26, 1920 [1938] *Selected Works*, vol. x, p. 241) and the “reformist” bourgeoisie who would oppose such actions. While the terminology changed, for Lenin this was not substantive. In his view, any nationalist movement could only be bourgeois-democratic because the vast majority of the population was made up peasants “which are the representative of bourgeois capitalist relations.” It would be “utopian” for any communist party in the “backward” countries, if indeed they could exist, to carry out communist tactics and policies without “having a definite relationship with the peasant movement, without supporting it in deeds” (*Second Congress*, 1977, Vol. 1, p. 111).²¹ Consequently, Roy was willing to insert in his theses a brief sentence on the utility of cooperating with bourgeois nationalists.

It would fall to Sneevliet to wrestle with the application of these theses in China and to make sense of them, reporting back to Moscow in categories that were acceptable to the Comintern and Soviet leaders. This was no easy task given the contradictions that allowed for varying interpretations. With respect to strategy, Sneevliet tended towards the views of the Asian delegates, particularly Roy, who were inclined to see the East as the key arena in the process of world revolution. He told the Congress: “In my opinion, there is not a single question on the agenda that is as important for the further development of the word revolution as the national and colonial question” (*Second Congress*, 1977, p. 150).

On the question of tactics, Sneevliet favored Lenin’s views. His practical frame of mind and experiences in the Dutch Indies convinced him that wide-ranging cooperation with the national bourgeoisie was necessary. He extolled the virtues of the Sarekat Islam, a Muslim party in the Dutch Indies. This party was revolutionary in the nationalist sense and had even “taken on a class character” (*Second Congress*, 1977, p. 152). Critical comments both in the Commission and on the floor of the Congress did not deter Sneevliet. He rejected the views of an “English comrade” in the Commission who stated that mass action in India could only end in failure and Sneevliet countered

20 *Second Congress*, 1977, p. 110. Sneevliet delivered the report on the work of the Commission to the Congress outlining the amendments and additions to Lenin’s theses. For the original German language draft signed by Sneevliet (Maring) see S.A. no. 196.

21 It took a while before the significance of this was recognized by the CCP.

that mass action was necessary to bring about a genuine socialist movement. Only this could build sufficient force to oppose capitalism (*Second Congress*, 1977, p. 153). Sneevliet held to his view of the need for cooperation with the national bourgeoisie in Asia, a perspective that he carried to China.

Despite siding with Lenin on tactics, Sneevliet moved to paper over the cracks in unity that were apparent during discussions on the Congress floor. He saw “no difference between Comrade Lenin’s Theses and those of Comrade Roy,” claiming that they were “at one another in their meaning” (*Second Congress*, 1977, pp. 153–54). In keeping with his character, he took a highly practical approach to the work, for he continued: “The difficulty consists only in finding the correct attitude towards the relations between the revolutionary nationalist and the socialist movements in the backward countries and the colonies. In practice this difficulty does not exist. There is the necessity of working together with the revolutionary nationalist elements, and we are only doing half the job if we deny this movement and play at being doctrinaire Marxists” (*Second Congress*, 1977, p. 154).

Roy, the Asian delegates and Lenin agreed on two other key points in the Theses: the question of peasant soviets (or councils) and whether it was possible for the “backward countries” to bypass the capitalist stage of development. Lenin called for the creation of peasant councils or councils of toilers wherever conditions permitted. This was derived from the Russian experience, where Bolshevik-peasant relations were extremely important, and from experience in “backward areas” such as Turkestan, where pre-capitalist relations prevailed. Under such circumstances, a “purely proletarian movement” was out of the question. The proletariat was not excluded but this marked a significant step in the recognition of the peasantry as a member of the revolutionary forces. Lenin believed that soviet organization could be applied “not only under proletarian conditions but also under feudal and semi-feudal peasant conditions.” (*Second Congress*, 1977, p. 112).

The answer to whether “backward” countries could bypass capitalism, was positive. If the advanced proletariat was engaged, these countries could advance directly from the feudal or semi-feudal stage to socialism after they had thrown off imperialist rule (*Second Congress*, 1977, p. 113). Sneevliet agreed wholeheartedly, informing the Congress that “we must grasp that capitalist development can be bypassed in the colonies” (*Second Congress*, 1977, p. 154). This was reinforced by his view of the Dutch Indies where it was not necessary for the colony to pass first through the stage of capitalist development.

That Congress delegates took Sneevliet seriously is shown by the fact that some suggestions came to fruition. He made the practical but symbolically important suggestion that the Theses be translated and published in the Asian

languages. In addition, he called for a Propaganda Bureau of the Comintern to be organized for both the Far East and the Middle East. Such a bureau would unify work already under way in the Far East that could not easily be directed from Moscow (*Second Congress*, 1977, pp. 154–55). Sneevliet brought this idea with him to the Congress, as when meeting with Roy in Berlin, he mentioned that he wanted to go to India and set up a “centre for revolutionary activity throughout the East.” Whether Sneevliet suggested India out of deference to Roy is unclear but he did appear to collect names of those in India who would be useful for revolutionary work.²² However, Sneevliet wanted to wait until after the Second Congress in the hope that the Comintern would send him to the Far East as its representative. He sought Roy’s “approval and cooperation” for this venture (Roy, 1964, p. 283). Sneevliet was indeed appointed but to China rather than India.

Finally, Sneevliet proposed that the Comintern set up special training facilities in Russia for leaders of the Far Eastern revolutionary movements. He envisaged that six-month study periods would train them in communism and enable them to carry out the policies of the Theses. Moscow and Petrograd were a “new Mecca of the East” and Sneevliet felt that the Eastern communists should be provided with the opportunity for a theoretical education in communism in Russia “to help make the Far East an active member of the Communist International” (*Second Congress*, 1977, p. 155).

Sneevliet clearly made a favorable impression on Lenin and other leaders, as he was elected to the Executive Committee of the Communist International (ECCI) and later got his wish to be sent on a mission to the Far East on behalf of the Comintern. Although appointed in August 1920, Sneevliet did not leave until April 1921.²³ According to Sneevliet himself (March 1952), it was Lenin who suggested that he go to China as the Comintern representative. His role was to go to Shanghai to look at establishing contacts with the revolutionary movement not only in China but also in Japan, Korea, the Dutch East Indies, Indo-China and the Philippines and to explore the feasibility of establishing a Comintern Bureau in the Far East (Bericht des Genossen H. Maring, July 1922).

For Sneevliet, the work in the East was an integral component of the world revolution. He had told the Congress that the development of the national and colonial question was the most important question on the agenda, other questions were merely ones that always cropped up once the revolution stagnated. During the Second Congress, Sneevliet met with Liu Zerong, a delegate of the

22 For a list of names see S.A. no. 209.

23 Sneevliet’s travel notebook, S.A. no. 226; Bericht des Genossen H. Maring, July 1922; and Issacs, 1971, p. 102.

Chinese Socialist Labor Party, and Pak Chin-sun, a delegate from the Korean Socialist Party, to discuss the formation of the Far Eastern Bureau of the ECCI in Shanghai. In January 1921, the Bureau was established in Irkutsk (Ishikawa, 2013, p.83). During Voitinsky's May 1920 visit, an East Asian Secretariat of the ECCI was established preceding the establishment of one in Irkutsk and thus its status and relationship to the Bureau is unclear. Importantly, this Secretariat was to coordinate work in the Far East and Vilensky-Sibriakov who sent Voitinsky said that Moscow had instructed him to "support" revolutionary movements of the people in East Asia and to set up strong links with the revolutionary organizations of Japan, China, and Korea.

It took some time for the Congress decisions to work through and it was not until January 1921 that they were felt in China (Schram, 1966, p. 62). Certainly, there is no evidence to suggest that delegates to the First CCP Congress (July–August 1921) were receptive to the Comintern strategy and tactics, despite Sneevliet attendance. Yet, over the longer term, the decisions adopted and how Sneevliet interpreted them and applied them to China would have a far-reaching and dramatic effect.

The most obvious outcome of the Second Congress was that there was a plan of action to promote revolutionary activity in China while also integrating such activity with the world revolutionary movement. However, the theses contained ambiguities and were open to varying interpretations. The basic contradiction was that full support was to be provided for the bourgeoisie, while, at the same time, not preventing the development of its antithesis (Whiting, 1954, pp. 57–58). Questions about what the nature of the alliance should be and how temporary was temporary, remained to be answered. At some point, the proletarian movement would have to turn on the bourgeois movement before it was crushed itself. With the benefit of hindsight, one can point to such problems as inherent in the strategy, especially with the tactic adopted but in 1920 they were not so apparent. Many of the delegates to the Congress probably felt that it was not worthwhile to sort out the contradictions, as cooperation with the bourgeoisie was interpreted as a very temporary affair, which would end with the *imminent* proletarian revolution. When this revolution did not occur, the contradictions assumed far greater significance. For Sneevliet and Voitinsky, the questions, contradictions and differing interpretations hung over their work in China as they sought to find practical answers within the complex realities of China. It would lead to clashes between the two men over the way forward for the Chinese revolution.

The debates were rerun at the "First Congress of the Peoples of the East" (Baku, September 1 to 8, 1920) but the Comintern was now even more reserved about prioritizing revolution in the East, despite pleas by the Muslim

delegation. The Comintern delegates resisted supporting national movements led by the bourgeoisie. By contrast, the Eastern delegates saw emancipation as only coming through a national revolution; an alliance might last longer than those working in the Comintern anticipated. The subordination of revolutionary activity in individual countries to that of world revolution as a whole was beginning to emerge. This development was important for those who sought to push Soviet national interests in the name of world revolution as well as for those who believed in a genuinely international approach to the overthrow of capitalism and imperialism. The self-identification of Moscow as the center of world revolution and the view that what was good for Moscow was good for progress toward socialism made it easier to overrule dissenting views about policies pursued in other countries. For those who saw individual struggles as merely a cog in a greater wheel, it meant that those who prioritized the broader struggle could appeal to those needs to override particular interests—an appeal that an internationalist such as Sneevliet was willing to resort to on occasion.

For some, this meant that the Russian revolution would assume a colonial nature.²⁴ For Safarov (1934, p. 32), “it was inevitable that the Russian Revolution in Turkestan should have a colonialist character.” Russia’s privileged position in possessing an industrial proletariat and Turkestan’s weak, leaderless working class, lacking a revolutionary tradition, meant that “the dictatorship of the proletariat took on a typically colonialist aspect.” Recognizing this problem had led the Muslims in Russia to call for the establishment of their own communist parties based on solidarity among their own peoples. In China, this played out as a succession of Soviet advisors claimed a superior wisdom, based on a higher moral authority derived from membership of the Russian Communist Party (Bolshevik). This enabled them to overrule the particularistic and/or nationalist tendencies of the CCP.

3 Preparing for Voitinsky’s Visit

While the Comintern was developing its outline for alliances in the East, the Siberian area of Russia was being bitterly contested between the new Soviet forces, remnants of the old system under Kolchak, and the Japanese. In April 1920, the Far Eastern Republic was established as a nominally independent state but for the Soviets it was a buffer between them and the Japanese

24 Elleman, 1995, pp. 470–71, writes of the emergence of “red imperialism” as the Soviet leaders revived tougher policies on Outer Mongolia and the CER.

occupied territories. In June, the Far Eastern Republic dispatched the Yurin delegation to Beijing to put further pressure on Japan by establishing relations with China and contacting all those who might help avert conflict.²⁵ On July 15, the Japanese authorities agreed to recognize the state, signing a truce with the Red Army. Further progress was made on September 28, 1920, when the Beijing Government cancelled recognition of all Tsarist representatives in China. The original capital was Verkhneudinsk but in October 1920, the capital was moved to Chita. Finally, after the fall of Vladivostok in October 1922, an end to the civil war was declared and in November the “independent state” was absorbed into Soviet Russia (Smith, 1975; Wood, 2011 for the broader history).

The Far Eastern Republic, Chita and Vladivostok all played important roles in promoting Russia’s interest in China and in the Far East more generally. For example, the Far Eastern Bureau of the Russian Communist Party had been established on March 3, 1920 in Vladivostok to prepare for the creation of the Far Eastern Republic.²⁶ Initially, the Bureau functioned under the Siberian Bureau of the Russian Communist Party but in August 1920 it was restructured into the Far Eastern Bureau of the Central Committee of the Russian Communist Party and placed on a par with the Siberian Bureau (Ishikawa, 2013, p. 92), a pretty clear indication of the future “independence” of the Republic. The Bureau assumed the important role of promoting activities in the Far East and it was this bureau that sent Voitinsky on his first trip to China (April 1920). This was before the Eastern People’s Section of the Siberian Bureau was set up in Irkutsk (August 1920).

Soviet personnel were busy laying contacts. Prior to Voitinsky’s visit, Popov, Agaryov and Potapov had all been involved in secret operations around Shanghai.²⁷ While Popov visited Shanghai four times, including meeting with

25 Kazanin, 1973, p. 57. Sun also met with someone from the Yurin delegation and it has been suggested that the Far Eastern Republic provided Sun with material support.

26 Already in June 1919, F. Gapon, a member of the Siberian Regional Committee of the RCP (B) had suggested setting up an Eastern Bureau to establish contacts with revolutionaries in the East. Persits, 1979, pp. 86–88.

27 On Popov and Agaryov, see Ishikawa, 2013, pp. 88–90. Liu Jianyi in his 2000 PhD thesis uses the British Public Records Office to provide information on Popov’s visit as well as visits of many other Bolsheviks and Bolshevik sympathizers. He notes Popov’s May 1918 visit to Shanghai and then on to Tianjin, the visit of Burtman to Tianjin after the May Fourth demonstrations and writes that beginning from February 8, 1920, Russian residents who were sympathetic to the Bolsheviks met several times. A January 1920 Japanese police report recorded that by the beginning of 1920 there were at least ten Bolsheviks in Shanghai alone, Liu Jianyi, 2000, p. 83, 64–95.

Sun Yat-sen (Wilbur, 1976, pp. 115–16, 326),²⁸ Potapov was most important in laying the groundwork for Voitinsky's mission and although the two men overlapped in China, Potapov claims that they did not come into direct contact (Li Yuzhen, 1996, pp. 56–59, 131–134; Potapov report to Chicherin, December 12, 1920, Doc. 7; Voitinsky, June 1920 report, Doc. 1). Although Potapov had been in China earlier in 1917, most important for our purposes, he was stationed in Shanghai between December 17, 1919 and April 22, 1920 (Ishikawa, 2013, p. 90). While in Shanghai, he maintained close relations with Sun (Report to Chicherin, Doc. 7). At the end of April, he went to Zhangzhou, Fujian, to spend a couple of weeks, meeting with the warlord Chen Jiongming on April 29 (Li Yuzhen, 1996, p. 131). Potapov was impressed with Chen Jiongming and he brought back to Moscow a letter from Chen to Lenin. As far as Potapov was concerned, Chen was a "convinced communist," who enjoyed the support of the common people (letter translated in Li Yuzhen, 1996, pp. 132–133). Chen's letter reinforced this positive assessment, expressing strong support for Bolshevism and suggesting that New China and New Russia would be friends. Potapov's opinion of Chen resonated in Moscow and among its agents in China for some time and they viewed him as a potential ally. While in China, Potapov provided the Chinese radicals with some Bolshevik materials including an article by Trotsky. In early June, when back in Shanghai Potapov met with Sun Yat-sen, who was more cautious in his assessment of the Bolsheviks. Potapov left China shortly thereafter.

Writing after his return to Moscow (December 12, 1920 report to Chicherin, Doc. 7), Potapov was more positive about Sun citing the close relationship they had developed while he was in Shanghai. Sun was "fanatically anti-British," an enemy of the Beijing Government and the now collapsing Guangzhou Government. He enjoyed support throughout China and was a respected and loyal friend to the revolutionaries. In particular, Potapov noted Sun's close relationship with Chen Jiongming and Chen Duxiu. He also received material support from many capitalists and was most influential in Hunan, Sichuan and Fujian provinces. However, unlike Chen Jiongming, during various conversations, Sun revealed that he did not believe that "we can succeed with communism in Russia," which was based on his assessment of China's actual conditions. Despite his reservation, Potapov persuaded Sun to send Liao Zhongkai (finance minister in the Guangzhou Government) and General Zhu Zhixin to Russia.

28 The earliest reference I can find to Popov's visit is in Chapman, 1928, p. 45. He refers to Popov's arrival in Shanghai 1919 charged with investigating the situation.

The ground had been prepared for more direct engagement with the revolutionaries in China. Radical thought had gained ground among a small group of influential urban intellectuals. Anarchism remained the principal thought system to challenge liberalism and Darwinism but Marxism had won over key advocates, such as Li Dazhao and Chen Duxiu. More importantly, since the fall of the Qing and especially during the May Fourth Movement, China's domestic travails were viewed as inextricably linked to the exploitative imperialist world order. This rendered seductive the Soviet call to join a global struggle of the oppressed against the imperialist powers. This was reinforced by the perception that Soviet behavior was quite distinct from that of other powers. The slide toward a total solution to China's challenges was encapsulated well in the "problems versus isms" debate between the liberal Hu Shi and the Marxist influenced Li Dazhao. Hu argued for scientific observation and a problem oriented approach that would result in reform by "inches and drops." By contrast, Li argued that all the problems China faced were interconnected and were based on the system of economic relations. They could only be resolved by a comprehensive, total solution to China's problems (Meisner, 1967, pp. 105–12). Slowly but surely, the intellectual climate within the radical elite was shifting to an acceptance of thought systems and political organizations that could provide such comprehensive solutions. This was the atmosphere that welcomed Voitinsky and later Sneevliet to China with their messages and ideas about national revolution and Bolshevik organization.

4 Coordinating Revolutionary Movements in the East

The Comintern's plans did not remain on the drawing board. Shanghai was viewed as the base for revolution throughout the Far East, with movements to be launched simultaneously. The First Congress of the Korean Communist Party, under Pak Chin-sun in Shanghai was held in May 1921, a preparatory meeting was held for the Japanese Communist Party (Beckmann and Genji, 1969, p. 390), and at about the same time preparations had begun for the formal launch of the CCP, which was delayed until July.

Pak Chin-sun, the Far Eastern representative on the ECCI, arrived in Shanghai and worked to rename the Korean Socialist Party as the Korean Communist Party. In mid-November, a joint conference of socialists of the Far East was held in Shanghai, with participants from China, Korea and Japan but it is unclear whether Park convened it or attended it.²⁹ The purpose was

29 Eudin and North, 1957, pp. 89–90 reporting from *Izvestia*, no. 5, January 11, 1921, p. 5. There were eighteen delegates from Japan, three from Korea, forty from China and one from

to establish a league of Far Eastern revolutionary parties to come under the Comintern's leadership (Suh, 1967, p. 18; Beckmann and Genji, 1969, p. 30; and Chang Kuo-t'ao, 1971, Vol. 1, p. 691). Vilensky was very supportive and wrote that "East Asia has established a foundation for an organized unification of the revolutionary work among the toilers of China, Korea, Japan and India." This marked the growth of communism in the region and the development of communist parties.³⁰ In January 1921, the Far Eastern Secretariat was established.

Shanghai was a logical focal point for the work. Following the failure of the March 1, 1919 uprising in Korea, large numbers of nationalists fled to Shanghai and they established the Provisional Korean Government and the Korean Socialist Party moved its headquarters from Siberia to Shanghai. Pak's views were in line with the Comintern's approach to revolution. Apart from in Japan, as far as Pak was concerned, the proletariat was too weak to drive a communist revolution but the "victory of an agrarian revolution" was certain. If the Western bourgeoisie maintained its grip on the colonies, the proletariat would not be able to overthrow it. In his view, victory for the Comintern and the social revolution would only come "when all the colonial people's rise in revolt." This would turn "enslaved Korea" into a part of the "federated World Soviet Republic." For Pak, Russia was the crucial link between the proletariat in the West and the revolutionary East (Second Congress, 1977, Vol. 1, pp. 141-48).

The Korean communists worked with their Chinese comrades and shared the Shanghai printing press (Voitinsky, Doc. 2). However, as with attempts to engage the early Chinese socialists and communists, different Soviet agencies pursued different approaches, which, on occasion, resulted in confusion. The Eastern People's Section of the Siberian Bureau of the party in Irkutsk, which had sent Voitinsky, was very unhappy that the Comintern had sent Pak. It claimed that Pak worked against its interests and those of the central committee of the Korean communists and it bemoaned the lack of a coherent plan, with each agency sending its own operatives. There was little value in the meeting that Pak was trying to convene as the Koreans in Shanghai were "weak." The participants would only be chosen from among his intellectual friends. Last but not least, it complained that Narkomindel, ignoring the Bureau's advice, had provided Pak with 4 million rubles to help its work (Doc. 8).

Eventually, such criticism undermined Pak's position as well as that of Yi Tong-hwi, the head of the Korean Communist Party. Arriving late to the Comintern's Third Congress, caused by an arrest on route, he found himself under a cloud, not the least because of his association with Huang Jiemin

Formosa (Taiwan). The conference decided to establish a central bureau in Siberia where it would be joined by a representative from India.

30 Quoted in Eudin and North, 1957, p. 90. The article was in *Izvestia*, January 12, 1921.

and Yao Zuobin, leaders of the Datong Party, which was affiliated with the Comintern. For Sneevliet, the problem lay in turf battles between the Comintern's Far Eastern Secretariat in Irkutsk and the Far Eastern Bureau in Chita and more specifically between Shumiatsky and Krasnoshchekov (*Bericht des Genossen H. Maring*, July 1922).³¹ The Bureau supported the activities of Pak but there was a clear struggle over who controlled the activities in China. At the Third Comintern Congress (June–July, 1921), Zhang Tailei represented the CCP and was supported by Shumiatsky, which limited the space for Huang and Yao's organization to be represented as the CCP.³² The Far Eastern Secretariat then moved to shut out Pak's organization. After the Congress, the ECCI removed Pak and put in his place Nam Man-ch'un who was based in Irkutsk as a member of the Korean Communist Party. This group, established in May 1921, was supported by Shumiatsky and Zhang Tailei and represented Korea at the Comintern Congress.

Sneevliet was unhappy with the infighting within the Korean groups as it meant that they did very little work in Korea. He had little time for the Korean government based in Shanghai, which only engaged in diplomatic work without conducting propaganda and or opposing Japan. For Sneevliet, there was little difference between the Irkutsk and Chita based groups but, on balance, he favored those in Chita as the Secretariat in Irkutsk was less enthusiastic about the nationalist movement. The Secretariat, in his view, had no actual links to Korea, drawing from the Koreans based in Siberia. The Shanghai group around Pak also did not escape criticism. First, there was a scandal regarding missing funds. Pak had entrusted funds to a comrade named Kim Rip who then misappropriated them and, as a result, was executed. Second, Sneevliet felt their workload had little impact in Korea; after the leadership arrived from Irkutsk, all they had done was produce some leaflets and distribute a weekly newspaper. The rivalry led Sneevliet to propose that no more funding be given until the two groups unified.³³

31 Shumiatsky had set up the Irkutsk Secretariat in early 1921, Krasnoshchekov was a member of the Central Committee of the Bolshevik Party of the Far Eastern Bureau.

32 The Far Eastern Secretariat had already received a letter, dated September 27, 1921, from Yu Xiusong denouncing Yao Zuobin for posing fraudulently as a representative of the CCP. Yu claimed that because of his actions during the second student strike Yao was "reviled" as an "apostate" by Chinese students, Ishikawa, 2013, p. 128.

33 In fact, Sneevliet claimed that there was a third group under Tjo Se-wang, a person he thought enjoyed greater credibility in Korea itself. Tjo was also bitterly critical of the Irkutsk group. He blamed it for the Alexeyevsk Incident (June 1921) in which the Irkutsk and Shanghai groups engaged in open conflict, resulting in criticism of the Comintern by the underground Korean groups.

Despite his frustrations with the Korean comrades, Sneevliet strongly supported a coordinated approach to the revolution in the East. In the appendix to his July 11, 1922 report to the ECCI, he called for Comintern and Profintern representation in Guangzhou with representatives from China, Japan and Korea to undertake the translation of literature and its distribution to each of the countries. Guangzhou was ideal not only because the office could operate freely but also because communications could be easily arranged through Hong Kong, with Chinese sailors willing to transport and distribute materials. The office could regulate and support communications between the nationalist and communist movements in China and Korea. Work for his former theater of action, the Dutch Indies, was to be linked with "British India." Not surprisingly, Sneevliet was appointed as the Comintern and Profintern representative.³⁴ The commitment to coordinating work among China, Japan and Korea was maintained, although the location changed. In January 1923, the decision was taken to establish a Far Eastern Bureau of the Comintern in Vladivostok with three members, Katayama, Sneevliet and Voitinsky. Sneevliet's appointment on January 11, terminated his prior appointment (S.A. nos. 242 and 244).

34 "Authorization for H. Sneevliet to Represent the Comintern and the Profintern in South China," July 1922, published in *Klassefront*, May 1937, in Saich, vol. 1, 1991, pp. 325–26.

Creating a Communist Party

On the eve of Voitinsky's arrival, the situation in China was complex to say the least with shifting spheres of influence controlled by feuding warlords and a small but extremely powerful foreign presence. Weaving his way through this environment, Voitinsky provided the stimulus for the founding of the Chinese Communist Party (CCP). Most works by CCP historians still stress the party's indigenous roots. "Chen in the South and Li in the North" is the common refrain; the notion that Chen Duxiu through his contacts was influential in the South and Li Dazhao was instrumental for the development of the small groups in Northern China. In his path-breaking work *van de Ven* (1991) concludes that the CCP would have come to life irrespective of Soviet involvement. The atmosphere did encourage radical intellectuals to look for alternatives such as those provided by a Bolshevik party. However, as we have seen, Soviet agents were actively courting Chinese activists and promoting their views and ideology. We review the question of the origins by examining the communist small groups that formed before the First Party Congress.

"Chen in the South and Li in the North" is a myth created by a later justification that has entered the canon of official CCP accounts of the party's founding. The origins lie with the speech by Gao Yihan at Li Dazhao's memorial service in 1927 (Gao Yihan, 1927, Ishikawa, 2013, pp. 101–03). No original sources confirm the thesis but the debate has continued in China, with those such as Xiao Chaoren still supporting the traditional view, whereas others such as Ren Wuxiong (a head of the Museum for the First Party Congress) adopting a more critical view. This chapter covers the strong role that Soviet Russia played, mainly through the work of Voitinsky, to create the basis for the CCP. Perhaps a CCP might have developed independently but it would have taken far longer and would not have thrived without Russian material and organizational support. The united front tactic was vital to the CCP's expansion through the 1920s.

1 China on the Eve of and after Voitinsky's Arrival

While the Comintern was developing policies for China and the Far East, the nation was in a state of flux. The revolution had ended dynastic rule but had created a set of questions to be answered about what kind of government

was suitable for China and what the relationship of the people should be to the state. Different groups explored rival solutions and advocates of communism had to struggle to find a place on the intellectual and political agendas. Important for work in Shanghai were the actions of the foreign powers, the growth of a new bourgeoisie and the stirrings of a small proletariat. The young and radical intellectuals were profoundly influenced by the nationalist, anti-imperialist sentiment developed during the May Fourth Period (1915–1919). It made for a heady mix and a world full of intrigue, suspicion and betrayal.

Nominally, the 1911–12 Revolution had ushered in a Republican Government based in Beijing but, in reality, the country was divided internally. Outside of Beijing, real power often rested with an array of warlords. Around the time of the Comintern's Second Congress and during Voitinsky's initial visit, two important events were taking place that had an important bearing on Voitinsky's and Sneevliet's activities. First, a power shift took place in Beijing, when the Zhili and Fengtian Cliques defeated the Anhui Clique. Second, in November 1920 Sun Yat-sen returned to Guangzhou. With these events taking place on the ground and with the Comintern developing its policies, Voitinsky tried to understand the situation, while helping lay the foundations for the CCP.

The end of the empire ushered in an incompetent republic with Yuan Shikai as president. Revolutionaries and monarchists agreed that Yuan was the most suitable candidate as he had been an influential figure in the waning years of the Qing dynasty and in the abdication of the boy Emperor. The revolutionaries were severely disappointed as Yuan accumulated more power, leading Sun Yat-sen to flee to Tokyo (November 1913). On December 12, 1915, Yuan declared himself to be the Hongxian Emperor, causing disruption and opposition in several provinces. Before conflict and confusion became worse, Yuan died on June 6, 1916. Not only was parliamentary rule not consolidated but also warlordism became the norm for much of the country. For many, political survival meant aligning with a military power, which was unreliable at best and life threatening at worst. The nationalists and the communists had to find a path through the shifting sands of warlord alliances and betrayals.

Militarism was dominant, with feuding warlords fighting to control territory and resources (van de Ven, 2003). It left the country vulnerable and many citizens prey to exploitation and banditry (Sheridan, 1977). For political movements such as the Nationalist Party (Guomindang, GMD), it meant that without an independent military force, it had to seek shelter from "friendly" warlords. These alliances were fragile, prone to sudden shifts, often exposing the nationalists to unexpected dangers. For the Soviets, it led to the search for the good "nationalist" or even better a "socialist" warlord. Frequently, they

were disappointed. In the case of Sun Yat-sen, he was convinced that a military solution had to precede any political solution and a firm commitment to an alliance with the Soviet Union. While money moderated and shaped Sun's view, Sneevliet remained critical of his preference for military work over propaganda and for developing a strong, organized political party.

Three major "cliques" dominated life in North China during the period under consideration: one based around Duan Qirui, the Zhili Clique and the Fengtian clique.¹ While the Comintern's Second Congress was holding forth and while Voitinsky was still in China, a decisive shift in factional power took place. From 1917 until July 1920, Beijing politics was dominated by Duan Qirui and the Anhui clique.² Duan served as Premier presiding over a parliament amenable to his wishes, managed by his supporters in the Anfu Club. Internationally, Duan received complete support from the Japanese to whom he was financially indebted (Sheridan, 1983, p. 304). The relationship was problematic for Duan, especially once the May Fourth demonstrations erupted to protest the Versailles agreement, which ceded the German concession of Shandong to Japan. Duan's embarrassment was even greater when it was revealed that the Versailles decision was based, in part, on agreements signed between his government and the Japanese. Opposition to Duan resulted in his rivals solidifying into a rival group—the Zhili clique. Further, Duan's activities disturbed Zhang Zuolin and his Fengtian Clique that controlled the Northeast and Inner Mongolia. The perceived threat to their position caused them to ally with the Zhili clique to ouster the Anhui clique.

The defeat of the Anhui Clique led to further uncertainty in Beijing with power shifting between the Zhili and Fengtian Cliques. Both cliques sought to run the government to serve their own interests and conflict was inevitable. In any case, the "alternative government" based in Guangzhou never accepted either one as legitimate. Initially, the Zhili clique had the upper hand in Beijing but it consisted of two main factions: one under Cao Kun and the other under Wu Peifu.³ Having played the key role in ousting Duan Qirui in 1920, Cao was

1 The relationships among the various cliques are described well in Ch'i, 1976, pp. 36–76. For a further concise but very useful account of these cliques (apart from Fengtian) and others see Nathan, 1976, pp. 225–61.

2 Nathan warns against lumping these two together. He writes that one should think of Duan's personal faction, the Anhui Clique comprising the group of militarists who fought for Duan or who publicly supported him in the 1920 war and the Anfu Club, the parliamentary group created by Duan and his associates, Wang Yitang and Xi Shuzheng, to protect Duan's power in government. Nathan, 1976, p. 226.

3 For an account of the structure of the Zhili clique, see Wou, 1968, pp. 255–71. For an assessment of the relationship between Cao Kun and Wu Peifu, see Nathan, 1976, pp. 233–39.

the nominal leader but Wu was increasingly acknowledged as the “real military leader of the Zhili clique” (Sheridan, 1983, p. 313). Under Wu’s military leadership, the Zhili Clique began to expand its power causing Zhang Zuolin to ally with Sun Yat-sen, based in Guangzhou, who was equally worried about Wu Peifu’s expansion of power. Initially, the alliance did not do either man any good. Zhang was criticized for his pro-Japanese sympathies and the CCP was hyper-critical of Sun because of his association with Zhang. These shifting relationships complicated Soviet attempts to find allies and produced significant wishful thinking about the true intent of the different warlords.

Choice in the North was simplified in spring 1922 when the Zhili Clique defeated Fengtian, leaving Wu Peifu as the clear champion from 1922 to 1924. Zhang and the Fengtian Clique were not completely defeated and withdrew to their Manchurian heartland to lick their wounds, regain strength before returning to defeat the Zhili Clique in 1924.

Wu Peifu and his supporters carried favor with the British and Americans. The British Government was favorably disposed toward Wu but tried to exhibit a degree of neutrality and it did not funnel financial and other aid to his government (Wou, 1978, pp. 151–97; Sheridan, 1983, p. 307). The same cannot be said for British companies operating in China that plied Wu with large sums in return for protecting their interests, especially by prohibiting boycotts against companies in the areas under his control.⁴ Once the CCP stepped up its labor activities in areas under Wu’s control, a road to disaster was opened as it undermined the case of those in Moscow who supported Wu as a potential ally.

Zhang Zuolin’s retreat was important for Soviet Russia and Japan (McCormack, 1977). Crucially for the Soviets, the Chinese Eastern Railway (CER) ran through his territory. As Zhang rose to prominence in the 1920s, the Japanese decided to support him. While they were willing to ensure he remained in control in Manchuria and were even willing to help him develop the area, they did not support his expansionist aspirations to control the Beijing Government. The Japanese were primarily interested in maintaining a stable warlord who would ensure that their interests in Manchuria were well protected (Sheridan, 1983, p. 305; McCormack, 1977, pp. 56–59).

These persistent conflicts among the various warlord cliques created a highly unstable situation, which rendered long-term planning impossible. Most warlords never even attempted to develop enduring political structures, preferring to concentrate on the more immediately gratifying prospect of grasping and expanding personal power and prestige. This situation left China vulnerable

⁴ This was especially true of the British American Tobacco Co. and the Asiatic Petroleum Co. Sheridan, 1983, p. 307.

to foreign penetration and pressure. Yet such disorder and fragmentation was a double-edged sword for the foreign powers. On the one hand, it permitted a high degree of foreign influence but, on the other, the “widespread disorder limited foreign activities and interfered with the economic exploitation of the country by foreign enterprises” (Sheridan, 1983, p. 303). For Soviet agents, it gave them freedom to move around, especially in the foreign concessions, to establish contacts with radical Chinese. However, they were also drawn into the game of playing off the warlords and seeking alliances with the shifting factions. On different occasions, the Soviets attempted to establish contacts with both Wu and Zhang.⁵ The issue of whether to support Wu Peifu in the North or Sun Yat-sen in the South was hotly debated within Comintern and Narkomindel circles. Sneevliet had strong opinions on this question and he had a significant impact on the outcome of the debates.

The situation in the South was equally complex. In 1920, Sun Yat-sen pulled together various nationalist voices to form the *Zhongguo* GMD, followed a few months later, in November 1920, by the formation of Sun’s second administration in Guangzhou. His first administration ended with Sun’s disillusionment, resignation and departure for Shanghai in April 1918 (Wilbur, 1976, pp. 29–30). In reality, despite his impressive title of “Grand Marshall,” real power was in the hands of Li Rongting, head of the Guangxi clique. In Shanghai, Sun had plenty of time for reflection and he put some of that time to good use. He breathed life back into the GMD and plotted his return to Guangzhou.⁶

While in Shanghai, Sun enjoyed his first physical contacts with Soviet Russia (see also, Wilbur, 1976, pp. 112–18). Already in the Summer of 1918, Sun had telegraphed Lenin to congratulate him on the Russian party’s success and to express his hope that Russian and Chinese forces might come together in a joint struggle. Given the unstable situation, it is not surprising that contacts were sporadic, consisting of letters and telegrams gone astray or arriving late. The most important meeting was with Voitinsky, either at the end of October 1920 or, more likely before November 25 when Sun left Shanghai to return to Guangzhou.

In October 1920, the wheel of fortune swung back Sun’s way. Warlord, Chen Jiongming with his allies were driving the Guangxi Clique out of Guangdong

5 In late 1924 and 1925, the Russians favored Feng Yuxiang, whose defection from Wu Peifu brought the Zhili-Fengtian War to an abrupt end. In Feng, they saw a potential ally for the GMD in light of his perceived revolutionary and reformist posture. He was known as the Christian General, Sheridan, 1966.

6 For overseas branches, the *Zhongguo* GMD was launched officially on October 10, 1919, with establishment as a political party following one year later. It adopted its Constitution on November 9, 1920, Wilbur, 1976, p. 30.

and on October 26, 1920, with Sun's political help, they captured the city of Guangzhou. This facilitated Sun's return in late-November and once again he took over the military government.

Again, after returning to Guangzhou, things did not go as smoothly as hoped because Sun and Chen Jiongming had different views about future strategy. In theory, Chen was subordinate to Sun but his military position as the most powerful army commander and his political position as provincial governor placed him in a strong position. It is no surprise that Soviet advisors viewed him favorably and a strong bet for an alliance. Sun's gaze was always fixed on the national stage and he longed for national reunification. The Guangzhou base was the starting-point for a Northern military push to promote a revolutionary movement in Central and Northern China. In contrast, Chen viewed this as a costly expense and he favored concentrating on the development of Guangdong province. His desire was to turn Guangdong into a model province for others to follow. Despite Chen's opposition, on May 5, 1921 Sun was inaugurated as president, having been elected earlier by the "Extraordinary Parliament."

In the summer of 1921, the Guangxi Clique suffered a further defeat as the Guangdong armies marched into Guangxi province. Sun set off for Guilin to organize his Northern military campaign to reunify China, remaining there from mid-October until his return to Guangzhou in April 1922. Sun was frustrated in Guilin, sitting through the winter while a disinterested Chen Jiongming made clear his opposition to the whole idea.⁷

2 **Voitinsky's Mission in China**

Grigori Voitinsky was Soviet Russia's first formal envoy, traveling with his wife and two assistants, Titov (a graduate of the Eastern Institute in Vladivostok) and Serebryakov (a social activist in Korea), in April 1920. Formally, they had been sent by the Foreign Section of the Vladivostok Branch of the Far Eastern Bureau of the Russian Bolshevik Party and on the personal authority of Vilensky-Sibiriakov. Although the mission had the approval of the Comintern, given its lack of resources and expertise on the Far East, it was billed as a delegation of Bolshevik Party members. Voitinsky went to China under the cover of a journalist of the Dalta News Agency for the Far Eastern Republic. This allowed him to move around and meet with many of the key figures on the political left in China. His front as a journalist, while working

⁷ While in Guilin, Sun met Sneevliet for the first time.

clandestinely on behalf of the Bolshevik Party, would become a normal pattern of operations for Soviet intelligence officers working overseas. The clear mandate for the mission was to establish contact with revolutionary groups working out of Shanghai, understand the local environment and explore possibilities for the development of a more formal organization. Serebryakov's inclusion was important as they were also to investigate the situation in Japan and Korea. In addition to memoir literature, three reports in the Comintern Archives help us understand the mission's work and its early progress in establishing a communist movement.⁸

Voitinsky's arrival certainly provided impetus for the creation of a formal CCP organization but it does not seem that initially he set out to establish a more traditional, disciplined party. In his June 1920 report (Doc. 1), he mentioned meeting with the "leaders of the Chinese revolutionary movement" and that the next step would be to bring together the "socialists and anarchists" in a representative meeting in North China. Chen Duxiu was charged with working out both the details and the timing of the meeting. The two differed on the nature of the initial organization for the revolutionary movement (on the debate among Chinese scholars see Fang Ning, 2011). While Chen favored a "pure" party, Voitinsky was willing to include in the mix the anarchists and others to push forward the revolutionary momentum.⁹ Tensions were inevitable but the Comintern's Second Congress (July–August 1920) resolved the debate in Chen's favor. Policy was to exclude reformists and other groupings from the communist parties, causing Voitinsky to modify his position and for the CCP to push ahead with plans for a more orthodox party.

Some Chinese youths radicalized by the May Fourth Movement and impressed by developments in Russia began to organize and participate in study groups. These study groups, such as the New People's Study Society, the Awakening Society, the Social Welfare Society and later the Society for the Study of Socialism, provided the training ground for a number of China's communist leaders.¹⁰ The existence of these groups support the view

8 Two reports were from Voitinsky himself (June and August 1920, Docs 1 and 2) and one was from Vilensky-Sibiriakov (September 1920, Doc.8). Earlier accounts claimed that Voitinsky's delegation included Mamaev and Yang Mingzhai. However, Mamaev was not part of the delegation and Yang, while crucial for Voitinsky's work, was already in China when the delegation arrived. Clearly, earlier Soviet writings on the mission were based on the then unpublished reports in the Comintern archives. See, for example, Kartunova, 1973 and Shevelyov, 1981.

9 The main proponent of this view was Jin Liren, 1998; 2010. According to Jin, Chen Duxiu was the first person in China to draw a clear distinction between Marxism and anarchism.

10 Mao Zedong was the motivating force behind the New People's Study Society, Zhou Enlai was involved in the Awakening Society, while the Society for the Study of Socialism was

of official Chinese historians regarding the indigenous origins of the CCP, underpinned by the claim that the suggestion to form a party was raised by Li Dazhao and Chen Duxiu when Chen was leaving Beijing. This would place the discussion in early 1920, thus preceding Voitinsky's arrival (see Yu Chongsheng, 1986; for an official view Zhonggong zhongyang, 1991). No clear contemporary documentation supports this assertion and instead derives from various memoirs and the writing of Gao Yihan, a friend of Li Dazhao. Gao mentions the discussion at a memorial service held for Li in 1927 but its reliability is questionable (Ishikawa, 2013, pp. 101–02).

Voitinsky had three objectives for his work. As noted, the first was to acquaint himself with the key figures in the Chinese political landscape and report back on his findings. The second was organizational work to plant the seeds for the idea of establishing a CCP. The third was propagating materials on Bolshevism and the Chinese Revolution. Posing as a journalist, Voitinsky met with a wide range of people. The recent publication of the Karakhan Declaration meant that Voitinsky was well-received in Beijing and elsewhere. The enthusiasm was short-lived, however, as the “petit-bourgeois and bourgeois intellectuals became estranged” (Li Da, 1955, pp. 6–7). Two Russians teaching at Peking University, Ivanov and Polevoy, were instrumental in helping with introductions to radicals in the city and most probably one or both facilitated the meeting with Li Dazhao, a professor at the university. Li Dazhao was one of the earliest converts to Marxism. While Voitinsky's two reports (Docs. 1 and 2) do not mention Li by name, it seems certain that the two did meet and that the conversation was wide-ranging but general in nature and did not specifically cover the topic of a communist party.¹¹ More important were his interactions with Chen Duxiu, having been introduced through a letter from Li Dazhao.

In addition, to these two future CCP luminaries, Voitinsky met with influential theorists, Li Hanjun and Dai Jitao and important political figures, Chen Jiongming and Sun Yat-sen and with Bai Jianwu, a key member on the staff of the Northern warlord, Wu Peifu. Chen, Sun and Wu were all considered to be potential allies by different Russian actors. Voitinsky did not express strong

organized under Li Dazhao's guidance and was the successor to the Marxist Research Society (late 1916).

11 However, Luo Zhanglong (1978 [1980], pp. 197–99; interview September 1987) remembers that while in Beijing, Voitinsky commented that China needed a Russian-style party. Luo maintained that it was only during Voitinsky's visit (April–May 1920) that they considered establishing an organization. Voitinsky felt that although a party had not been formally established and did not have the approval of the Comintern, it was evolving spontaneously. If the Chinese wished to set up an organization, he was willing to pass on their ideas to the Comintern.

support for any of them and seemed ambivalent about both Chen and Sun. Li Dazhao arranged an introduction for Voitinsky and Polovoy to meet with Bai (October 9, 1920). They enjoyed a general discussion about the current situation in China while Voitinsky introduced conditions in revolutionary Russia (Bai Jianwu, 1992, p. 277). In Guangzhou, Chen Duxiu accompanied Voitinsky to meet with Chen Jiongming, about whom he was ambivalent. Later, Voitinsky noted that Chen Jiongming was a man of “great will power and self-control” but he found him rather puritanical. He noted the friction between Chen and Sun Yat-sen and although Chen expressed great respect for Sun he “considered him an impractical idealist.”¹² His contemporary assessment of Chen (June 1920, Doc. 1) was less positive than that of other Russian visitors: “According to the local revolutionaries, the revolutionary activities of General Chen (in Zhangzhou) were somewhat exaggerated.”

In his 1925 memorial for Sun, Voitinsky (March 15, 1925 [1957]) wrote that their meeting in Shanghai had been held in November at Chen Duxiu’s prompting.¹³ The conversation ranged from Sun’s interest in hearing about the revolution in Russia, a discussion of the 1911–12 Chinese Revolution and finally back again to the problems in Soviet Russia. Voitinsky noted that Sun was “greatly interested in the question of how the struggle in South China, which has just been liberated from counterrevolutionary ... troops in Guangzhou, could be joined with the struggle of faraway Russia” and he complained that geography rendered establishing contact with Russia unfeasible.¹⁴ Finally, Sun asked repeatedly whether it would be possible to place a very powerful radio station in Vladivostok or in Manchuria to facilitate communications. As Voitinsky prepared to leave China, he had not expressed a clear preference for a specific ally in China and later he clashed with Sneevliet about the value of cooperation with Sun.

Voitinsky was very positive about organizational progress. Subsequent developments following his departure suggest he was overly optimistic. However, there was noticeable progress and the foundations were laid for future advance. Four sets of organizational activities were important to guide Voitinsky’s activities but their impact and effectiveness varied. First, in May 1920, a Far Eastern Secretariat of the Comintern was set up in Shanghai (Report by Vilensky-Sibiriakov, Doc. 8) but mystery surrounds the organization

12 The article was written on the occasion of Sun Yat-sen’s death and was published in *Pravda* (Truth), no. 61, March 15, 1925, p. 2, translated in Eudin and North, 1957, p. 218.

13 He refers to Comrade Ch, who must be Chen Duxiu. The mention also gives us a clue about the dating as Sun left Shanghai to return to Guangzhou on November 25. Voitinsky, 1925, in Eudin and North, 1957, pp. 218–19.

14 Sun raised the same problem in his correspondence with Chicherin.

as it is not mentioned anywhere else and it is debatable whether or not it really functioned.¹⁵ The Secretariat was described as a temporary organization to coordinate information about revolutionary activities and potential with a China Department and a Korea Department and, to be set up, a Japan Department in line with the original remit.¹⁶ The China Department was to establish basic grass-roots organizations in the coastal industrial areas with party work promoted through worker and student organizations. Labor unions and the military were important for this work and communist propaganda was to be encouraged within them. Last but not least, publication work was promoted.

Second, and importantly, building blocks were assembled for the establishment of the CCP. Voitinsky (June 1920, Doc. 1) reported that he had contacted the most important revolutionary activists and even though there were no representatives operating in cities such as Hankou, Guangzhou and Nanjing, things were moving ahead.¹⁷ From the beginning, the intention was to create an organization that could coordinate and centralize these actions. The dispersed nature of the activities drew complaints leading Voitinsky (June 1920, Doc. 1) to suggest soon convening a gathering of North China socialists and anarchists. Chen Duxiu was tasked with writing to revolutionaries in each city to encourage their participation. Voitinsky hoped the meeting would take place in July as he intended to participate and help with the preparations. In fact, on July 19, a meeting of the “Most Activist Chinese Comrades” was held in Shanghai, which helped lay the groundwork for the establishment of the CCP (Ishikawa, 2013, p. 112). Voitinsky suggested that the Qunyi Bookstore could play a coordinating role.¹⁸

July was a busy month. On July 4, Vilensky, together with several assistants, arrived in Beijing. Having sent out information in advance, from July 5 to 7, they convened the first meeting of the representatives of the members of the Russian Communist Party working in China. Among other issues, they

15 Only in January 1921 was the Executive Committee of the Communist International (ECCI) Far Eastern Secretariat set up but it was in Irkutsk not Shanghai.

16 Again, it is important to note that work in Shanghai was to pursue revolution throughout the region and it was not limited to China.

17 Vilensky-Sibiriakov (Doc. 8) wrote that these activities provided the basis for developing communist organizations in Beijing, Shanghai, Tianjin, Guangzhou, Hankou, Nanjing and other cities.

18 Voitinsky's report refers to a United Publications Bureau but the editors of the Chinese translation of the report refer to this as the *Qunyi shushe*, the publisher of the influential *New Youth* (*Xin qingnian*) journal.

discussed the soon-to-be-held meeting of Chinese communist organizations and the establishment of a CCP. Probably, the meeting referred to is that of July 19.

The Shanghai Revolutionary Bureau featured prominently in Voitinsky's August 1920 report (Doc. 2).¹⁹ It comprised five members including himself and four Chinese revolutionaries: Chen Duxiu, certainly, and Li Hanjun, Yang Mingzhai and Yu Xiusong (Ren Wuxiong, 2002). The bureau had three departments: publication, information and agitation, and organization. Voitinsky noted that a similar bureau was established in Beijing and Stoyanovich was dispatched from Tianjin to Guangzhou to set up another bureau there (with departments for propaganda and for organization), while one was also planned for Hankou. The Bureau must be the Shanghai communist small group, which formed the core of the nascent CCP (Ishikawa, 2013, p. 113). However, there are different opinions among Chinese scholars as to the nature of this organization and neither Chinese memoirs nor documents refer to it. The range of views include the idea that the Revolutionary Bureau was an organization set up by the Bolshevik Party, and led by its members and it did not represent at all the early party organization (Xie Yiming, 2002) or that it was a united front body for socialists and anarchists (Tian Ziyu, 2001). Others suggest it was a provisional body of the Comintern set up under the Far Eastern Secretariat to oversee the Chinese revolutionary movement (Li Danyang and Liu Jianyi, 2001) or that the Revolutionary Bureau, under Voitinsky's direct leadership and the Shanghai group that founded the party were two independent organizations (Ren Wuxiong, 2002, pp. 337–50).²⁰

It is no surprise that organization and propaganda work focused on students, who were viewed as sympathetic to the Russian cause. In turn, Voitinsky and his colleagues used the students to conduct propaganda and organizational work among the workers and soldiers (June and August 1920, Docs. 1 and 2). The Bureau's Organization Department oversaw this work but was not especially successful, although the Bureau did claim that some organizations were under its control.

In August, hoping to push ahead with work, the Organization Department intended to convene a meeting for ten local unions and trade associations, with each sending two delegates. The objective was to establish a Central Labor Secretariat, which would send a representative to participate in the Shanghai

19 The report was sent to the section of the Eastern People of the Siberia Bureau of the Central Committee of the Russian Communist Party (Bolshevik), August 17, 1920.

20 For a review of the different perspectives see Zhang Yuhan, 2002. Ishikawa engaged with Yang Kuisong and Jin Liren who had originally debated the provenance of the Bureau. See, for example, Yang Kuisong, 1996, and Jin Liren, 1998.

Revolutionary Bureau. Voitinsky was the driving force behind this, drafting a resolution passed by the Bureau that was included in the propaganda materials for the proposed meeting.

Voitinsky reported that in early August, the communists had helped with student meetings in Shanghai, Beijing and Tianjin to discuss the question of unifying the various groups. As a result, Voitinsky hoped that the revolutionary student groups would band together to establish the Socialist Youth Corps (SYC) and indeed, on August 22, 1920 the Shanghai SYC was formed. To increase influence among the student movement, Voitinsky suggested sending delegates to participate in the Shanghai, Beijing and Tianjin Revolutionary Bureaus.

Voitinsky's expectation was that by integrating the revolutionary students into the Bureaus, they would grasp the clear distinction between communist ideology and that of "the capitalist groups, the intellectuals and business groups, because these groups rely on the democratic US to oppose Japan." Voitinsky wanted students to prepare for social revolution and oppose Japanese militarism and the division of China into spheres controlled by different foreign powers. The students were to rely on the workers and to take control of their own lives as the only way to ensure China's liberation. Voitinsky dismissed the "fantasy" harbored by some students that it was possible to rely on "non-aggressive capital (American)" to help Chinese capital develop the productive forces, in turn improving people's living standards. This view was especially prevalent among those with an American education. In the current struggles, student support for the convocation of a National Assembly made them sympathetic toward Wu Peifu (August 1920, Doc. 2).

The last set of work was publication and the promotion of pro-Russian materials. Work began by translating materials about socialism and the Russian Revolution but this quickly moved on to establishing publications that would come under the influence of the emerging communist movement. On June 1, the Shanghai "*Dalu bao*" (Voitinsky wrote *China Press*) published an article based on materials that he had provided. This was followed by other pieces. Yang Mingzhai helped with materials about Soviet Russia, including those for Chinese students.

After the Vilensky visit in early July and the stated intent to form a communist party, publication work was stepped up. Certainly, Vilensky viewed publication as a key component of the work of the "Far Eastern Secretariat."²¹ There were to be three publishing centers: Vladivostok for Russian materials, Harbin for republication of "agitation literature" in English, Chinese and Japanese, and Beijing and Shanghai as the focal points in China. The work in Beijing was

21 It is unclear whether he was referring to the Shanghai Revolutionary Bureau.

pushed forward by students and the publications included “*Xin chao*” (New Wave) and the Beijing University Students’ Weekly.²² On May 1, a special issue of the journal was dedicated to the international workers’ movement.

Publication work was strongest in Shanghai and it was linked most closely to the development of the communist movement. The publication department under the Shanghai Revolutionary Bureau had its own printing capability and was already churning out pamphlets (15 in all, as well as some flyers) in addition to translating and printing materials sent from Vladivostok. The Russo-Chinese Information Bureau, with a branch in Beijing, was set up under the Information and Agitation Bureau and contributed information to thirty-one Chinese newspapers. The Bureau drew materials from papers in the Russian Far East and other left-wing publications, such as *The Manchester Guardian*, the *New York Call* and *Soviet Russia*. Yang Mingzhai was a key figure promoting this work (Voitinsky report, August 1920, Doc. 2).

In retrospect, the most important development occurred in fall 1920 when the influential magazine *Xin qingnian* (New Youth), under Chen Duxiu, effectively became a publication of the Shanghai Communist movement.²³ The use of left-wing American publications indicated the clear influence of Voitinsky who had joined the Socialist Party of America in 1915. Chen Duxiu and his colleagues at *Xin qingnian* even put the logo of the Socialist Party of America on the magazine’s cover.²⁴ At the same time as *Xin Qingnian* became the external face of the communist group, the decision was taken to launch *Gongchandang* (literally *The Communist Party* but more commonly referred to as “*The Communist*”) as a monthly underground journal for the party. Under the editorship of Li Da, it was launched on November 7, 1920; after publishing seven issues, it ceased publication in July 1921 (*Zhonggongdangshi shijian renwulu*, 1983, p. 84). The journal contained mainly explanatory theoretical articles and pieces on Soviet Russia.

On August 22, the publishing department put out a paper for Chinese workers, *Laodong jie* (Workers’ World).²⁵ To increase influence among workers,

22 *Xin chao* was a monthly that ran from 1919 to 1922. The student publication was short-lived, running from January 4, 1920 to May 23 1920.

23 This was from vol. 8, no. 1 onwards (Li Da, 1955 [1980], p. 8). See also *Zhonggongdangshi shijian renwulu*, 1983, p. 73.

24 Relying on the diary of Yu Xiusong, Zhang writes that the Shanghai organization formed in June 1920 was originally named the “Socialist Party” but was changed to the CCP in August 1920, Ishikawa, 2013, p. 116; Zhang Xudong, 2011, pp. 113–15.

25 Voitinsky calls it “Workers’ Speech.” The publication ran from August 1920 to January 1921. The first copy had a print run of 2,000 and was sold for one cent. It was a weekly that published nineteen issues, although issue no. 13 did not appear. The last issue appeared on December 29, 1920, He Shouyi, 1981, pp. 78–79.

in Beijing on November 7, the group launched the weekly *Laodong yin* (The Voice of Labor). The publication department also published the *Communist Manifesto* that had been translated by Chen Wangdao and revised by Chen Duxiu and Li Hanjun.

Finally, to increase access to Russia, in Shanghai, the Foreign Languages School was established under Yang Mingzhai's leadership to provide language training for those members of the recently formed SYC who were going to study in Russia. In spring 1921, it enrolled its largest cohort, including the future President of the People's Republic of China and CCP leader, Liu Shaoqi.

3 The Party Falls Apart

On leaving China in January 1921, Voitinsky could be pleased with the progress. A foundation for the communist movement had been laid, the suggestion of a national congress had been raised, propaganda work was progressing and it seemed that a strong core was being developed in Shanghai. However, following Voitinsky's departure, the central party organization collapsed, only to be revived following the arrival of Sneevliet and Nikolsky.²⁶ Internal differences resurfaced but some momentum was maintained to activate Voitinsky's suggestion to convene a national congress. In March 1921, the Far Eastern Secretariat, which sent Nikolsky to China, had already decided that the time was ripe to convene a congress. In fact, writing in late April or early May, Shumiatsky was under the impression that the Congress might already be under way, creating a Chinese branch of the Third International.²⁷

However, the congress was not in session and neither Nikolsky, who was to oversee it, nor Sneevliet, who was sent by the Comintern, arrived in China until early June (Saich, 1991, vol. 1, p. 54). Reflecting on the collapse of momentum, on arrival in Shanghai Sneevliet found that he had to start from the very beginning (Isaacs, 1971, p. 103) and had to begin his work under "highly unfavorable conditions" (Bericht des Genossen H. Maring, July 1922). The Russian representatives in Beijing and those from the Irkutsk Bureau informed him of the weak connections between the communists and the working-class and that very little real organizational work had been accomplished (Isaacs, 1971, p. 103).

26 Voitinsky did not return to China until 1924 but he remained influential in the policy debates.

27 Ishikawa, 2013, p. 228. This is based on his essay "Kommunisticheskii Internatsional na Dal'nem Vostoke" (The Communist International in the Far East) *Narody Dal'nego Vostoka*, 1, no. 1, May 1921.

Aside from Guangdong province, where the GMD and anarchist influence was strongest, only the railway workers at Changxindian (near Beijing) had formed modern organizations.²⁸

Others noted the problems with the young workers' movement. Lidin, who was sent to China in October 1921, traced the lack of success to the "intellectual group of the CCP" being isolated from the workers, with the Labor Secretariat "divorced from the masses." The real workers' movement had passed the communist small groups by!²⁹ Earlier, Zhang Tailei had complained that the labor landscape was populated by one form of traditional organization or another. For the most part, the only real unions were the Shanghai Machinists' Union, the Five Metals' Union, the Printers' Union and those in Hong Kong. The reason was that the Chinese economy was built on the peasantry, while contemporary capitalism, despite imperialism, had not had an impact on Chinese life. Foreign goods were plentiful but there were no large factories.³⁰ How to operate under these circumstances, without a modern proletariat and with a large peasantry was a crucial question that Sneevliet and early CCP members wrestled with.

Five reasons explain the problems with party work under the Shanghai Revolutionary Bureau. First, following Voitinsky's departure, the party found itself in financial difficulties. Second, with Chen Duxiu's move to Guangzhou, Shanghai lost a driving force. Third, Li Hanjun, who took over from Chen Duxiu, was not too keen on practical work, preferring a more academic approach. Fourth, not surprisingly, strong disagreements existed between Chen and Li over the party's future development. Finally, there was the insular nature of the different party groups and their isolation from social forces.

Sneevliet noted that after Voitinsky's departure, the Shanghai group found itself without financial means, leading to the abandonment of activities in the workers' schools. It is unclear which schools he is referring to here as the Foreign Languages School and the workers' school that had been established in Changxindian did continue to function after Voitinsky's departure. Perhaps, they continued but with reduced CCP engagement.

Li Da (1955 [1980], p. 9) also mentioned the funding problems. When Voitinsky left for Russia, the monthly expenses for party work amounted to around 200 dollars, most probably Mexican dollars. At the time, none of the

28 Bericht des Genossen, H. Maring, July 1922. Sneevliet actually refers to "railway workers near Beijing" but clearly he is referring to Changxindian.

29 He sent his report on work in China to the Far Eastern Department of the ECCI on May 20, 1922, Doc. 21.

30 Zhang Tailei's 1921 [2013].

Shanghai members were employed and thus they had no income and therefore the organization could not meet its financial obligations. Clearly, a workers' movement without any money could not do very much. Writing to Chen Duxiu, Li Hanjun suggested that the New Youth Book Company could provide a monthly subsidy to cover party expenses. At the time, the recently opened book company was enjoying a brisk trade. Li never heard back from Chen, not surprising given that just before Chen left for Guangzhou, they had fallen out over the question of production costs for *Xin qingnian*. The dispute was the source of the enmity between the two men. The only source to fund party activities was contributions from articles that members had managed to sell. These financial problems also led to the discontinuation of *The Communist*.

In December 1920, Chen Duxiu left for Guangzhou to take up his post as Commissioner of Education in Guangdong province, leaving Li Hanjun to deputize together with Chen Wangdao, to take editorship of *Xin qingnian* (Li Da, 1955 [1980], p. 5). Yet, even before Chen's departure, party members had been hard-pressed to handle the work. Toward the end of the year, Bao Huiseng arrived in Shanghai with a group of Wuhan SYC members. They intended to travel on to Moscow for study but the trip could not be realized and Bao was asked to stay on in Shanghai to help with party work. The provisional party center set up an education committee with Bao and Yang Mingzhai in charge. The most important tasks were to select students to be sent to Moscow, arrange Russian classes—presumably through the Foreign Languages School—and engage in propaganda work in Shanghai (Bao Huiseng, 1953 [1980], p. 304).

Chen and his deputy Li differed about the type of party to be built. Li called for the party to operate openly and legally as the time was only ripe for educational work, research and to spread Marxist influence in intellectual circles. In particular, Chen and Li disagreed about the power relationships within the party. In February 1921, Chen drafted a party document that he sent to Shanghai advocating that the party adopt a system of centralized power.³¹ Clearly, Chen had learned something about Bolshevik organization from Voitinsky! Li disagreed completely, feeling that Chen simply wanted members to support his autocratic and dictatorial rule. In response, Li Hanjun drafted a document advocating the division of power among the localities (*ditufenquan*) instead of Chen's advocacy of centralized power (*zhongyang jiquanzhi*). The center comprised an office but was to have no authority to dictate to the branches. Chen

31 Most probably, Li Da (1955 [1980]) was referring to an original draft of "The First Program of the Chinese Communist Party." This called for the loyalty of members to the party and gave a provisional Central Executive Committee the power to supervise and direct finances, publications and the policies of any local soviet.

was furious with Li's draft and sent a letter to Shanghai, reproaching Li Hanjun and claiming that other party members were also opposed to Li's views.

The rift between Chen and Li grew increasingly wider. Li Hanjun was sufficiently incensed that he wished to resign as acting secretary and also from the editorship of *Xin qingnian*. He handed over the party register and a few articles to Li Da and asked him to take over as party secretary, which Li Da did to maintain party unity (Li Da, 1955 [1980], pp. 9–10; Wang Laidi, 1981, p. 18, states Chen handed over the items on March 7, 1921). Whether Li Hanjun really did resign as secretary is unclear as he continued to play an important role in organizing the First Party Congress and at the Congress, he vigorously defended his views. Zhang Guotao (1971, vol.1, p. 136) wrote that teaching commitments meant that Li Da, Li Hanjun and others had not been able to perform their duties as they had when Chen Duxiu was present.³²

Finally, Sneevliet and others felt that the party was isolated from society. There was initial engagement with the railway workers in the North and with the students. However, in May 1921, engagement with younger Chinese suffered a blow when the SYL was disbanded; it was not restored until November when Zhang Tailei returned from Russia (Smith, 2000, p. 26). In addition to Sneevliet's negative views of the party, Lidin (May 20, 1922, Doc. 21) complained that there was no unified, single party but merely a few local communist groups. In his view, they operated as independent blocs rendering them incapable of practical revolutionary work. They were inclined to "content themselves with a kind of greenhouse culture of communism."³³

Clearly, when Sneevliet arrived in June 1921, the party as an organization was not in a very healthy state. However, there was an organization into which life could be breathed and the Chinese comrades together with Sneevliet and Nikolsky's help, began to resuscitate it and bring it back to life.

4 The Development of Communist Small Groups across China

The small groups that formed the building blocks of the national party were an eclectic bunch—some came together through promptings by Soviet activists,

32 Bao Huiseng (1953 [1980], p. 304) provides a different account for the decline in the work of the Party Center in Shanghai. Following a May Day mass meeting, Chinese and French police raided the Party Center offices and the Language School. Li Hanjun convened a meeting to discuss the matter and suggested that party activities be suspended and that either party headquarters be moved to Guangzhou or that Chen Duxiu be asked to return to Shanghai. Bao was then sent to Guangzhou to discuss these matters with Chen Duxiu.

33 Lidin's report was one of two in addition to Sneevliet's that reported positively on the relative strength of the GMD within the labor movement as compared with that of the CCP.

whereas others had little or no contact at all. Without the drive of the Soviet emissaries, a national congress clearly would not have convened so soon. Newly available materials allow us to clarify some but not all of the outstanding puzzles. Not surprisingly, Soviet writers and Chinese official historians persisted in stressing respectively the role of the Comintern in the party's formation or the indigenous nature of the local groups. Both approaches contain elements of truth and the party was born during a period not only of domestic but also global turmoil, with people adjusting to the end of the war and coming to terms with the rise of Bolshevism. Chinese historians covered the local developments that were responding to the interest in Marxism among intellectuals as they searched for a suitable political system to replace the old imperial system. Soviet accounts dwelt on the various Soviet agents and the range of meetings with local progressive intellectuals to detect fertile ground to grow socialist and communist roots. Confusing the picture on the ground, the Marxist research groups, anarchist associations, study societies, and communist small groups enjoyed a profusion of names, with some interchangeable and individuals enjoying multiple memberships. It is not surprising that many years or even decades later memories were faulty or confused. So what does reliance primarily on contemporary documents reveal?

For a communist party to take root among radicalized intellectuals four transitions had to occur. First, Marxism had to be viewed as an intellectually viable belief system and displace other radical ideas such as anarchism and more moderate forms of socialism. Second, the intellectual inquiry and publishing ethos had to be replaced by action. Third and related, the dominance of interpersonal relations as the basis of group formation had to be replaced by a commitment based on ideology and subservience to the organization. Fourth, there had to be a shift to Leninism as an instrument for action and the necessity to form a Bolshevik-type organization.

Perhaps downplaying the Soviet role in the genesis of the CCP, Chinese memoir literature makes no mention of the Revolutionary Bureau that Voitinsky claims he established. Most probably, they mean the Revolutionary Bureau when referring to the Shanghai communist small group and they may even have used the names of the Revolutionary Bureau and the Marxist Study Group interchangeably. Clearly, the Bureau was the focal point of later CCP development. A December 1920 report from Bronstein (deputy president) and Abramson (head of the China Division) refers to Voitinsky's August report, noting that a five-person Revolutionary Bureau had been established.

Apart from Voitinsky's, the most extensive report was by Zhang Tailei to the Comintern's Third Congress (1921 [2013], pp. 6–31). He identified Shanghai and Beijing as the places where the earliest communist small groups were set up in May 1920, "followed by a few others." Before March 1921, no unified communist

organization existed, in part because of the strength of the anarchists within the radical movement. As a result, communist sympathizers tried to infiltrate their organizations to turn them toward communism. Certainly, this was the case in Guangzhou. To counter the anarchists effectively, the necessity to clarify communist principles and objectives became obvious. Consequently, a March 1921 meeting decided that a congress should be convened to pass provisional guiding principles (although a manifesto had been published in November 1920), a work plan and to clarify attitudes with respect to the SYC, union and trade associations and other organizations such as the military.

Interestingly, Zhang stated that by May 1921, the CCP had seven provincial organizations, listing six of them: Beijing, Tianjin, Hankou, Guangzhou, Hong Kong, and Nanjing, which was the most recent organization.³⁴ The delegates who attended the First Congress representing domestic organizations came from Shanghai, Beijing, Wuhan, Hunan, Guangzhou, and Jinan (Shandong). This attests to the fortuitous nature of who attended. We do not know who was invited and the attendees were a mixture of those who could make it and those who happened to be around at the time. The absence of any delegates from Tianjin is interesting, given that not only Zhang Tailei but also other accounts attest to the vibrancy of the work there but organizationally, it fell under the Beijing region, which explains why there were no separate delegates. Zhang noted that the Tianjin group devoted special attention to the Tangshan area as it was China's first great industrial center. Members were drawn from workers at the railway repair shop at the largest station on the Tianjin-Pukou Railway.

The deposition of Shi Cuntong when he was arrested in Japan (late-1921) concurs with Zhang Tailei on May 1920 regarding the establishment of a group to promote a communist party (Ishikawa, 2013, pp. 157–59). Further a July 10, 1920 entry in Yu Xiusong's diary noted that a Socialist-Communist Party (Voitinsky's Revolutionary Bureau)³⁵ had been organized probably before June 17 when the diary entries began (for a discussion see Ishikawa, 2013, pp. 152–56). This suggests this is the Revolutionary Bureau set up at Voitinsky's instigation. Again, the precise origins are confused by the use of different names in later memoirs that may or may not refer to the same organization. For example, historian Yang Kuisong concludes that the Socialist League, the Revolutionary Bureau

34 Presumably the seventh was Shanghai but it was not listed as it was the Party Center. In his June 7–9, 1921 letter to the Far East Secretariat of the ECCI, Sneevliet mentions some fifty members who were spread across six small groups: Beijing, Shandong, Hankou, Guangzhou and Shanghai. One place name is indecipherable. This suggests either a rather fluid situation or poor information flows.

35 Shi notes that Voitinsky attended the meeting, indicating that the two names are for one organization, Shi Fuliang, 1956 [1980].

and the Shanghai Communist small group were one and the same thing. By contrast, Jin Li claims that the Socialist League and the Revolutionary Bureau are one and the same but the small group was separate (Ishikawa, 2013, p. 164). Jin Li's view supports the idea of the strong indigenous nature of the CCP's origins. However, contemporary documents do not support this.

The contemporary accounts by Zhang and Shi give May 1920 as the date for the formation of a group promoting a communist party, confirming Voitinsky's claim about the establishment of a Revolutionary Bureau in Shanghai. Certainly, by mid-June, a communist nucleus had formed in Shanghai around Chen Duxiu, Li Hanjun, Shi Cuntong and Yu Xiusong. The group drew up party rules before Shi departed for Japan on June 20 (Shi Cuntong's deposition in Ishikawa, 2013, p. 161). Contemporary accounts make it clear that the group in Shanghai was the first one to be established and it functioned as the central organization of the future communist party.

Voitinsky and Sneevliet came into this environment with very different ideas about what a communist party should be than those members in the original communist small groups. This included Chen Duxiu. The early ideas about the nature of the CCP developed from two very different traditions (Ishikawa, 2013, p. 162). Chen was a product of the New Culture Movement and a tradition based on interpersonal relationships to draw people to the organization, especially those who were associated with *Xin qingnian*. He was not convinced about the viability of the nascent labor movement and was negative about the potential of working with the anarchists. Marxism-Leninism fit the agenda of the early Chinese communists but conflicted with their prior norms of behavior and the type of cooperation to which they had been accustomed (van de Ven, 1991, p. 6). Certainly, Li Hanjun saw Chen's initial program as developing a party that revolved around the crucial presence of his own persona, which Li denounced as autocratic.

Voitinsky and Sneevliet came from a very different tradition within which organization and discipline were important. Voitinsky wanted to work with the student and labor groups at the core and with the Revolutionary Bureau operating as the coordinating agency. Voitinsky was instrumental in pushing the small group of radical intellectuals into action. Sneevliet brought with him the experience of working in the Dutch labor movement and the national railway movement in the Dutch Indies. Discipline was important to him and, when necessary, he would invoke it to get his way, much to the annoyance of some Chinese comrades.

In September 1920, Chen Duxiu signaled publicly, in the article "Talking Politics," that he was beginning to break from his tradition. This followed the formation of the Revolutionary Bureau and the discussions about outlining a

platform for a communist organization. He was moving away from his roots in the anti-Qing networks and those of the May Fourth Movement to a perspective that was more sympathetic to the Bolshevik message that Voitinsky had brought to China and that Sneevliet would reinforce. He wrote “In my belief, revolutionary means must be employed to establish a working-class state” (Chen Duxiu, September 1920), a sentiment echoed by others who became influential in the early communist movement. In December 1920, Mao Zedong wrote to his colleagues in the New Study Movement in France that when all other means had failed, revolution was the last resort and was “simply the natural course of events.” In response to Cai Hesen’s letter of August 13, 1920, Mao agreed that a proletarian dictatorship along the lines of Soviet Russia was the only solution for China’s woes (Mao Zedong, December 1, 1920, pp. 9, 11). This was shortly after the party had drafted the November 1920 declaration but there is no evidence to suggest that Mao had seen it.

It is well known that as early as 1918 Li Dazhao had been attracted to the Bolshevik world view (Meisner, 1967, especially p. 24 and the discussion in Chapter Two). In 1926, Cai Hesen recollected that while the study societies formed the organizational antecedents of the communist party, they were not completely communist and they lacked an organizational umbrella (Cai Hesen, 1926 [1980], p. 8). However, they did form the building blocks for the CCP. In fact, in January 1921, at Mao’s prompting, the majority of the New Citizen Study Society decided that they should adopt a Leninist strategy. Of the 15 voting, 12 favored Bolshevism (Zhang Yunhou et al, 1979, vol. 1, pp. 592, 594). The Chinese soil was becoming more fertile to sow the seeds of a communist party. Bolshevism and the Leninist idea of the party were gaining traction so quickly that the party was Bolshevik before its members understood what that entailed. This led to clashes between Sneevliet and his Chinese colleagues and as a result many of the First Party Congress attendees drifted away.

In 1985, I wrote that the common wisdom was that six communist “small groups” had been established *inside* China before the First Party Congress convened (July 1921): Shanghai, Beijing, Wuhan (or Hankou or Hubei), Guangzhou (or Guangdong), Changsha (or Hunan), Shandong (or Jinan) (Saich, 1985). Yet, even this was a simplification. In both contemporary documents and in the memoir literature there is confusion about what they were called, as there is confusion with the founding of the Shanghai Small Group. Most Chinese writers refer to them as *xiaozu* (small groups) but others disagree. Liu Renjing (1978 [1980], p. 207) remembered that before the First Party Congress, Shanghai, Beijing, Changsha, Jinan, Wuhan, Qingdao, Guangzhou and so forth all had organizations propagating communism but there was no standard, formal name. Luo Zhanglong (1979 [1980], p. 195; interview September 1987)

explained that the appellation Beijing communist “small group,” of which he was a member, was appended by later writers, as the group never used this name in internal or external dealings. Zhu Wushan (1956 [1980], p. 91) goes so far as to say that in early 1921 there was no formal party organization in Beijing, while in Hunan, there was no communist “small group” independent of the New Citizens Study Society (van de Ven, 1991, p. 66).

A fast-moving and confusing situation combined with simultaneous developments that were often poorly coordinated. Some reports refer to active groups such as Tianjin/Tangshan that did not send delegates to the First Party Congress. Even if one made it as a delegate to the Congress, there was little continuity as few attended subsequent meetings. Further, the two key figures who had spearheaded Marxism within leftist circles, Chen Duxiu and Li Dazhao, did not even attend the Congress.

The different traditions and influences were reflected in the origins of the cells scattered around the country. Some were formed with considerable help from Russians and the Comintern (Shanghai, Beijing, Guangzhou), others through local forces, personal connections and the radicalization of those who had gone to France (Hunan), such as Cai Hesen while some areas had communist groups that did not send any delegates at all (Tianjin, Nanjing and Chongqing). This variation created a distinct organizational trajectory for the early CCP with no clear core leaders and central organization (van de Ven, 1991, pp. 55–56). The CCP emerged from these disparate local organizations. The group in Shanghai operated more as a facilitating agency than as a leadership group and when Chen Duxiu sought to assert his authority, this conflicted with the personal bonds and regional loyalties that could not be easily supplanted. Sneevliet encountered similar resistance when seeking to enforce his authority. Van de Ven’s argument is persuasive but documents released subsequently reveal how hard the Comintern worked to instill the idea of organization and to bring discipline through a more powerful Revolutionary Bureau in Shanghai.

Clearly, before the First Party Congress, groups that considered themselves communist did exist but even contemporary documents present a confused picture. Once one includes the memoirs, the situation becomes even murkier. Some originated as Marxist Study Societies, others from youth league activities and in Hunan, for example, from the New Citizen Study Society. Later CCP historiography imposed an order on this varied picture by naming the diverse entities “small groups.”

The first communist group—The Revolutionary Bureau—that could be taken seriously was set up in Shanghai with Voitinsky’s strong prompting. However, as noted, the time of its establishment has been subject to debate. Earlier writings suggested May or August 1920, with most preferring the earlier

date.³⁶ If the Revolutionary Bureau had been set up in May 1920, surely Voitinsky would have mentioned this important fact in his June report. He mentioned it in his August report and the “Report on the First Party Congress” provides corroboration claiming that the Chinese communist organization was established in mid-1920 (translated in Saich, 1991, vol. 1, p. 203). It had five members, including Chen Duxiu. Thus, the Bureau was established after Voitinsky filed his June report but before July 10 (when we have the first of Yu’s diary entries), hence most probably in the mid-June (Ishikawa, 2013, p. 154).³⁷ The key figures in the organization were Chen Duxiu, Li Hanjun, Shi Cuntong, and Yu Xiusong. Sokolov-Strachov, reporting in April 1921 (Doc. 9), suggested that real leadership of the party lay with the editorial group of *Xin qingnian*, under Chen Duxiu (the “Chinese Lunacharsky”).³⁸ At the time of his writing, Chen had already left Shanghai for Guangzhou. Thus, the Shanghai core group combined the attributes of a group founded both through personal relations and the promptings of the Comintern.

This was swiftly followed by other groups that broadened the base for a “national” communist organization. Generally, they evolved from the extant radical study groups and other similar organizations. The first two localities to follow Shanghai’s lead were Beijing and Wuhan (Hankou). The date of the establishment of the Beijing group is easily determined as its report to the First Party Congress states clearly it was October 1920. Work to date had not been very fruitful and the group hoped that the Congress would spur future momentum.³⁹ Earlier in March 1920, a Marxist Study Society had been set up at Peking University, which some claim formed the genesis for the “small group” (*Jindaishi ziliao*, 1955, pp. 161–73). Again, it may only have been an informal

36 The May 1920 date stems from the date given in the 1939 official publication *Zhongguo xiandai geming yundongshi* (History of the Contemporary Chinese Revolutionary Movement), 1939, p. 127. Ishikawa, 2013, has provided a great service by bringing clarity to the timing.

37 This is concluded by Ishikawa following remarkable detective work, 2013, p. 161. Yang Kuisong disputes this conclusion, dating the founding to sometime between the establishment of the Socialist League (July 19) and Voitinsky’s August report to the Comintern. According to Yang Kuisong (1996), Yu’s entries are incorrect. Jin Liren (1997, 1998) dates the founding as June 1920 after the Marxist Study Group was set up in May 1920 and he views it as independent of the Revolutionary Bureau.

38 The report covered the Guangzhou Government and was marked top secret.

39 “Beijing gongchan zhuyi xiaozu de baogao,” (Report of the Beijing Communist Small Group) *Yida qianhou*, vol. 3, 1986, pp. 1–9, presented by Zhang Guotao. An English translation is in Saich, 1996, pp. 19–25. In his June 7–9, 1921 letter, Sneevliet gives the date of October, which suggests either he had seen the report in advance of the Congress or at least had been informed about it. He wrote that the group comprised eight members after some anarchists had withdrawn once the group had passed a communist party program.

grouping that came together at the university to cater to growing interest in radical ideas. The genuine origin was the branch of the Revolutionary Bureau that was setup on Voitinsky's instructions and was working with "Comrades Minor (Stoyanovich) and Polevoy."⁴⁰ Voitinsky visited Beijing in October and one can presume that that marked the formal beginning of the Beijing group.

The third major group set up with Soviet influence was in Guangzhou. Contemporary reports permit a more precise timeline to be determined. In his August report, Voitinsky mentioned that he had sent Stoyanovich to Guangzhou to set up a Revolutionary Bureau. Reporting to the First Party Congress, the Guangzhou group noted that in 1920, there was no organization and nobody could be found to carry out such work.⁴¹ At the end of 1920, Voitinsky and Perlin visited Guangzhou and set up a branch of the Russian News Agency, set about organizing labor unions and began carrying out propaganda work. In late December 1920, Chen Duxiu arrived. In his work, Stoyanovich did not seem to distinguish between the anarchists and the communists and it is not surprising that the report complained that the anarchists dominated the original organization. Of the nine members, only the Russians, Stoyanovich and Perlin were communists. Only following Voitinsky's visit and Chen Duxiu's were the anarchists expelled and the group reformed as a "communist" organization.

The anarchist influence resulted in three self-proclaimed communists, Chen Gongbo, Tan Pingshan and Tan Zhitang refusing to join. The three had been publishing the leftist periodical *Guangdong qunbao* (Guangdong Masses). Reporting to the Party Congress, Chen Gongbo noted that the party was better thought of as an "anarcho-communist party." Between February and March 1921, the anarchist influence was overcome as on March 15 the anarchist publication, *Minsheng* (The People's Voice), started up again. The majority of its editorials critiqued Marxism and Bolshevism. The Russian supported *Laodongzhe* (The Laborer, the paper of the anarcho-communist party, ceased publication in January). The Guangzhou Bureau was rated as good in publication and propaganda work but not very active in the labor movement where the anarchists were stronger.

40 Voitinsky's August report sheds some light on why Tianjin did not have a delegate at the First Congress. Voitinsky was sending Stoyanovich from Tianjin to Guangzhou, implying that the work in Tianjin was in some way incorporated under the Beijing Revolutionary Bureau. The December 21, 1920 report on the work of the Siberian Bureau also notes its work, Doc. 8.

41 "Guangzhou gongchandang de baogao" (Report of the Guangzhou Communist Party), *Yida qianhou*, vol. 3, 1986, pp. 10–14, delivered by Chen Gongbo. An English translation can be found in Saich, 1996, pp. 25–27.

There is no original documentation about the remaining three localities that sent delegates to the Congress. The key figures in Wuhan (Dong Biwu) and Changsha (Mao Zedong) had been in contact with Li Hanjun and Chen Duxiu respectively in Shanghai. Memoirs credit Dong Biwu and Liu Bochui with working to establish the “small group” in Wuhan (or Hankou or Hubei). After the establishment of the Shanghai group, Li Hanjun wrote to Dong Biwu suggesting that a similar organization be set up in Hubei. Dong replied that he would begin work and shortly thereafter, Li Hanjun made a special trip to Wuhan for consultations with Dong Biwu, Zhang Guoen and others. At about the same time, Liu Bochui was in Shanghai on his way back to Wuhan from Guangzhou, where he had been involved in editing *Weimin Zhoukan* (*Weekly for the People*). In Shanghai, he consulted a number of times with Chen Duxiu, who persuaded him to join the Shanghai group. Shortly thereafter Chen sent him to Wuhan to help Dong set up the party.

Memoir literature suggests that one day in September a meeting was convened to set up the Wuhan Communist Research “Small Group” (*Gongchanzhuyi yanjiu xiaozu*).⁴² Six people attended the meeting: Dong Biwu, Liu Bochui, Chen Tanqiu, Bao Huiseng, Zhang Guoen and Deng Kaiqing.⁴³ The meeting discussed the draft of the party program that Liu had brought from Shanghai and listened to Liu’s report on the Shanghai group.⁴⁴ Bao Huiseng was placed in charge of work for the “small group,” Chen Tanqiu and Zhang Guoen were to take charge of organizational and financial work, respectively. The account of the meeting might be correct but the date is incorrect. In one memoir, Bao Huiseng (1961 [1980], p. 435) although holding to the September-October date, remembered that “perhaps the Beijing group was set up a little earlier than the Wuhan group,” the Beijing group having been set up in October. In 1921, Shumiatsky reported that the Wuhan SYC was established on November 7,

42 Also referred to as the Hubei Party branch (*Hubei dangzhibu*) or the party “small group” (*Hubei dang xiaozu*).

43 Liao Xinchu, 1980, p. 26. This article is a summary of several reminiscences by Bao Huiseng. Bao refers to the role played by Lin Bochui in setting up the group and provides the date of September 1920 as the date of its establishment. Bao was chosen as Deputy Secretary and Zhang Guoen was placed in charge of financial work. After the “small group” was set up, some time in the fall, Mamaev arrived in Wuhan to investigate the situation and to select students to go to Russia. Bao’s memoirs refer to Mamaev as one of Voitinsky’s entourage but although they must have been in contact, he was not a formal member of the delegation. See Bao Huiseng, 1961 [1980], p. 373; 1953 [1980], pp. 312–13.

44 Li Hanjun had written to his associate Dong Biwu in June or July 1920, asking him to set up a communist organization to which Dong replied positively, a request presumably reinforced by Mamaev. Bao, 1953 [1980].

with the initial objective of studying socialism and realizing its ideals.⁴⁵ The group was at the core of communist actions in Wuchang and the broader Wuhan area. Its main activities in Wuhan operated through the private secondary school that had been set up by Dong Biwu and Zhang Guoen, with Chen Tanqiu playing a very active role. The school opened on April 10, 1920. Early activists often set up schools to push revolutionary propaganda and to identify recruits. Dong, Zhang and Chen were three of the seven original members of the small group and subsequently five of the nine members came from the school (Wang Qian, 2001, pp. 46–47).

In Changsha, it is quite probable that a formal communist small group did not exist before the First Party Congress. In Changsha, the activities revolved around Mao Zedong and some of his close associates. The most important organization was the New Citizen's Study Society (van de Ven, 1991, pp. 66–69). Even though Mao and He Shuheng attended the Party Congress as Hunan delegates, it was not until October 10, 1921 that Mao participated in the establishment of a Hunan branch of the CCP (Pang Xianzhi, ed., vol. 1, 1993, pp. 85, 89). Peng Shuzhi was one dissenting voice about Mao's centrality (Cadart and Cheng, 1983, especially pp. 154–56), who given his Trotskyite views was hostile to Mao. Peng Shuzhi identifies He Minfan, director of the Chuanshan Secondary School as the main driving force in Hunan. He was introduced to Chen Duxiu by his former pupils in Shanghai who called on He Shuheng to form a communist group. The work began in July 1920 and by September the group consisted of five people: He Minfan, Liu Hun, one of the teachers in He's school, He Shuheng, Mao Zedong and Li Yirong. This informal group was actually the Marxist study society. Mao's early official biographer agrees on the timing of July–August but makes no mention of He Minfan and attributes the work to Mao as well as the founding of the Cultural Book Society (Li Rui, 1991, pp. 366–81).

What existed before the Congress in addition to the New Citizens Study Society with its leftist leanings was the SYC. Yi Yirong (1979a [1980], p. 283), one of those personally involved in the events, states quite clearly that before the First Party Congress there was only a SYC organization and no party organization. Peng Shuzhi agrees that it was following the Party Congress that the Hunan branch was formally set up, with Mao Zedong as secretary (Cadart and Cheng, 1983, p. 158).

The final group to send delegates to the First Party Congress was established in Jinan, Shandong province and again no contemporary sources exist. Li Da

45 This is feasible as the October meeting strongly emphasized the youth movement and its organization.

(1955 [1980]), based in Shanghai, provides the only source suggesting contacts between Shanghai and those in Shandong. He remembered that Chen Duxiu had asked Wang Leping to help organize a group but Wang deferred to three students at the Number Five Middle School. The delegates to the Congress attended more because of their relationship to Chen and Shanghai rather than because they represented an actual local organization. Other memoirs and accounts stress the primary role of Beijing and of Chen Weiren in particular, in organizing the group.⁴⁶

There were also self-proclaimed communist groups that did not send delegates to the Congress such as Tianjin and Nanjing and even Sichuan, where there was no connection with Shanghai. The communists active in Tianjin fell under the jurisdiction of Beijing and thus did not send representatives and in Nanjing, according to Chen Tanqiu there were a few communists but not an actual organization.⁴⁷

Especially interesting is the case of Chongqing, where a very lively communist organization is reported to have thrived.⁴⁸ The report described the activities of a group that was established on March 12, 1920, formed by students and workers who had been involved in strikes. The group set itself the task of linking with other communist groups in China and establishing contact with Soviet Russia to develop a better understanding of communism. For a long time, neither later Soviet nor Chinese sources referred to this organization: clearly it did not fit the dominant narrative of either set of official historians.

This raises questions about the provenance of the document and why, if it is genuine, no one was invited to attend the First Party Congress. The report was delivered to the Comintern by four group members who had traveled to Moscow via Shanghai, intending to attend the Comintern's Third Congress (Liao Huaping, Du Xiaoma, Xu Dunrang and Qin Huiseng). The official delegates to the Congress, Zhang Tailei and Yu Xiusong, objected to their credentials and had them expelled as they were not legal representatives from China. Most of those who planned to go to Moscow from Sichuan were

46 On Chen's role see Wang Weiwan and Li Zhaonian, 1981, p. 97. Zhang Guotao did not mention Chen but writes that Beijing organized the communist "small group" and the SYC in Shandong. Chang Kuo-t'ao, 1971, vol. 1, p. 138. Ma Baosen's memoirs (1951 [1980], p. 393) noted that Chen went to Shandong to set up a party branch but this was after the Party Congress.

47 On Tianjin see Zhonggong Tianjin shiwei dangshi yanjiushe (2005, especially p. 65). On the question of Nanjing, Chengdu and Hangzhou having communists but no organization and thus not invited to the First Party Congress see Chen Tanqiu, 1936.

48 "Sichuansheng Chongqing gongchan zhuyi zuzhi de baogao" (Report of the Chongqing, Sichuan Province, communist organization), in *Zhongyang dang'anquan* (1984), pp. 27–32; van de Ven, 1991, pp. 73–75.

anarchists and indeed the organization they had founded, the “Appropriate Society” (*shishe*), was an anarchist organization. In turn, this was a “secret society” based on the Chongqing Socialist Party Branch that had been established in March 1912 (Yang Shiyuan, 1996, pp. 3–8 and pp. 22–26). The report was written by Liao Huaping, an influential member of the group who had studied at the Shanghai Foreign Languages School. Liao was an anarchist with no affection for Chen Duxiu and the Bolsheviks. On March 9, 1921, he wrote “Now in Guangzhou, the Bolsheviks are very active, for example, Chen Duxiu is very active in Guangzhou, he often howls in the press ‘advocating that the anarchists are a few hundred years too early,’ is he a scoundrel or not?” This would explain why the preparatory group in Shanghai would not want to invite such a critical group to attend the Congress.⁴⁹

A range of organizations had developed under the broad umbrella of the communist organization and although the precise names and structure differed from place to place, by the time of the First Party Congress a threefold structure had evolved. Operating, in many cases illegally at the core, were the “small groups,” and operating semi-openly were the SYCs, providing a recruitment pool for the party, and, presenting a public face, the Marxist Study Societies were trying to reach the widest audience possible. Just as the organization varied from place to place, so too did the type and intensity of work. However, with varying degrees of success, the nascent groups became involved in the labor movement, propaganda and youth work.

49 Li Rong, 2011, pp. 38–48. Li Rong suggests that because the group had no direct contact with the Shanghai group or because it had lost contact are the most likely explanations for its members not attending.

The Chinese Communist Party Decides its Path, Sneevliet Suggests a Different Route

When Sneevliet arrived in Shanghai on June 3, 1921, posing as a journalist, the party had fallen into disarray following Voitinsky's departure.¹ On arrival, he immediately contacted Nikolsky, who had recently been sent by the Far East Secretariat based in Irkutsk (*Bericht des Genossen H. Maring*, July 1922).² Sneevliet had to start from the beginning (Isaacs, 1971, p. 102), working under "highly unfavorable conditions" (*Bericht des Genossen H. Maring*, July 1922). The Russian representatives in Beijing and the Irkutsk Bureau informed him that the communists had weak links with the working-class and that very little real organizational work had been accomplished (Isaacs, 1971, p. 103). Only in Guangdong, where the Guomindang (GMD) and anarchist influence were strongest and among the railway workers at Changxindian was modern organizational work carried out. Facing this situation, the two men set about breathing life back into the party and encouraging it to convene the Congress.

Sneevliet came with no specific instructions, basing his preparation on the discussions and theses of the Comintern. However, he did come armed as a veteran activist who was well-versed in the norms of a Bolshevik revolutionary party and his experiences in the Dutch Indies. The Comintern theses provided him with a tactical plan that necessitated promoting a national-revolutionary movement and prioritizing the need to find a nationalist movement within which to work.

Sneevliet enjoyed great flexibility in the field, enhanced by the difficulties in communicating with his "superiors" in Moscow. He made the unlikely claim that until early December 1921 while in Shanghai, he avoided undertaking independent work to prevent organizational disruption and he confined himself simply to executing orders that he and Nikolsky received (*Bericht*

1 For details of his troublesome trip to China and the dating see Saich, 1991, vol. 1, pp. 31–33 and his July 7–9, 1921 letter to the Comintern, in Sneevliet, July 7–9, 1921, 2011, p. 5.

2 Initially, Chinese sources referred to Nikolsky as a representative of the Profintern, primarily based on the memoirs of Bao Huiseng. However, the two contemporary sources both name Nikolsky as a representative of the Far Eastern Secretariat: Sneevliet's report to the Executive Committee of the Communist International and the report on the First Party Congress written in the latter half of 1921 and sent to the Comintern. The Russian version and an English translation can be found in Saich, 1991, vol.1, pp. 200–08. Nikolsky was also known as Viktor Aleksandrovich Borg.

des Genossen H. Maring, July 1922).³ After agreeing to work together, the two men met frequently.⁴ A Russian comrade, probably Polevoy, linked them up with Chinese and Russian comrades. Sneevliet was under the impression that he was the Comintern representative, proposed by Lenin himself (Sneevliet, March 29, 1942) but on arrival, a courier informed him that he had been appointed a member of the Far Eastern Secretariat.⁵

It is highly unlikely that Sneevliet, when reporting to the Executive Committee of the Communist International (ECCI), would say anything other than that he was executing orders. This comment might also have been intended to deflect any blame for problems in the work of the Far Eastern Secretariat. Sneevliet was scornful of the role of the Secretariat and his position within it, claiming that he was a “member in name only” and he never received any literature from Irkutsk (Bericht des Genossen H. Maring, July 1922). Moreover, he opposed the whole idea of the Secretariat, feeling that a Comintern Secretariat for the Far East in Irkutsk was useless as the city was too distant and no regular links could be maintained through Manchuria. In July 1922, he stated that “I cannot bear any responsibility for the tactics of the now dissolved Secretariat, especially with respect to the Korean affair.” He remained bitter and he continued his harsh critique of the Secretariat in his 1935 discussions with Harold Isaacs. He criticized its pro-Wu Peifu orientation and its perception of Sun Yat-sen as “an idle dreamer,” with the Secretariat’s activities governed “solely by what it considered to be Russia’s interests in North China” (Isaacs, 1971, p. 102). This reflected Sneevliet’s increasing frustration with the rise of the Russian national interest at the expense of the demands of the global revolutionary movement.

Sneevliet’s critique notwithstanding, the Secretariat played an important role in pushing the convocation of the First Congress of the Chinese Communist Party (CCP), which Sneevliet and Nikolsky both attended. Voitinsky’s visit had prompted the Secretariat to promote a centralized organization for the radical activists in China. The Secretariat had already developed its own contacts with representatives of the Chinese communists and in March 1921, Zhang

3 While in China, Nikolsky had three tasks to perform. The first was to handle the arrangements for the First Party Congress, the second was to manage financial affairs and the third was to arrange for the Congress of the Toilers of the East. After returning to Russia to attend the latter Congress, Nikolsky changed his name and began work in Northeast China. Personal communication from Professor Kartunova.

4 Sneevliet letter July 7–9, 1921 [2011]. Nikolsky arrived a few days after Sneevliet with the remit to work on China, Japan and Korea. Importantly, Nikolsky brought some money and received various supplies.

5 Organizationally, this was feasible, as the Secretariat in Irkutsk had not been set up when Sneevliet attended the Comintern Congress and was not established until January 1921 to coordinate work.

Tailei arrived in Irkutsk, where he was joined by Yang Hete, to establish closer relations (Ding Zejin and Wang Shude, 1981, p. 87). Zhang Tailei and Yang Hete arranged for the establishment of a Chinese section of the Far Eastern Secretariat.⁶ Zhang (1921 [2013]) reported that in March a preparatory conference had been held to coordinate better the communist movement and to discuss the movement's goals and objectives. The meeting formulated a provisional program outlining the structure, a work plan and its tasks among the unions. A contemporary Russian account states that "forming a single political party of the revolutionary proletariat, namely a party of communists" was one of its tasks.⁷ Zhang and Yang were then sent to Moscow to attend the Third Comintern Congress (June–July 1921). With Zhang Tailei on his way to Moscow, the Secretariat proposed that the Congress be held in China, or indeed it was already being held.⁸

Nikolsky's job was to oversee the convening of the Congress, while Sneevliet was sent to study the movements in the Far East and to investigate whether a Comintern Bureau rather than a party should be established in the Far East (Bericht des Genossen H. Maring, July 1922).⁹ Some Chinese historians concur that Nikolsky was the motive force (Zhu Zechun, 1998, pp. 70–72), whereas others (Zhang Weiliang, 2011) suggest that he was too inexperienced for such an important role. While the idea may not have been Sneevliet's, together with Nikolsky he threw himself into the work and played a key role at the meeting. Overseeing party affairs in Chen Duxiu's absence, Li Da (1955 [1980]) stated that following an introductory talk, the two proposed convening the Congress. As a result, Li Da sent letters to seven party organizations, requesting that they select delegates to come to Shanghai. Bao Huiseng added that if it had not been

6 For the duties of this section as outlined by Zhang Tailei see Eudin and North, 1957, pp. 139–140. Zhang implied that the CCP already existed as a section of the Comintern. This should be read as intent rather than reality.

7 *Kommunist*, Irkutsk, no. 7, 1921, p. 4, quoted in K. Shevelyov, 1981, p. 136. A telegram from Shumiatsky in Irkutsk to the ECCI (March 27, 1921) referred to the forthcoming Party Congress to be held in May 1921 "with the participation and under the leadership of our representatives." Holubnychy, 1979, p. 147. This was ambitious given that Sneevliet and Nikolsky did not arrive in Shanghai until June!

8 This can be gleaned from an essay written by Shumiatsky written in late April or early May, *Narody Dal'nego Vostoka*, no. 1, 1921. For an analysis see Ishikawa, 2013, pp. 228–29, Shumiatsky must have been referring to the meeting mentioned by Zhang. The March meeting in Shanghai called for establishing a unified revolutionary proletarian political party.

9 Like Voitinsky, Sneevliet went to China under the guise of journalism using the assumed name, Andresen. His original intention was to go to Japan and Korea but his arrest in Vienna, while trying to obtain a visa for China, made this impossible. He had arranged a job as a correspondent for the *Oriental Economist* based in Tokyo—a strange circumstance given that he presented himself in China as a representative of the Comintern.

for Sneevliet, the Congress might have been delayed for “one, two or even more years.” The plans and the expense estimates were all drawn up by Sneevliet.¹⁰

The atmosphere running up to the Congress was not good, arrangements were chaotic and conflicts between Chen Duxiu and Li Hanjun over how to manage affairs had soured relations. Sneevliet was not impressed, seeing little to work with and an organization that he deemed incompetent. Despite his active engagement, in the run-up to and during the Congress, Sneevliet did not think the time was ripe to establish a party. Just prior to the Congress, he wrote that not too much money should be spent in China and he expressed the hope that in a year or so, it might be possible to form a “truly well-organized political party” (Sneevliet letter, July 7–9, 1921 [2011]). One year later, his view had not changed significantly informing the ECCI that “a propaganda group would have been much better” (Bericht des Genossen H. Maring, July 1922). For Sneevliet, the real action lay elsewhere in the South and with the nationalists. The founding of the CCP was not such a big deal for him!

Sneevliet never abandoned this negative view of the party’s premature founding. He retained his preference for the dissemination of propaganda about Marxism and activism among the workers’ movement rather than establishing a political party. This immaturity was a frequent theme in his reports and letters. In May 1923, the divisions within the party led him to report that “our group is still so that one *cannot* call it a party.”¹¹ In June 1923, he wrote that “the fact that it [the party] was born much too early (in 1920) or, better said fabricated, still weighs on the party.” Not only was the party born too early but also it was “supported too strongly by foreign means” (Letter from Sneevliet to Zinoviev, Bukharin, Radek, and Safarov, June 20, 1923, S.A. 231). Despite his frustration with the independent spirit of some Chinese comrades, such comments supported his overriding view that it was too soon to establish a mature political party. He saw the independent spirit as a sign of naivety.

10 Bao Huiseng, 1979 [1980], pp. 95–106. Perhaps to give credibility to greater Chinese engagement, Bao mistakenly remembered that Sneevliet and Nikolsky had several discussions with Li Dazhao and Zhang Guotao in Beijing about convening a national conference. Following this, they went to Shanghai with Zhang for discussions with Li Hanjun, Li Da and others. Sneevliet did not go to Beijing. Zhang makes no mention of such talks in his memoirs and notes explicitly that he met Sneevliet for the first time in Shanghai (Chang Kuo-t'ao, vol. 1, 1971, p. 137). Zhang’s timing is off, claiming that following his arrival around the middle of May, he went immediately to speak with Li Da who told him about the recent arrival of Nikolsky and Sneevliet. Yet, we know Sneevliet did not arrive until June 3. Sneevliet’s travel diary for the period makes no mention of a visit to Beijing, S.A. no. 226.

11 H. Maring, “Bericht über die Lage in China und Unseres Arbeit für die Periode vom 15 bis 31 Mai 1923” (Report on the Situation in China and Our Work During the Period from May 15 to 21, 1923), May 31, 1923, S.A. no, 297.

Clashes with his Chinese colleagues, especially Li Da and Li Hanjun, began as soon as Sneevliet arrived. Sneevliet's first meeting with the two Li's was far from cordial. Announcing that he was the Comintern's official representative, Sneevliet demanded a work report from Li Hanjun, which Li refused to write for the simple reason that there was nothing to report given the party's infancy and collapse following Voitinsky's departure. In any case, Li's disdain for practical work and his academic focus would have led him to shy away from such work. If that was not enough, then they clashed about the program of activities and the budget. Li Hanjun viewed the planned work as premature: the communist party had not yet been officially established. Sneevliet offered Comintern support but Li Hanjun resisted, claiming that even after the party was founded, the question of joining the Comintern would have to be investigated. Such reticence did not last long and money clearly talked: from October 1921 to June 1922, the Comintern provided 16,655 of the 17,655-dollar expenditures.¹² Zhang Guotao was called on to break the deadlock and, on Li Da's advice, operated as the official go-between. Sneevliet was not an easy person to deal with and affected an air of superiority over his Chinese comrades (Chang Kuo-t'ao, 1971, vol. 1, pp. 136–39).¹³

Looking back over its 100-year history, the founding Congress has assumed a mythic significance but it was not only Sneevliet who considered its establishment not too important. Congress discussions revealed a wide range of opinions and many of the participants abandoned the party shortly thereafter. If it was so important, why didn't either Chen Duxiu or Li Dazhao attend? They played a pivotal role in introducing Marxism to Chinese intellectual circles and official accounts place great importance on their roles as the prime movers in the CCP's establishment. The predominant claim is that they both were too busy with their work in Guangzhou and Beijing respectively. Chen was working in Guangzhou as the Commissioner of Education. Zhang Guotao claims

12 Chen Duxiu, June 30, 1922 [1985], p. 304. Bao Huiseng remembered that each delegate received 100 *yuan* in travel expenses to attend the Congress (a tidy sum in those days) and a further 50 *yuan* to travel back. Bao Huiseng, 1980; 1953 [1980].

13 Although Zhang became a fierce opponent of Sneevliet's strategy, his views about Sneevliet are worth noting, reflecting the view of others. He found him an "extraordinary man," whose "sympathy was with the oppressed nations of the East." However, he thought Sneevliet "dwelt too much upon the backwardness of Asian people, and he joked about the infantile simplicity of Oriental socialists." Sneevliet had "acquired the habits and attitudes of the Dutchmen that lived as colonial masters in the East Indies ... He saw himself coming as an angel of liberation to the Asian people." He "seemed endowed with the social superiority complex of the white man." Regarding his stubbornness, Zhang wrote "he would persist in his views with such stubbornness that you would think he was prepared to challenge to a duel." Chang Kuo-t'ao, 1971, vol. 1, p. 139.

that Li Dazhao was busy with university work. It may have been that upon receiving the invitation from Shanghai, the Beijing group did not prioritize the meeting. Rather than send a major figure such as Li Dazhao, it chose to send two students, Zhang Guotao and Liu Renjing.¹⁴

The discussions at the Congress are clear but there have been long-running disagreements about the timing of the Congress and who attended. We can now answer with a higher degree of conviction. The report on the Congress (1921 [1972], Saich, 1991, vol. 1, pp. 200–08) cites a start date of June 20, which is clearly mistaken and should read July 20.¹⁵ This was the scheduled date but the report notes that it began on July 23 once the delegates from Beijing, Hankou, Guangzhou, Changsha, Jinan and Japan arrived.¹⁶ Confusion about the closing date derives from the interruption of the meeting by an intruder and the subsequent police search of the premises. As a result, the meeting reconvened on a boat on South Lake, Jiaying. The most reliable date for the closing is August 5, rather than the dates July 31 or early August given in the memoir literature.¹⁷

14 Liu Renjing, 1979 [1980], p. 74. For the different views about why Li did not attend see Miao Tijun and Dou Chunfang, 2007, pp. 72–74.

15 The mistake is all the more likely as the original document was in English and translated into Russian. Personal communication from Professor Shevelyov. Most probably, the document together with the “First Program” and the “First Decision” of the CCP were sent to the Comintern by Sneevliet, Dong Biwu, 1971 [1980], pp. 366–67. This would explain why they are in English. The Russian text was published in *Narody Azii I Afriki*, no. 6, 1972, p. 157, and is translated in Saich, 1991, vol. 1, pp. 203–08.

16 Some participants did not set out in time for a June 20 starting date. For example, Bao Huiseng only left Hong Kong on July 15, arriving in Shanghai around July 20 (Shao Weizheng, 1980, p. 113). Liu Renjing first attended the Youth Conference in Nanjing from July 1 to 4. (Liu Renjing, 1978 [1980], p. 209). Mao Zedong and He Shuheng left Changsha for Shanghai on June 29: the entry on Xie Juezai’s diary reads: “Today at six o’clock p.m. Shuheng left for Shanghai accompanied by Renzhi to attend the national ...” Renzhi is a courtesy name for Mao Zedong; see He Shisan and He Shisi, 1981, pp. 22–25.

17 August 5 is mentioned in a letter written by Iu. Smurgis, October 13, 1921. Mainland historians have shifted towards accepting this date, Shao Weizheng 1980b and Cao Zhongbin, 2000. Smurgis was sent by Chita in November 1920 to set up a Far Eastern Secretariat of the International Labor Federation (later the Profintern). Toward the end of 1921, he published a pamphlet entitled “China and its Labor Movement.” This well-informed pamphlet highlights the backward labor conditions and argues that these had to be taken into account when formulating policy. Smurgis was critical of Chinese intellectuals and communists for not addressing the real problems confronting China. He highlights the paucity of articles about the Chinese labor movement in the journal *The Communist (Gongchandang)*. The recollections of Chen Tanqiu (1936), Dong Biwu (1971 [1980]), Bao Huiseng (1953 [1980]80), and Li Da (1955 [1980]) all suggest that the final session was held on July 31, while Zhang Guotao suggests that a day had elapsed and Wang Huiwu, who suggested the venue and made the arrangements, indicated that several days had passed (1959 [1980], p. 56). Wang was Li Da’s wife.

The number of delegates in attendance and their status has also been subject to debate. Confusion stems from the report sent to the Comintern, which states clearly that twelve delegates from seven localities, including Shanghai participated. Two of these localities sent one delegate and five localities sent two (Saich, 1991, Vol. 1, p. 204); Chen Gongbo's thesis (1924) also mentions twelve delegates, as does Mao Zedong in his comments to Edgar Snow (1937, p. 157). Mao's concurrence makes it difficult for official party historians to dispute the number.

Actually, there were thirteen Chinese attendees together with two attendees from international organizations, making a total of fifteen participants. The confusion revolves around Bao Huiseng and He Shuheng. Zhang Guotao (1971, vol. 1, p. 142) claimed that he refused to recognize He Shuheng's qualifications and, as a result, Mao Zedong thought of a way to send He back to Hunan. It seems highly improbable that such formalities operated at the Congress. Would the group of young men have acted in such a formalistic way at their first get together? Bao Huiseng who attended described himself as one of two Guangzhou delegates, chosen as a substitute for Chen Duxiu who was too busy to attend. As we have seen, Bao happened to be in Shanghai for other reasons.

This does not resolve why the 1921 report mentions twelve delegates. Chen Gongbo and Bao Huiseng were the two delegates from Guangzhou but Chen did not attend the final session on the lake. In all probability, delegates to the young party did not care about formal credentials, especially since Bao Huiseng and Chen Gongbo were well known in radical circles. It seems unlikely that anyone would have objected to their presence but perhaps the formal report still excluded Chen. This would provide the following line-up of attendees to the First Party Congress.

<i>Locality or Organization</i>	<i>Name</i>
Shanghai	Li Da, Li Hanjun
Beijing	Zhang Guotao, Liu Renjing
Wuhan	Dong Biwu, Chen Tanqiu
Hunan/Changsha	Mao Zedong, He Shuheng
Guangzhou	Bao Huiseng
Jinan	Wang Jinmei, Deng Enming
Chinese in Japan for Study	Zhou Fuhai
Guangzhou but not registered formally	Chen Gongbo
Comintern/Far Eastern Secretariat	Sneevliet
Far Eastern Secretariat	Nikolsky

The Congress was a lively affair, with the delegates representing fifty-three party members (Wang Jianying, 1983, pp. 1–2). Zhang Guotao chaired the meeting and opened by announcing that the purpose was to formulate a program and plan for practical work.¹⁸ The opening session worked out an agenda for the Congress, heard speeches from Sneevliet and Nikolsky and began listening to work reports by the local groups. Liu Renjing and Li Hanjun acted as interpreters to and from English.¹⁹ The reports all made the same three points: membership was very small; membership should be increased; and work should be carried out to organize workers and to conduct propaganda. The reports ran over into the second day. At Sneevliet's suggestion, the Congress was then adjourned for two days to enable a draft party program and work plan to be drawn up for discussion. The next three sessions animatedly debated the drafts.

Not all were happy with Sneevliet's role and presumably with that of Nikolsky. Li Da and Li Hanjun wanted Sneevliet to have little to do with the Congress, while Zhang Guotao wanted to treat him strictly as an advisor (Chang Kuo-t'ao, 1971, vol. 1, pp. 147–78). Zhang's claim that he did not seek instructions from Sneevliet is disputed by others and is not borne out by the Congress report. Indeed, Bao Huiseng (1979 [1980], p. 97) suggested that Zhang's appointment to chair the Congress had already been approved by Sneevliet.

This notwithstanding, Sneevliet was active at the Congress and made an important speech. To these CCP founding members, he presented an impressive figure. He arrived bearing the authority of the Comintern, personally dispatched by Lenin, and he had extensive personal experience in organizing labor in both the colonial heartlands and the colonies themselves. For those who had only recently begun to grapple with the writings of Marx and Lenin, Sneevliet appeared not only to have mastered the language of class struggle and national liberation but also had made significant practical contributions. In particular, he persuaded the local comrades that theory, party organization and propaganda were important as political weapons.²⁰ These themes were frequently reinforced by other Comintern members such as

18 "The First Congress of the CCP" (1921 [1972], in Saich, 1991, vol. 1, pp. 200–08). This account is based on this report unless otherwise stated.

19 Zhou Fuhai also helped with interpreting, Bao Huiseng, 1979 [1980], p. 97. The reports for the Beijing and Guangzhou communist small groups prepared by Zhang Guotao and Chen Gongbo respectively, are translated in Saich, 1996, pp. 19–27.

20 Apart from his regular contacts with party leaders and his briefings at meetings, Sneevliet published numerous articles in the Chinese communist press under another of his aliases, *Sun Duo* (Sentot). For an English translation of these articles and others written during Sneevliet's time in China see Saich, 1991, vol. 2, pp. 737–836.

Voitinsky and those Chinese who had studied in Moscow or overseas, such as Cai Hesen.

Sneevliet addressed the Congress on his experiences in Java and recommended that the party pay special attention to the establishment of workers' organizations (First Congress, 1921 [1972] in Saich, 1991, vol. 1). He stressed that the number of workers in the party was too small and that consequently the party should actively recruit more working-class members.²¹ Nikolsky talked about the Far Eastern Secretariat and the situation in Russia. On Nikolsky's suggestion, a telegram was sent to Irkutsk to inform them about the progress of the Congress.

After the second day, the meeting adjourned for two days to draft a party program and a work plan for discussion and a committee was elected to carry out this work. Perhaps because of concerns expressed by some Chinese delegates, neither Sneevliet nor Nikolsky attended the drafting sessions nor the following three sessions (July 27, 28 and 29) that were convened to discuss the program and the party's future work. Or perhaps it was just simple logistics as everything would have to be interpreted. Had Sneevliet attended, he would not have approved of the isolationist tone of the party's program and the rejection of collaboration with revolutionary nationalists.

The discussions exposed the deep differences of opinion among the Chinese delegates. In particular, there were sharp debates about organizational questions such as party membership, how to understand the current situation and whether party members could join the National Parliament. The most divisive issue was whether party members could and should become officials and/or members of the National Parliament. By the end of the fifth session (July 29), this latter question had not yet been resolved and the decision was taken to hold it over to the next Congress (The First Congress of the CCP, 1921 [1972]).

Views were polarized, with Li Hanjun the key representative of the minority view and Liu Renjing the fiercest defender of the majority viewpoint. With his preference for research, Li Hanjun opposed direct involvement in the workers' movement. At the current stage, the working-class was unprepared and had an inadequate understanding of Marxism. Thus, the first task was to undertake a lengthy period of educational and propaganda work, organizing Marxist universities, publishing journals, pamphlets etc. Intellectuals were to be armed with Marxism and then the workers could be educated to raise their

21 Bao Huiseng, 1953 [1980], p. 315 and Bao Huiseng, 1979, p. 97. Somewhat exaggeratedly Bao claims that Sneevliet's report lasted for five hours! This view is countered by Liu Renjing, 1979b [1980], p. 112, who claims that Sneevliet did not know enough about China to talk for that long!

class consciousness and become organized. While this work was in progress, the comparative values of Russian Bolshevism and German Social Democracy could be analyzed so that a decision could be taken about which best suited China's needs. This led Li Hanjun to oppose forming a tightly organized party based on the working-class that would usher in the dictatorship of the proletariat. Some form of organization was needed for party work but it was not vitally important. Li Hanjun preferred a looser-based party that would also recruit students, intellectuals and anyone who believed in Marxism and was willing to propagate it.

Li concluded that there was no danger for communists to act as officials in the "bourgeois government." The final goal of the revolution was still a long way off and, as a result, it would be necessary to work with the bourgeoisie to improve the workers' conditions and to prepare for the future proletarian revolution. Thus, Li favored support for the government based in Guangzhou rather than the Northern Government.²²

On all these issues, despite some support from other delegates, Li Hanjun found himself in the minority. Zhang Guotao claimed that except for Chen Gongbo who expressed a "vague sympathy," all the delegates were critical to varying degrees (Chang Kuo-t'ao, 1971, vol. 1, p. 144). This is disputed by Zhou Fuhai (1927 [1967]), who claims that he was in Li's faction, which Zhang and Liu Renjing accused of being "pessimistic."²³

The strongest opponent was Liu Renjing and, to a lesser extent, Zhang Guotao. Liu supported the dictatorship of the proletariat as the immediate objective, objected to joining the "bourgeois democratic revolution" and was against the recruitment of intellectuals into the party! Party members were to be recruited from among the industrial workers, a clean break made with the bourgeoisie and opposition to any form on "public work."²⁴ This approach commanded the majority with strong support from Bao Huiseng, Chen Tanqiu and Zhang Guotao (Bao Huiseng, 1953 [1980], p. 318 and Chen Tanqiu, 1936). Bao was one of the main opponents of cooperation with Sun Yat-sen in the South (Shao Weizheng, 1980b, pp. 168 and 161).

Sneevliet and Nikolsky returned to attend the aborted session at Li Hanjun's home. This was at Sneevliet's request as he felt excluded from the discussions

22 Bao Huiseng, 1953 [1980], pp. 317-18; Chen Tanqiu, 1936; Li Da, 1955 [1980], p. 11; Liu Renjing, 1978 [1980], pp. 212-13; Chang Kuo-t'ao, 1971, vol.1, pp. 144-45; Zhou Fuhai, 1927 [1967]; and Shao Weizheng, 1980a, pp. 161-75.

23 Chen Tanqiu, 1936, includes Li Da as a supporter of Li Hanjun.

24 Chang Kuo-t'ao, 1971, vol. 1, p. 144; Bao Huiseng, 1978b [1980], p. 375 and 1953 [1980], pp. 317-19; Chen Tanqiu, 1936; Li Da, 1955 [1980], p. 11; Liu Renjing, 1978 [1980], pp. 212-13; and Shao Weizheng, 1980b, pp. 161-75.

(Chang Kuo-t'ao, 1921, vol. 1, p. 148).²⁵ He wished to express his opinion on certain questions concerning the disagreements that had arisen during the debates. Zhang Guotao called to delay taking any decisions until the following day, as Sneevliet would make a speech and had some relevant ideas (Bao Huiseng, 1953 [1980]). The move to Jiaying deprived Sneevliet of the chance to make his views known to the Congress.²⁶

The decisions adopted by the delegates steered between the two extremes, although on balance they reflected the ideas of Liu Renjing rather than Li Hanjun. However, on all issues Li Hanjun was willing to bow to the majority (Liu Renjing, 1978 [1980], p. 212). If Li did not attend the final session, he would have had little input in any case. It is most likely that the ideas and positions that were taken were more fluid and hazy than later accounts suggest. Certainly, talk of Liu Renjing representing the “left” faction (Chen Tanqiu, 1936) is a case of rewriting history in light of later disputes between Stalin and Trotsky and the ideological labelling that became a common practice in CCP polemics. Showing the fluidity and informality, Liu voted for his “main opponent,” Li Hanjun, in the elections held by secret ballot (Liu Renjing, 1978 [1980], p. 214).

Highly inexperienced and with no interaction with fraternal communist parties, the delegates had little idea on what to base their decisions. The meagre sources they had were the “Program of the American Communist Party,” the “Manifesto of the American Communist Party” and a description of the procedures of the British Communist Party’s First Congress.²⁷ The CCP’s initial program and the decision reflected the language of class politics and it adopted a strident tone. The First Party Program incorporated a harsh stance with a four-point program calling for the overthrow of the capitalist classes by the “revolutionary army of the proletariat” and the adoption of the dictatorship of the proletariat to “complete the end of class struggle—abolishing classes.” Crucial to this was the overthrow of “the private ownership of capital” and “confiscation of all the means of production.” Finally, the program called for uniting with the Third International.²⁸ The chief policy objectives were to

25 It is not clear why the police came to the house but it is the case that Sneevliet had been under supervision since his arrival in Shanghai.

26 Chen Gongbo did not make the final session and some sources claim that it was police surveillance that caused Li Hanjun to miss the final session, Zhang Zhong and Chen Zhiying, 1981, p. 17.

27 The documents from the United States were published in the second issue of *Gongchandang*, December 1920 and the materials about the British Communist Party were published in the first issue (November). On the influence of these documents see Ishikawa, 2013, pp. 68, 261–63.

28 The decision required the central party authorities to report monthly to the Comintern and, if necessary, to send a representative to be stationed in the Far Eastern Secretariat.

promote the social revolution and to cut off completely “all relations with the yellow intellectual class and other such groups.”²⁹ This isolationist stance was included in the decision of the Congress that called for relations with existing parties to be those of “independence, aggression, and exclusion.” The party was to “stand up on behalf of the proletariat” and “allow no relationship with other parties and groups.”³⁰

Membership guidelines allowed anyone to join “who accepts the program and policies of our Party and who promises loyalty.” In line with the exclusionist stance, any member had first to sever relations with any other party or group that opposed the communist program. During the debates, some pointed out that an exclusive reliance on industrial workers was insufficient not only because virtually all members were intellectuals but also because the industrial working-class was not sufficiently developed at the time (Bao Huiseng, 1953 [1980], p. 319). This was in line with Sneevliet’s perspective but his views were overridden.

The weakness of the working-class did not prevent the party from placing the workers’ movement at the core of its work with the chief aim being the creation of industrial unions (First Program, in Ch’en Kung-po, 1924 [1960], pp. 103–04). As a preparatory step, “labor supplementary schools” were to be set up together with an institution for the study of labor organization to provide a good flow of information. Although the Congress does not seem to have discussed it specifically, after the Congress Sneevliet proposed establishing a Labor Secretariat.

There was stalemate rather than consensus on the important question of working for the “bourgeois” government. Point fourteen of the program in general barred members from holding posts as government officials or as members of parliament but exempted soldiers, policemen and civil service employees (Ch’en Kung-po, 1924 [1960], p. 103). Unanimity could also not be reached on the question of the Southern Government and Sun Yat-sen. Some delegates argued that neither the Northern Government nor the Southern Government was any good, while others argued that as Chen Duxiu was working with the Guangzhou Government, it must have been relatively more progressive (Li

29 “The First Program of the Communist Party of China 1921.” The original English-language version appears in Ch’en Kung-po [Chen Gongbo] (1924 [1960], pp. 102–03. The essay was Chen’s M.A. thesis at Columbia University and was edited for publication by Professor Wilbur. The Program appears as Appendix 1. Li Yuzhen, 2007, pp. 65–71, 91, suggests that the program was not a formal document of the Congress but rather a report or notes. She claims that the program went through three drafts: first in mid-1920 when Chen Duxiu and Voitinsky worked on it; second after Sneevliet arrived in Shanghai and finally, at the Congress itself.

30 “The First Decision as to the Objects of the CCP.” The original English-language version is published as Appendix 2 of Chen Gongbo’s thesis, 1924 [1960].

Da, 1955 [1980], p. 11). Dong Biwu, Li Hanjun and the majority felt that Sun had played a progressive role since the founding of the *Tongmenghui* and it was possible to work with him (Shao, 1980a, p. 161). This perspective was not reflected in either the program or the decision but it may have given Sneevliet some sense that his idea for cooperation with nationalist elements might find support.

One last controversy was whether or not the party joined the Comintern at this time. The program would suggest that this was the case; the English text uses the word unite rather than join. Of course, this could be merely a linguistic issue but official party documents declared that it joined the Comintern at the Second Party Congress (July 1922).³¹ “A Brief History of the Chinese Communist Party” states that the divide made it “impossible to discuss or even raise the question of the CCP joining the Comintern” (Wilbur and How, 1989, p. 453).³² Certainly, Sneevliet’s demeanor and his clashes with Li Hanjun before the Congress and with Chen Duxiu afterwards raised concerns about the overbearing nature of the Comintern representatives, creating worries for some about Comintern dominance of their young movement. Zhang Guotao confirmed it was agreed that the CCP become a branch of the Comintern but this was not included in the Constitution (Chang Kuo-t’ao, 1971, vol. 1, p. 146). The only mention in the 1921 report is that Nikolsky suggested that the Congress telegraph Irkutsk to inform them of the progress. Sneevliet went further in his 1922 report to the ECCI and the Program and the Decision all indicated that in principle the party decided to join the Comintern even if there was no formal decision.³³ For the Comintern, given that its members promoted the idea of a Congress and Nikolsky was sent from Irkutsk to oversee the meeting, it must have been obvious that the CCP was a member. For Nikolsky and Sneevliet, it was inconceivable that a communist party could be established and not automatically be a member of the Comintern. This did not mean that the sensibilities and the strong nationalist sentiments of the

31 “Zhongguo gongchandang jiaru disan guoji juejian” (The Decision of the CCP to Join the Third International), in “*Erda*” he “*sanda*,” 1985, p. 68.

32 The brief history was compiled by Samuil Naumovich Naumov, a political advisor to the Whampoa [Huangpu] Military Academy based on discussions with various Chinese comrades. It provides a flavor of the atmosphere but it is full of errors.

33 Sneevliet wrote “in July 1921 representatives of the local branches met in Shanghai and decided to establish a Communist Party section of the Comintern.” The Program notes that the party is to unite with the Third International, while the Decision’s last section is on relations between the party and the Comintern, which notes the need to report monthly, send a representative to Irkutsk and send deputies to various Far East nations to “further plans for union in the class struggle.”

Chinese comrades would prevent sharp divisions about the correct relationship between the CCP, the Comintern and its representatives.

The concluding session elected the central leadership positions. As total party membership was small, they decided to set up a provisional Central Executive Bureau to maintain liaison with the various branches. Chen Duxiu, Zhang Guotao and Li Da were elected members, with Chen as secretary and Zhang and Li in charge of organization and propaganda work respectively (Wang Jianying, 1983, p. 2). In Chen's continued absence, Zhou Fuhai was to deputize for him.³⁴

The Congress documents were never published (Saich, 1991, vol. 1, pp. 68–69). Sneevliet and Nikolsky were opposed to the majority view and had overturned a proposal by Zhang Guotao that there was no difference between the North and South and that both should be attacked. They suggested cooperation with the Southern Government: “You know how powerful they were” (Zhou Fuhai, 1927 [1967]). The decision on publishing was left to the incoming leadership and Chen Duxiu, who worked with the Southern Government, was highly unlikely to support such criticism. With the most influential communist and the Comintern representatives opposed to the plan and program, it is not surprising that they did not see the light of day.

1 Post-Congress Differences

Sneevliet was not impressed with the young party and the proposals adopted but he saw great potential for the labor movement and, during his trip to the South, he saw the possibility for cooperation with the nationalists. His conflicts with the Chinese comrades continued after the Congress, this time with Chen Duxiu. Initially, party work was delayed while waiting for Chen Duxiu to return to Shanghai from Guangzhou. He had been invited by Sneevliet “to take on the political work of the small communist sect” (Bericht des Genossen H. Maring, July 1922).³⁵ Chen arrived back in late August or mid-September.³⁶ Following

34 According to Bao Huiseng, 1978b [1980], p. 377, this was Zhang Guotao's suggestion, as it would keep power in Zhang's hands as Zhou was anxious to return to his studies in Japan.

35 Bao Huiseng's memoirs (1953 [1980], p. 320) recount how Sneevliet was dissatisfied with party work, feeling that it was confined to a group of students and was not politically significant. This contradicts Zhang Guotao's recollection (1971, vol. 1, p. 154) that it was the Central Bureau that decided to recall Chen and wrote to him accordingly.

36 In July 1922, Sneevliet commented that Chen returned to Shanghai at the end of August. The Chinese scholar, Chen Shaokang, 1983, pp. 324–25, suggests mid-September based on information contained in the Guangzhou paper *Guangdong qunbao* (Guangdong

Chen's return in the early fall, he clashed with Sneevliet over the relationship with the Comintern and especially over the budget.

Chen refused to meet with Sneevliet on his return (Chang Kuo-t'ao, 1971, vol. 1, p. 157 ff. and Liu Renjing, 1978 [1980], p. 215), perhaps because he had heard criticisms of his work-style. One further reason for Chen's displeasure was his anger over the selection of delegates to the Congress of the Toilers of the East. In August, Sneevliet received an emergency directive to arrange delegates for the Congress and without informing Chen Duxiu or the Central Bureau, he sent Zhang Tailei to Japan on behalf of the Comintern. Zhang had returned from Moscow in August and was acting as Sneevliet's aide and interpreter (Ding Zeqin and Wang Shudi, 1981, p. 85). Chen's wrath was said to be such that he considered demanding Sneevliet's recall and may even have sent a letter to Japan calling on members not to receive Zhang Tailei.³⁷

For the Chinese communists, Nikolsky and Sneevliet seemed demanding, expecting weekly meetings with Chen Duxiu, Zhang Guotao and Li Da to hear work reports (Li Da, 1955 [1980]). Sneevliet corroborates this friction. Nikolsky had been instructed by Irkutsk to attend conferences of the party leadership but this was opposed by the Chinese comrades who "resented the tutelage" (Bericht des Genossen H. Maring, July 1922). This is the source of the claim that Chen did not want to meet with Sneevliet. The meetings cannot have been very informative or demanding affairs: Li's report on propaganda was brief as they did not publish a book every month, Zhang Guotao had little to report about work in Shanghai and contented himself with lengthy reports in broken English about the views of a few workers whom he had contacted. Chen Duxiu only made one report and did not have much to say, refused to attend a second time, dug in, became stubborn, and refused to meet Sneevliet. Chen called for the movement to be independent and claimed that help from the Communist International was not needed. The revolution would be more successful if conducted "on our own." As a result, he did not meet Sneevliet for a few weeks (Li Da, 1955 [1980], pp. 15–16).

In Chen's view, the party was still in its infancy and the Chinese Revolution had its own characteristics and thus should not yet be brought under the flag of the Comintern. He was especially opposed to economic aid. Fraternal relations should be maintained and only when the time was right, then the

Masses), September 10 that refers to Chen as still being in Guangzhou, whereas the September 13 issue noted that he had left for Shanghai.

37 Chang Kuo-t'ao, 1971, vol. 1, p. 160. If Chen only returned to Shanghai in late August at the earliest, it would hardly have been possible for Sneevliet to have conferred with him before Zhang Tailei left for Japan.

party should ask the Comintern for help (Bao Huiseng, 1980a, p. 100 and 1953 [1980], p. 308). Chen was equally concerned that anarchists would seize on links with Moscow to criticize the communists. In Guangzhou, Chen had been attacked by anarchists such as Ou Shengbai for worshipping Bolshevism. This had strengthened Chen's resolve not to take money from others and to rely on the party's own independent capability (Bao Huiseng, 1978 [1980], p. 384). Clearly, the right time came very swiftly as the Comintern bankrolled almost all the activities of the CCP through its first couple of years.³⁸

The disputes led Sneevliet to draft a long letter to Chen asking him to reconsider his views and arrange another meeting to try to find agreement (Bao Huiseng, 1980a, p. 101). On October 4, before he could reply, a French police raid on the party premises swept up Chen together with other comrades.³⁹ The experience prompted a dramatic change in Chen's attitude. On release from prison, he discovered that Sneevliet, in collaboration with GMD member Zhang Ji, had been very active and had arranged bail for Chen. Within a day and a half, they had acquired the services of a French lawyer and put up bail of 500 silver *liang* to secure Chen's release. The others remained in prison until October 26 (Wang Guangyuan (ed.), 1987, p. 115). The police had not been particularly zealous in their search of the premises and had not found any incriminating communist party materials. Importantly, they did not find the letter from Sneevliet, which, according to Chen, could have landed him with seven or eight years' imprisonment. The lack of evidence and the French lawyer's defense resulted in the case being dropped at the cost of a 5,000 dollar fine levied on *Xin qingnian* (New Youth) for its radical contents (Bao Huiseng 1957; 1978 [1980], p. 380; 1980a, pp. 101–02).

This improved the relationship between the two men but their differences about cooperation with the nationalist movement persisted until August 1922 and simmered even thereafter. Following his release, Chen convened the first-ever meeting of the Central Executive Committee (CEC) (Bureau). Chen proposed that *The Communist* continue publication, *Xin qingnian* be resumed and labor movement work proceed on the basis of Zhang Guotao's draft plans. Cadres working in the labor movement would not receive "salaries" or "wages" as such but they would receive "living allowances" to a maximum of 25 dollars

38 In addition to the aforementioned expenditures, from October 1921 to January 1922 and in the year between the Second and Third Party Congresses, virtually all the party's finances, some 15,000 *yuan* was provided by the Comintern, Chen Duxiu, June 1923, pp. 56–62, English translation can be found in Saich, 1991, Vol. 2, p. 572–77.

39 Those arrested included Gao Zhunman, Chen's wife, and Bao Huiseng, who had come to discuss the problems with Sneevliet. For the date of the arrest see Tianjin *Dagong bao* (Ta Kung Pao), October 7, 1921, p. 1. Founded in 1902, it is the oldest Chinese newspaper.

per person per month, roughly equal to a poor worker's income and only 15 percent of what one could expect to earn elsewhere. Sneevliet thought that the Comintern could cover the costs.⁴⁰

After the CEC session, Sneevliet and Chen met to resolve their differences.⁴¹ Sneevliet recognized that the CEC should conduct its own affairs, while he was merely an advisor and would only maintain regular contact to discuss policy with the highest "representative" members. For his part, Chen accepted that the party supported the Comintern and would respect the policy recommendations of its representative (Chang Kuo-t'ao, 1971, vol. 1, p. 169). This was a fragile compromise and prey to different interpretations. The accord would be put to the test in August 1922 when Sneevliet returned to China from Moscow and convened the Hangzhou Plenum.

In November 1921, Chen Duxiu sent the preliminary work plan to the localities. The objective was that by the Second Party Congress at the latest (to be held in July 1922), the five districts of Shanghai, Beijing, Guangzhou, Wuhan and Changsha would have set up district executive committees and each would have recruited 30 members.⁴² Such a development would enable a "formal CEC" to be established in accordance with the party program. Each district was to set up at least one labor union under its control and to develop "realistic contacts" with other unions. The primary focus was on the railway workers with the intent to organize a national railway union. As for propaganda work, the Central Propaganda Department set itself the target of publishing over twenty books before July 1922.

2 Sneevliet Travels South and Sees the Revolution's Future

With party work moving slowly and the frictions with the comrades rumbling on, Sneevliet focused on work with the labor movement and set out to

40 Chang Kuo-t'ao, 1971, vol. 1, pp. 167–68. Liu Renjing, 1978 [1980], p. 215, remembers Chen and Sneevliet agreeing on a budget of 20 or 50 dollars a month per person.

41 Zhang Guotao, 1971, vol. 1, pp. 168–69, wrote that they met two days later for the first time. Bao Huiseng, 1980a, p. 102, recalled that they met twice to resolve their differences and came to a three-point agreement. First, the head of the World Communist Movement was in Moscow and the communist party of each country was a branch. Second, Profintern and the Labor Secretariat were organs maintaining economic relations, the Secretariat's work plan and budget for each year were to be approved by the Profintern. Third, the Central Bureau would not receive the Comintern's economic support and any necessary expenses would be allocated through the Labor Secretariat. However, as noted, this was certainly not the case.

42 In fact, by June 1922, Shanghai had some 50 members, Beijing 20, Canton 32, Hubei 20 and Changsha 30, with a total membership of 195. Chen Duxiu, June 30, 1922 [1997], p. 27.

investigate the potential for a national-revolutionary movement. His assessment defined the report that he made to the Comintern in July 1922. His first proposal after the Party Congress was to establish a Labor Secretariat to coordinate work.⁴³ The home of the Secretariat was Shanghai, with Zhang Guotao as its head and *Laodong zhoukan* (Labor Weekly) as its flagship publication.⁴⁴ Despite the extensive discussion of labor issues at the Congress, the idea of the Labor Secretariat was not mentioned. The most reliable date for its establishment is August 11, 1921.⁴⁵ Sneevliet wrote the Declaration of the Secretariat, had it translated into Chinese, and published it in issue no. six of *The Communist* (letter from Sneevliet to Zinoviev, Bukharin and Radek, June 20, 1923, S.A., no. 231).⁴⁶ The budget for the Secretariat was shown to Sneevliet to request a Comintern subsidy with the CCP covering the remaining costs. Sneevliet was surprised at the low cost and he committed the Comintern to covering the entire amount, allowing any funds raised by the CCP to be put to other uses (Chang Kuo-t'ao, 1971, vol. 1, p. 156).

From day one, the Secretariat concentrated on encouraging strike action and union organization and it became the most active project of the Central Bureau (Chang Kuo-t'ao, 1971, vol. 1, p. 170). The Shanghai section's first action was involvement in the autumn strike at the British-American Tobacco Company. It played a major role in organizing the workers' demands and the strike itself. Management gave in to some of the workers' demands. Sneevliet was impressed by the importance of the work and Zhang Guotao's engagement and he called for the intensification of labor work. In this respect, Zhang Guotao saw a difference between Sneevliet and Voitinsky:

Maring [Sneevliet] regarded the labor movement as very important, and this real evidence of its progress strengthened his belief in us. He urged that the work be intensified. On this issue, his views differed from those

43 Bao Huiseng, 1954 [1980], pp. 352–55; 1957, wrote that the idea came from Zhang Guotao and Sneevliet but he mentioned that Sneevliet was the principal instigator. Luo Zhanglong, 1978 [1980], p. 204, credited the “Comintern representative” with the idea. Luo confirmed this view during interviews in the summer of 1986.

44 Chang Kuo-t'ao, 1971, vol. 1, p. 154, Bao Huiseng, 1954 [1980], pp. 353–54; Luo Zhanglong, 1979b [1980], p. 204. Other members were Li Qihan, Bao Huiseng, Li Zhenying and Xu Baihao, Wang Jianying, 1983, p. 5.

45 Letter from Iu. Smurgis, October 13, 1921, in *Narody Azii I Afriki*, No. 6, 1972, p. 157; English translation in Saich, 1991, vol. 1, p. 213.

46 This issue should have been published on July 7, 1921 but the journal appeared irregularly and articles in the issue suggest that it was published some time later. There are references to events that occurred in August, for example, a strike in Guangzhou from August 16 to 21. The journal also refers to the publication of *Laodong zhoukan* (*The Workers' Weekly*), which it noted was launched after the founding of the Secretariat.

of Voitinsky, for Maring was a product of the Asian Labor Movement, and he knew something about the empty formula of linking the economic and political studies. Once an Eastern labor movement was launched, he believed it could be counted on to pursue a revolutionary path.

CHANG KUO-T'AO, 1971, vol. 1, p. 175

In October, Zhang left Shanghai and progress faltered. For Sneevliet, although the Secretariat could publish its weekly and establish contacts with various groups of workers, it had been unable to develop modern organizations. It had been able to support local struggles for better wages but it had run into problems from the secret societies (*Bericht des Genossen H. Maring*, July 1922). The lack of impact is reflected in the memoirs of participants. Li Da (1955 [1980], p. 15), remembers that in over three months' work, not a single union was organized in Shanghai. Between Zhang Guotao's departure and the Second Party Congress, no work was carried out within the Shanghai labor movement. Luo Zhanglong (1978b [1980], p. 205) noted that pressure from the authorities caused the Secretariat to halt its activities with the result that work was conducted independently via the local branches. It was not made public that the activities of the Shanghai Secretariat had been extinguished and its name was used for occasional publications. The branches continued with varying degrees of success with those in Hunan and Beijing particularly active.⁴⁷ The Beijing branch, under Luo Zhanglong, was responsible for labor affairs in North China, the Hankou branch was under Bao Huiseng, the Changsha/Hunan branch was under Mao Zedong and the Guangzhou branch was under Tan Pingshan.⁴⁸

As the labor movement stalled in the North, Sneevliet traveled South. There, he met with Sun Yat-sen and came away convinced that there existed a strong labor movement and a potential ally in the revolutionary-nationalist movement. With the party established and a faltering labor movement under way, he set out on the second and for him the most important part of his mission: establishing relations with the nationalist movement. He complained that the communist party just worked illegally to little effect and did not have

47 In the 1920s, Hunan and Anyuan in neighboring Jiangxi province became one of the strongest areas of communist power, Perry, 2012.

48 Wang Jianying, 1983, pp. 5–7. Luo Zhanglong, 1978 [1980], p. 205, noted that at Sneevliet's instigation, the Central Committee called a meeting of representatives from the various areas and the branches were established at that meeting.

any contact with the nationalist government in South China.⁴⁹ While official Soviet negotiations were conducted in the North, Sneevliet began to establish contacts with Sun in the South.⁵⁰

The meeting with Sun was facilitated during preparations for the Congress of the Toilers of the East (Moscow, January–February 1922) when Sneevliet encountered GMD supporters who were in Shanghai. The most important contact was Zhang Ji, a representative of Sun.⁵¹ Through these contacts, Sneevliet was invited to visit Sun at his headquarters, in the city of Guilin, Guangxi province (Bericht des Genossen H. Maring, July 1922; Isaacs 1971; and Sneevliet, 1926). Even prior to this, Sneevliet had the idea of visiting Sun in the South. As early as September 9, 1921, the Governor-General of the Dutch Indies had been informed of a plan by Sneevliet to visit the Sun government. This plan was thwarted by British obstruction, which forbade him from landing on British territory.⁵²

Sneevliet's tactic was shaped strongly by his trip to Southern China where he saw the GMD in action. One significant drawback for Sneevliet was that not only was he entering an alien environment but he had to understand this environment through the views and experiences of others. He did not speak or read Chinese and he did not seem to undertake any special preparation before his arrival. While it is true that he could have used contemporary English sources for general background, as did many Japanese leftists at the time, he had to depend on the skill of interpreters both to present his views correctly and for clear explanations about the situation on the ground. Zhang Tailei played a crucial role in enhancing Sneevliet's understanding of China in general and the CCP, in particular. Zhang frequently served as his interpreter and accompanied Sneevliet on his winter 1921–1922 trip to the South to meet Sun Yat-sen.

49 Bericht des Genossen H. Maring, July 1922. Liu Renjing (1978 [1980], pp. 215–16) remembered that Sneevliet felt that the weakness of the party encouraged him to reach out to Sun Yat-sen.

50 T'ang, 1930, p. 155, claimed that Sneevliet visited Wu Peifu prior to his meeting with Sun Yat-sen but Sneevliet did not visit Beijing until after his return from Guangzhou.

51 Zhang Ji, 1951, p. 195, recollected things somewhat differently. He noted that at the time they were in Guangzhou and Sneevliet "a friend of mine wanted me to arrange an introduction to Sun." Zhang arranged this and although accompanying him, did not participate in the conversation. However, Sneevliet did not go to Guangzhou before he went to Guilin.

52 Report of the Acting Dutch Consul-General in Shanghai Concerning Sneevliet's Stay in China, April 11, 1922 (Memo dated May 23, 1922), Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Exh 29-5-1922, D14, in Saich, 1991, vol. 1, pp. 265–72.

Thus, on December 10, 1921, the two men slipped out of Shanghai on their way to Guilin, via Hankou and Changsha.⁵³ Traveling through Hankou they took a short break in Changsha, arriving on December 19,⁵⁴ where Sneevliet met with the governor and military ruler, Zhao Hengti. Zhao was sympathetic to the GMD and a strong supporter of the federalist movement. Zhao talked about how he had been impressed by the British philosopher, Bertrand Russell, and how he had drawn up a constitution offering wider suffrage, which was to come into effect from January 1922 (Sneevliet, May 6 and 8, 1922).⁵⁵ Sneevliet lectured on “the class struggle, the Russian Revolution and the necessity of establishing unions” with the help of those attending the youth organization meeting (Isaacs, 1971, p. 103).⁵⁶ One account (Yi Lirong, 1979b [1980], p. 250) claimed that while visiting the Wenhua bookstore, Sneevliet met with Mao Zedong.

As the road between Changsha and Guilin was unsafe, Governor Zhao provided a small military escort for Sneevliet and Zhang Tailei to ensure their safe passage. They arrived in Guilin in the evening sometime between December 23 and 25, 1921.⁵⁷ They contacted Sun's headquarters and were taken immediately to visit him whereupon a lengthy discussion ensued (Sneevliet, 1926, p. 66). The two stayed in Guilin for nine days as Sun's guest and Sneevliet met several times with Sun and other nationalist leaders.⁵⁸ Sun informed Sneevliet about

53 *Ibid.* for the date of departure. This information had been provided by the French authorities in Shanghai. However, initially they thought Sneevliet had headed North. The authorities' attempt to track Sneevliet was spotty. They knew he went to Guangzhou and Shantou (Swatow) but they did not pick up his important visit to Guilin where he met with Sun. They presumed that he was involved in the strikes in Hong Kong and Shantou. See the Letter from W. Daniels, Acting Consul-General in Shanghai, to the Governor-General of the Dutch Indies, March 1, 1922, Archive of the Ministry of Colonial Affairs, Mailrapport 426x/22, Verbaal 23-5-1922, T5, in Saich, 1991, vol. 1, pp. 243–46.

54 This date is suggested by Cheng (1972, p. 50) based on the contents of a letter from Zhao Hengti to Tan Yankai.

55 Zhao's democratic leanings were not always in line with his actions. In January 1922, he had two negotiators for a textile workers' strike unceremoniously executed.

56 Sneevliet was more impressed with this youth organization than with any of the other youth organizations that he had encountered. He felt that the other groups in Guilin, Guangzhou and Haifeng contributed little in practical terms to the development of labor organizations. The Changsha group had organized a demonstration against the Washington Conference and had founded an association for textile workers.

57 Luo Jialun 1959, vol. 2, pp. 518–20. Cheng, 1972, p. 50, offers the more precise date of December 23 based on *Geming wenxian*, a date also given by Li Yuzhen, 1996, p. 98.

58 The most reliable source is Bericht des Genossen H. Maring, July 1922. In 1935, he remembered that he had spent about two weeks there (Isaacs, 1971, p. 104). It is possible that he may have even stayed a little longer as one of the materials in the Sneevliet Archive is dated Guilin, January 10, 1922 suggesting that he was still there, “The Chinese Revolution

GMD history, illegal activities conducted abroad during Yuan Shikai's rule, the role of Chinese living in the Pacific area played with respect to the GMD, about party tactics and the Washington Conference (Sneevliet, 1926, p. 66; Isaacs, 1971, p. 104). Sun was eager to hear about events and life in Russia after the revolution and about the New Economic Policy. He was heartened to find that, in his view, Russia's New Economic Policy was basically the same as his Plan for the Industrial Development of China (Sneevliet, 1926, p. 67).⁵⁹ Specifically, the men discussed three main topics: the reorganization of the GMD; the need to establish a military academy; and the possibility of cooperation between the GMD and the CCP.⁶⁰ There is no further supporting evidence for this last topic, although it would seem improbable that Sneevliet did not raise the possibility of cooperation in some form. Sneevliet did tell Sun about his experiences in the Dutch Indies, especially with respect to the development of the "nationalist mass organization"—the Sarekat Islam (Isaacs, 1971, p. 104).

Inevitably, the question of the recognition of and an alliance with Soviet Russia was discussed. Sun rebuffed Sneevliet on this issue, noting that no such alliance would be possible until after his Northern Expedition had been completed successfully. Sun worried that if the British were to get wind of such an alliance, they might decide to cause him problems (Deng Jiayan, 1955, p. 141).⁶¹

Sneevliet was not impressed with Sun's leadership style. He felt that although the GMD proposed democracy, Sun was more inclined toward a dictatorial approach and a militarist solution to the problems facing China. Sneevliet favored "democratization" of the GMD and stated that students, workers and peasants should be mobilized and drawn into the movement. Further, he wanted to push Sun to pay more attention to propaganda work

and the Relations to Russia," S.A. no. 233. The number of meetings is unclear but Sneevliet mentions that he had three long discussions about the possibility of recognition of and an alliance with Russia, Bericht des Genossen H. Maring, July 1922. Deng Jiayan, 1955, p. 1410, claims that Sneevliet spent only three days in Guilin and spoke with Sun on two occasions; on the second occasion, others were present, including Hu Hanmin, Xu Chongzhi, Chen Xiaobao and Sun Ke.

59 Sun is reported to have expressed this view to Liao Zhongkai, Wang Jingwei, 1926, p. 3855.

60 *Jiang Jieshi milu*, reprinted in Guangdong Museum of Revolutionary History (ed.), 1982, pp. 11–12.

61 Wilbur, 1976, pp. 325–29, discovered a document in the US State Department Archives that suggests the existence of a document containing terms of a secret agreement between Sun and the Russian Soviet Government. Sun's delegates are said to have sent the copy on December 26, 1921 and it is possible that British agents in Guangzhou acquired it from Sun's enemies. This runs counter to Sun's ideas at that time and it opens the possibility that it was fraudulent or that it had been drawn up by Sneevliet, or his superiors, hoping that Sun would sign such an agreement. Certainly, in the January 10, 1922 memorandum, a treaty with Soviet Russia is called for.

so that he would not only have to rely on the support of a few generals. The seaman's strike of January 1922 highlighted the positive role that the young proletariat could play in the liberation struggle. However, it is unlikely that the full impact of the strike was felt while Sneevliet was in Guilin (Sneevliet, 1926, pp. 66–67; Isaacs, 1971, p. 104). What interested Sun most was military matters, such as the Red Army and its political education, a concern shared by other officers. Not surprisingly, Sneevliet delivered a lecture to Sun's officers on the Russian Revolution.⁶²

Sneevliet must have been puzzled by Sun's understanding of Marxism and his belief in Chinese traditional thought. Sun was strongly critical of the influence that communist ideas had on the young, so much so that they had lost all practical significance for the revolution. He asked Zhang Tailei "Why do the youth seek wisdom in Marx, when all the basic ideas of Marxism are to be found in the Chinese classics?"⁶³ The influence of tradition on Sun's thinking was similarly reflected in his comment that there was "nothing new in Marxism. It had all been said two thousand years ago by the Chinese classics" (Isaacs, 1971, p. 104).

Before leaving Guilin, based on their discussions Sneevliet drafted a memorandum entitled "The Chinese Reconstruction and the Relations to Russia."⁶⁴ Sneevliet's intention is unclear, perhaps he hoped it would record agreement between the two men about the initial meetings. However, it was not published and it is not clear under whose authority, if any, it was drawn up. Sneevliet consciously incorporated Sun's ideas such as the necessity of acquiring the necessary materials for China's economic development from countries without political power. The memorandum makes several points about China's situation. First, the Washington Conference had postponed the possibility of war between the major powers. This was bad news for China and Russia as they would become victims of the major powers, requiring their cooperation for mutual defense. Second, establishing a strong, centralized government, which was genuinely independent, was not only in the national interest but also had a direct international importance. Third, for such a government to be established, it was necessary to promote "purely nationalistic" propaganda and only this could help the GMD develop into a party that could "fulfill its revolutionary

62 Sneevliet, 1926, p. 67; Isaacs, 1971, p. 104. Sneevliet also spoke with them about the international situation, especially with respect to the Washington Conference, life in Russia and the forms of propaganda.

63 Sneevliet, 1926, p. 67. This was while discussing with Zhang Tailei the need for more active participation by the youth in the nationalist movement, Isaacs, 1971, p. 104.

64 A typed document dated January 10, 1922, S.A. no. 233. In the archive, there is also a segment of this document written in Sneevliet's hand.

task." Fourth, in contrast to the capitalist countries that would neither provide help nor act neutrally, Russia had proved that it strongly supported the so-called backward countries in their struggle for political independence. Fifth, this meant that a revolutionary government in China should swiftly come to a clear understanding with Russia to strengthen its position. A prepared treaty would enable the Chinese people to view the movement in the South in a different light from the other warring military leaders. Finally, if such steps were not yet possible, the memorandum suggested that secret relations should be established by sending a delegation to Moscow.

Sneevliet came away with mixed feelings, remaining critical about Sun's militarism and his belief in a quick military solution to the problems facing him. Despite this, Sun was useful for Sneevliet's tactic as a person with whom an alliance could be forged. In the 1926 memorial article for Sun, he described Sun as a "pure bourgeois nationalist," influenced to a considerable extent by socialist ideas and better-equipped than others to combat the domination of capitalism. Yet, both earlier and later, Sneevliet expressed more ambivalent views and even flirted with the idea of an alliance with others.

From Guilin, Sneevliet and Zhang Tailei moved on down South to the city of Guangzhou, arriving on January 23, 1922 (Sneevliet, May 6, 1922). During the winter of 1921–1922, Sneevliet witnessed the large-scale seaman's strike that he felt demonstrated not only the power of labor and its anti-imperialist orientation but also the positive role played by the GMD.⁶⁵ The sailors won economic benefits but Sneevliet read into the strike a greater political significance, especially in terms of the anti-imperialist movement. The strike strongly influenced Sneevliet's view of the GMD and the potential for a vibrant national-revolutionary movement in South China. For him, it was "undoubtedly the most important event in the history of the young Chinese labor movement" (Sneevliet, May 6, 1922).

The origins of the strike developed from the growing disparity between prices and wages that had begun at the end of the First World War (Chesneaux, 1968, pp. 180–84). On January 12, 1922, for the third time, the union put forward its demands and when they were rejected, a strike was called for the following morning. Events moved quickly, the Hong Kong authorities declared martial law, the union was declared illegal, its premises closed down, papers seized and leaders arrested. As Sneevliet arrived in Guangzhou, there were some 10,000 on strike, the majority of whom were based in Guangzhou. Only the

65 The strike lasted from January 12, 1921 to March 5, 1922. By the end of January, the coolies in the port had joined the strike and by the end of February, the strike had evolved into a general strike of Chinese workers in the colony.

Japanese boats were sailing (Sneevliet, May 6, 1922).⁶⁶ On January 29, a sympathy strike was declared and before Sneevliet left for Shantou, about 300,000 workers were on strike and 151 ships with 231,000 tonnage lay idle. The center of the strike was in Guangzhou, where the political climate was more favorable, with branches set up in the two other main Guangdong ports of Shantou and Wuzhou. The seamen based in these two ports also came out on strike. In Shanghai, the Labor Secretariat mobilized to prevent the possibility of strike-breakers being recruited from their area.

Sneevliet found the attitude of the government in Guangzhou conducive to the development of the labor movement. Although the government did not wish to become directly involved in the strike, many individuals provided strong support and the government provided financial aid in the form of loans. Shortly before Sneevliet returned to Shanghai, the strike had escalated further. On February 26, all the Chinese workers in Hong Kong came out on a sympathy strike so that by the end of March around 120,000 workers were involved. As a result, the authorities caved in and on March 3, an agreement was concluded granting wage increases of 15 to 30 percent along with changes in the recruitment method.

For Sneevliet, his favorable impression of the GMD was even more important than the demonstration of working-class power. This contrasted dramatically with the lack of activity by the local communist party branch. In particular, he was impressed by GMD support for the strike, their organization of quarters and the provision of food for the strikers (Sneevliet, May 6, 1922). He claimed that the GMD acted "in exactly the same way as we in the revolutionary unions" (Sneevliet, September 13, 1922). He thought that the leadership of the strike was in the hands of the GMD, its leadership supported the strike and mass activity in favor of a nationalist movement had already begun (Isaacs, 1971, p. 104). In fact, the strike was led by Su Zhaozheng and Lin Weimin, neither of whom at that time were members of the GMD or the CCP. It is true that there were strong links with the Seaman's Union and Sun himself had written the Chinese characters for the union's official sign board (Chang Kuo-t'ao, 1971, vol. 1, p. 228).⁶⁷ The close ties between the GMD and the sailors impressed Sneevliet and he reported that 12,000 sailors from Guangzhou, Hong Kong and Shantou had joined the party. In the South, Sneevliet saw the greatest potential

66 For Sneevliet's handwritten notes on the strike that also cover the period from December 1921 to February 1922 see S.A. no. 221.

67 Su Zhaozheng did join the CCP in 1925 and became an alternate member of the Politburo at the Fifth Party Congress (April–May 1927). Lin Weimin became Chair of the First Executive Committee of the All-China Federation of Trade Unions.

for work in the labor movement, leading him to suggest that the Profintern set up an office in Guangzhou (Bericht des Genossen H. Maring, July 1922).

The seamen's actions were indeed impressive but one should keep in mind that Sneevliet arrived during the high tide of the strike and depended on informants from the GMD for his information. This resulted in his exaggerating the role of the GMD. Especially influential was Liao Zhongkai, a member of the party's left-wing. This led Sneevliet to promote a more optimistic assessment of the possibility for long-term cooperation with the nationalists than might have been the case otherwise. Certainly, such a positive assessment was not shared by those in Shanghai, especially Chen Duxiu (Chang Kuo-t'ao, 1971, vol. 1, p. 221).

This positive reporting about the GMD contrasted with Sneevliet's very critical assessment of the inactivity of the communist party branch and the SYC. Sneevliet was surprised that the communist party felt that it should continue to work illegally and not move to operate openly. The strike provided it with the opportunity to join with the left-wing of the GMD and promote communist propaganda but they had even forgotten to organize a support movement! (Bericht des Genossen H. Maring, July 1922 and Sneevliet, May 8, 1922). The only activity they undertook was to organize, under their leadership, a demonstration on January 15 by the SYC together with a workers' mutual aid association. It was a memorial for Rosa Luxemburg and Karl Liebknecht, attended by about 2,000 workers (Bericht des Genossen H. Maring, July 1922). Sneevliet remarked pointedly that the local group was even missing from the planning of the meeting (1926, May 8, 1922). He was especially pleased with the engagement with the labor unions that compared favorably with the lack of progress in Shanghai. At least 50,000 workers had been organized into unions, a far greater number than in the large, industrial city of Shanghai. Indeed, as noted, he suggested that the organized workers in Guangzhou be brought into contact with the Profintern (Bericht des Genossen H. Maring, July 1922).

While in Guangzhou, Sneevliet took the opportunity to meet with other leading GMD figures including Zhang Ji, Liao Zhongkai, Hu Hanmin and also Chen Jiongming.⁶⁸ Chen was a complex character about whom some Soviet emissaries had reported positively. He called himself a socialist and while in Fujian, he had wholeheartedly supported the Russian Revolution. Subsequent events in Russia had pushed him to the right and consequently, he then favored a form of state capitalism for Guangdong province, inhibiting private

68 Sneevliet, 1926, p. 67. In particular, he mentioned that Zhang Ji was in favor of a party dictatorship in China and hoped to be able to support the movement in the South by organizing the revolutionary Chinese in the North, either in Mongolia or Siberia.

capitalism and implementing a democratic government with a high degree of regional autonomy. Chen was critical of both Sun and the GMD and he was not enamored with Sun's Northern Expedition. For him, the centralization of China was impossible. He did, however, defend Sun's proposed military alliance with Zhang Zuolin as the only way to defeat Wu Peifu. The GMD's program was inadequate, meaning that it was necessary to form a new socialist party. Despite reservations, there was much here to interest Sneevliet. They shared concerns about Sun's militaristic approach to solving problems and Chen did provide financial aid to the striking workers and to a daily newspaper with communist editors.⁶⁹ Finally, Chen was interested in closer liaison with Russia, hoping to send a representative to Russia and he was not opposed to the establishment of a Comintern office in Guangzhou. He wanted Russian military advisors to help reorganize his army.

Chen's concerns about Sun led him at one meeting with Sneevliet, together with Tan Pingshan and Chen Gongbo, to discuss terms for opposing Sun, a matter about which outsiders knew nothing (Zhou Fuhai, 1927 [1967], p. 138). This cannot be confirmed but we do know that the Guangzhou communist small group favored cooperation with Chen rather than with Sun and this may have influenced Sneevliet's initial attitude.⁷⁰ Despite the disputes, Sneevliet did not anticipate that relations would be broken off (Bericht des Genossen H. Maring, July 1922). Even as late as May 1, 1922, he wrote "although Chen Jiongming is against the invasion plans of Sun Yat-sen, it seems to me that a split between both leaders must be deemed highly improbable."⁷¹ Clearly, he was not a clairvoyant, as on June 15, Sun was driven out of the Presidential Palace by General Ye Ju, a supporter of Chen Jiongming.

In the South, Sneevliet had witnessed and gathered evidence to support his view of how cooperation between the communists and a revolutionary nationalist movement should be pursued. By the time he left China to report to the Comintern, he was reasonably satisfied with what he had seen. In Guangzhou, a successful labor movement was developing and a Nationalist Party existed within which there were influential members sympathetic to the workers'

69 This was the *Guangdong qunbao* edited by Chen Gongbo, Tan Pingshan and Tan Zhichang.

70 For a review of events in Spring-Summer 1922 see Wilbur's introduction to Ch'en Kung-po, 1924, pp. 9–12 and Wilbur, 1976, pp. 120–24. According to Cai Hesun, Sneevliet had advocated resuming Chen Gongbo's party membership after his expulsion, a fault in Cai's eyes (Cai Hesun, 1926, pp. 44–46).

71 Letter to his wife, intercepted by the Dutch authorities. Report of the Procurator-General, Uhlenbeck, to the Governor-General of the Dutch Indies, June 10, 1922, Archive of the Ministry of Colonial Affairs, Mailrapport, 715x/22, Verbaal 27-9-1922, R10, in Saich, 1991, Vol. 1, pp. 273–85.

struggle and the new Soviet state. Sneevliet saw greater opportunities for future work and the dissemination of communist propaganda in the GMD-controlled areas than elsewhere in China. Now, it remained for him to elucidate the tactic and persuade his Chinese colleagues and the Comintern leadership that this was the correct approach. Eventually, neither his Chinese colleagues or the Comintern would be entirely persuaded.

Concern in China, Acceptance in Moscow

Returning from the South, phase one of Sneevliet's challenge seemed clear. He had discovered a viable partner but it remained for him to persuade his comrades in China and the leadership in Moscow that Sun Yat-sen and the Guomindang (GMD) were the best partners. His tactic had to be presented in conformity with Lenin's Theses. Importantly, he had to convince the GMD to work with the communists. His view of the "united front" and the form of Chinese Communist Party's (CCP) cooperation with the GMD was of the greatest lasting significance for the CCP. Collaboration with other social forces vital to CCP survival and progress has been a crucial weapon in its armory. It helped growth in the 1920s, saved the CCP from destruction following the Japanese invasion in the late 1930s and has been used post-1949 when the party has needed to engage groups that are not natural members, such as the business community and scientists. It has formed a core component of the CCP's international strategy to build coalitions to support its interests.

After some arm-twisting of the Chinese comrades, it looked as if the tactic would be accepted. However, as implementation progressed, opposition increased and Sneevliet's high-handed manner irritated some of the Chinese comrades. To push back against the opposition, he employed his interpretation of the Second Comintern Theses, his experience working in the Dutch Indies, and called on organizational discipline. To a group that had only just come together as a party and still harbored deep divisions about its appropriate nature, the use of organizational discipline rankled.

Differences went beyond the Chinese colleagues and included alternative perspectives about China policy within the Comintern. Sneevliet was at odds with Radek, Safarov and Voitinsky, and was caught between the different priorities of the Comintern and Narkomindel (the People's Commissariat for Foreign Affairs). This was a much tougher arena in which to be successful as he could not claim a superior understanding of Leninism nor could he appeal to organizational discipline. Differences focused on cooperation with the GMD, on what basis or even whether there should be cooperation as well as the importance of the labor movement. An early difference between Voitinsky and Sneevliet concerned the role of the labor movement. This was especially important for Sneevliet after he witnessed the work in South China and what he thought was GMD commitment. Soon after the July 1922 meeting of the Executive Committee of the Communist International (ECCI) had

accepted his proposals, opposition grew. As certain CCP members developed their own lines of communication with the Comintern, criticism of Sneevliet grew, eventually leading to the termination of his function in China.

1 Reporting in Beijing and Shanghai

On February 3, 1922, Sneevliet left Guangzhou for Shanghai but the seamen's strike and his poor health turned what would have been a five-day trip into a sojourn of one month (Saich, 1991, vol. 1, p. 87). Finally, on March 7, his boat docked and he stayed for a few days with the Russian Goorman, editor of the paper *Shanghai Life*. French police surveillance became too intense, forcing him to move to the International Settlement. His illness and the close watch by the authorities hampered his work and the situation in Shanghai became too dangerous.¹

With the heat turned up, he set off for Beijing on March 20, returning to Shanghai on April 1.² The visit passed without incident and his illness did not prevent him from meeting with the Russian envoy, Paikes. Not surprisingly, Sneevliet briefed him on his experiences in South China and, most importantly, he gave Paikes a preliminary report to forward to Narkomindel and the Comintern.³ Paikes performed the important liaison role with the Comintern, Irkutsk and other agencies. Sneevliet recommended stationing a representative in South China and he claimed that the "man in Beijing" wanted him to take up the position of Narkomindel representative as soon as possible.⁴ He was a little more circumspect in his July report, simply mentioning that he had proposed to Paikes the possibility of Russian representation in the South, a position that Sneevliet would indeed take up.

Back in Shanghai after April 1, Sneevliet encountered the first opposition to his tactic. Before leaving for Beijing, he had met with CCP leaders and GMD

1 Letter H. Sneevliet to W. Van Ravesteyn, April 2, 1922, van Ravesteyn Archive, no. 18. This included an application to search his premises and his luggage in the hope that it would lead to his expulsion from China. Letter W. Daniels to the Governor-General of the Dutch East Indies, March 14, 1922. Van Ravesteyn, a Dutch communist, was a friend.

2 In a letter to van Ravesteyn dated March 19, 1922, Sneevliet writes "Tomorrow 8 days to Peking," van Ravesteyn Archive no. 18, in Saich, 1991, vol. 1, pp. 251–53. The return date is given in a letter to his wife, which was intercepted by the Dutch authorities.

3 Bericht des Genossen H. Maring, July 1922. Bing, 1971, p. 683, suggests that there were two different reports and describes their contents. However, there is no evidence of two different reports.

4 Letter to W. van Ravensteyn, April 2, 1922. See also the letter to his wife, April 1, 1922, intercepted by the Dutch authorities.

members who were in Shanghai and he must have mentioned his ideas.⁵ On April 6, Chen Duxiu sent a letter to Voitinsky in which he mentioned that the various local groups had met to discuss cooperation. This confirms that Sneevliet raised his ideas before leaving for Beijing, otherwise the timeline would have been too tight.

Sneevliet's experiences in the South and his talks with key GMD leaders led him to confront the CCP leadership in hope that it would give up its opposition to the GMD and develop political activities within the party. This would facilitate contact with workers and soldiers in the South, two of the four groups that he identified as comprising GMD membership. Sneevliet stressed that the communists had to ensure that any activities did not compromise their independence and that they should work out the appropriate tactics to use within the GMD. This became the focal point of contention. Sneevliet claimed that GMD leaders had declared their willingness to permit communist propaganda within their party. Despite these qualifications, CCP members did not receive the news well, provoking stiff opposition. Consequently, in July 1922, Sneevliet told the ECCI that before leaving Shanghai, he was unable to persuade the CCP to abandon its exclusive position toward the GMD and to develop activities within it.

Chen Duxiu's letter to Voitinsky outlined the views of the Chinese comrades (April 6, 1922 [1985], p. 35). While Chen's criticism did not derail Sneevliet's vision, it fed into existing uncertainties. As more information flowed back to Moscow, by the end of the year concerns about the tactic crystallized. Radek, Voitinsky and Zinoviev were particularly concerned. Chen's letter began by making the case that the basic policies of the two parties were different: the GMD's cooperation with America, Zhang Zuolin and Duan Qirui was incompatible with communism and that outside of Guangdong, the GMD was regarded as a "political party scrambling for power and profit." The political situation meant that if they sought to ally with Sun, they would run into hostility from Chen Jiongming, rendering impossible any activities in Guangdong. "Comrades" from Guangdong, Beijing, Shanghai, Changsha and Wuhan had met to discuss the question of joining the GMD and "without exception"

5 Bing describes these initial talks as the First Hangzhou Plenum (April 1922). He is correct in identifying that talks took place but it is clear that there was no plenum and that the only Hangzhou plenum that took place was in late August 1922. For Bing's argumentation see 1971, p. 684, 1973a and 1973b, pp. 751–52. Evidence to refute his view was provided at the time by Cheng, 1972; Muntjewerf, 1973; and Chan, 1973. In the 1980s with the more relaxed atmosphere for Chinese historians, a number joined the debate also to challenge Bing's contention. See, for example, Yang, 1983; Wei Guansong, 1982; and Tong Zhiqiang, 1983. Contemporary documentation verifies the August date.

had passed a “resolution of complete disapproval.” As a result, Chen requested that Voitinsky relay these views to the ECCI should they discuss Sneevliet’s proposal.

The July meeting did not take up the criticisms perhaps because Chen Duxiu had begun to moderate his views. At the end of June, Chen wrote again to Voitinsky stating that although he did not see the possibility of a united front with the GMD, he harbored some hope that Sun and his followers would “temporarily follow the same road as us” (Chen Duxiu, June 30, 1922 [1985]). Zhang Guotao remembered that Chen Duxiu thought Sneevliet was “too optimistic” in his assessment of the GMD (Chang Kuo-t’ao, 1971, vol. 1, p. 221). This was a refrain oft repeated both within the CCP and by Voitinsky and others in the ECCI.

2 Reporting to the Comintern

On April 24, Sneevliet set out from Shanghai for Moscow but, once again, the trip did not go smoothly. The Japanese refused him a visa to travel through South Manchuria, forcing him to take a boat from Shanghai and transit through France and the Netherlands, arriving in Moscow in early July rather than the planned arrival in early May.⁶

Although unable to convince his Chinese comrades of the wisdom of his tactic, he was reasonably satisfied with his work in the South. It remained for him to convince the communists to work with and even to participate in the GMD, to report to the Comintern and to draw up a plan of action for the next phase. When Sneevliet arrived in Moscow, Comintern policy toward the East was undergoing changes that would render its leaders more interested in and receptive to Sneevliet’s account of the situation in China than they might have been a few months earlier.

The Third Comintern Congress (June 1921) met under sobering circumstances following the defeat of the “March Action” by the German Communist Party. This made it very clear that final victory was further in the future than many had thought. Trotsky, for one, declared that it was now clear that that world revolution was “a question of years” rather than months (Communist International, 1921 [1982], p. 90). The pressing need to analyze what had gone wrong in the West meant that the challenge of revolution in the East was

⁶ Report of the Acting Dutch Consul-General in Shanghai Concerning Sneevliet’s Stay in China, April 11, 1922 (Memo dated May 23, 1922), Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Exh 29-5-1922, D14, in Saich, 1991, vol. 1, pp. 265–72. For details of the trip see Saich, 1991, vol. 1, pp. 90–92.

ignored. No European or American delegate attended the ECCI session on the Eastern question (M.N. Roy, *Communist International*, 1921 [1982], p. 1018)⁷ and on the Congress floor speakers from the East were restricted to only five minutes each. Zhang Tailei complained that he had intended to provide a full picture of the communist movement in China and the anti-imperialist revolutionary struggle but time constraints made this impossible.⁸

Despite ignoring the East, the need for communist parties to break out of their isolation and to try to become mass parties was important for later China policy. Developments in Europe saw the emergence of a form of united front tactic that the Comintern felt could be applied to the East and in December 1921, the ECCI made it clear that this tactic of a “United Workers’ Front” was appropriate (Carr, 1953 [1978], vol. 3, p. 406). Weaknesses within the working-class were recognized and although social democracy was still attractive, the decisive battle with the bourgeoisie was some way off. Communist parties were encouraged to participate in a broader united front but to retain their organizational and doctrinal independence and their right of criticism. Sneevliet’s tactic for China fit within this framework but both approaches suffered from the same fundamental contradiction. Unity only existed in practical action to meet a common objective with the communist parties not giving up their ultimate objectives that they did not share with other groups, classes or parties (Carr, 1953 [1978], vol. 3, p. 407). This was exactly the contradiction that Sneevliet would confront with his plan for CCP cooperation within the GMD. How long term should cooperation be? How would the CCP pursue its own priorities that were not shared by the GMD? How would organizational independence be defended? Was the GMD even the correct partner? Who should organize labor? We shall review these challenges and Sneevliet’s tactic below.

Sneevliet’s first challenge was to change the negative perception of the GMD that was pervasive in Moscow. In response to the Washington Conference, which was convened by the Western powers to formulate policy for the Far East and the Pacific, Moscow convened the First Congress of the Toilers of the Far East (January 21–February 2, 1922). Sneevliet considered the outcome of the Washington Conference detrimental to China as it had postponed the possibility of war between the major powers. Future cooperation would adversely impact Russia and China, necessitating the two to cooperate more effectively.⁹

7 Zinoviev’s 60-page report to the Congress only referred to the fact that organizationally much remained to be done in the Far East, *Communist International*. 1921 [1982], p. 211.

8 *Communist International*, 1921 [1982], p. 472. Zhang Tailei, 1921 [2013], pp. 6–31, did submit a lengthy written report on the evolution of the communist movement that provided valuable information.

9 “The Chinese Reconstruction and the Relations to Russia,” January 10, 1922, S.A. no. 233, in Saich, 1991, vol. 1, pp. 229–31.

Sneevliet worked with Zhang Tailei to assemble the Chinese delegation to the Congress. None of the delegates were listed as GMD members but we know that some were indeed part of the delegation.¹⁰ Zinoviev's and Safarov's comments reflected a very low opinion of the GMD (Whiting, 1954, pp. 78–86) and were in marked contrast with the views that Sneevliet was developing based on his trip to the South. Zinoviev (January 23, 1922, *First Congress of the Toilers of the East*, 1922, p. 25) complained that some of Sun Yat-sen's supporters were gazing expectantly at American capitalism, hoping that it would “shower” the “benefits of democracy and progress upon revolutionary China.”¹¹

Sneevliet noted the phenomenon that Chinese intellectuals were generally favorably influenced by the countries where they had trained, the notable exception being Japan. However, he added that the leaders of the nationalist movement were “all influenced by socialist ideas” picked up during their studies in Japan, France or America (Sneevliet, September 13, 1922). Sneevliet enjoyed the benefit of contacts on the ground, while Zinoviev admitted that they were very poorly informed about the situation in South China (*First Congress of the Toilers of the East*, 1922, p. 25). The two men did share the view that the Washington Conference had made it clear that American capitalists were no friend of China.

Tao (Zhang Qiubai), a GMD delegate, challenged Zinoviev's negative view of the movement and denied that the Southern Government looked up to America as a “source of benevolent democracy and progress.” The GMD would “rather follow the Communist International than the Chinese imperialists.” He also challenged Zinoviev's assertion that supporters of the Southern Government wished to restore Mongolia to China (*First Congress of the Toilers of the East*, 1922, pp. 182 and 61, respectively).

Hearing this, Zinoviev expressed his pleasure and again pointed out the Comintern's lack of information about the situation in South China (*First Congress of the Toilers of the East*, 1922, p. 151). This did not prevent him from laying out a radical program for the GMD to follow. Chinese parties that considered themselves “true followers of democracy” were urged to adopt a system of Soviets even where they would be “preeminently peasant Soviets” (*First Congress of the Toilers of the East*, 1922, p. 154). This perspective was not on the radar of the CCP and Sneevliet, who were struggling to create links to the

10 There were 44 delegates of whom 14 were CCP members, 11 from the Socialist Youth League and 14 with no party affiliation. Most probably the GMD was not classified as a nationalist party by the Comintern. We know that Tao spoke at the Congress and he is identified by Zhang Guotao as Zhang Qiubai, a GMD delegate. See *First Congress of the Toilers of the East*, 1922, p. 239.

11 In his April 1922 letter, Chen Duxiu also criticized Sun's pro-American view, see Chen Duxiu, April 6, 1922 [1985].

working-class, somewhat surprising given the overwhelming dominance of the peasantry in China. Awareness did begin to dawn on the comrades. Zhang Tailei's written report to the Comintern's Third Congress (June 9, 1921) highlighted the work with labor but noted that the Chinese economy was built on the peasantry and that contemporary capitalism, despite imperialism, had not impacted on Chinese life. The "new village movement" was an important contributor to the small groups that had evolved in China. Chen Duxiu addressed the peasant question briefly after the Comintern's Congress (November–December 1922). It was hard enough for the early CCP members to assimilate the idea of a disciplined party to mobilize workers for them to shift their focus so quickly to working with the peasantry.

Safarov renewed the criticism of the GMD, agreeing that Voitinsky had been entirely correct that many in the Southern Government were sympathetic to the US. He saw less value in cooperation with the bourgeoisie, in sharp contrast to the tactic Sneevliet was developing.¹² He was willing to support "any national revolutionary movement" but only if it was not "directed against the proletarian movement" (*First Congress of the Toilers of the East*, 1922, pp. 165–67). The weakness of the working-class meant that not too much could be expected at the time but he thought it was developing. Crucially, Safarov stated that in "the Chinese labor movement, the Chinese workers must trend [*sic*] their own path, must not connect themselves with any democratic party or with any bourgeois elements." This must have provided comfort to those within the CCP, such as Zhang Guotao, who opposed Sneevliet's views on cooperation with the GMD. Safarov did not propose that conflict with "bourgeois democratic elements" was immediate but any opposition to the progress of the Chinese working-class would be met with a "determined fight."

The other looming key debate within the CCP was the proper role of the working-class. Safarov accepted that the national revolution could be supported but the work of organizing the proletarian and semi-proletarian masses of China had to be conducted independently (*First Congress of the Toilers of the East*, 1922, pp. 166 and 193). The main resolution adopted by the Congress showed even less support for cooperation with "bourgeois national movements" calling for "an alliance of the working masses of the Far East with the proletariat of the advanced countries—and with it—alone for the struggle against all imperialists."

Tao (Zhang Qiubai) agreed with Safarov's approach, claiming that the "Soviet system was quite suitable for China." Twenty years earlier, the GMD had laid down its approval to the question of authority, taxation, land

12 While Safarov's comments preceded Sneevliet's July 1922 report, he remained skeptical.

nationalization and the development of the proletarian movement and they were in alignment. In his view, the Southern Government enjoyed the “wide support of the proletariat” when implementing policies (*First Congress of the Toilers of the East*, 1922, pp. 182–83).

Safarov did not let matters rest, perhaps because he felt that Soviet pride was slighted by a representative from the East claiming that two decades earlier a bourgeois nationalist party had already adopted the Comintern’s policies! The Comintern was not so naïve as to believe that the GMD was a “revolutionary communist party” nor was it mistaken about the origins of the party (*First Congress of the Toilers of the East*, 1922, p. 192). Safarov rejected completely Tao’s suggestion that the GMD’s program resembled the Comintern’s and suggested that he failed to understand the Soviet system. He slammed Tao’s claim that the GMD had a plan for the nationalization of land but would only implement this once China was unified. Instead, Safarov called on the GMD to implement the policy immediately to set an example to the peasantry.

Given these exchanges, it is not surprising that the GMD delegates came away unimpressed with the Comintern. According to the “Brief History of the Chinese Communist Party,” the devastation in Russia caused by the war and famine left a bad impression on the delegates. On returning to China, given this and the way they had been treated, the delegates did not think the CCP would be of much help (Wilbur and How, 1989, pp. 456–57). Some even concluded that the Chinese communists were enemies and that precautions should be taken against them, an early warning.

3 Sneevliet Outlines His Views

Against this background, how did Sneevliet explain to the ECCI his view of the GMD, Sun Yat-sen, and the possibility for cooperation? Fortunately, by the time he arrived in Moscow, he found a more receptive audience.¹³ First, liberation struggles in the East were again seen as playing an important role in the world revolutionary process. Revolutionary activity in the West was in retreat, bringing the realization that world revolution would be a much longer process than many had envisioned. Second, by early 1922 the tactic of a united front and the need to work via other organizations to improve contacts so as to win

13 He delivered his report to the meeting of the ECCI on July 17, 1922. A summary of the contents, carried in a *Pravda* article indicated clearly that this was based on his written report of July 11, 1922. See “The Situation of the Chinese Communist Movement,” *Pravda*, July 30, 1922.

mass movements over to the communist cause was being promoted. The earlier hostility displayed by Safarov toward the GMD could always be put down to ignorance about the realities in South China and Sneevliet supplied the ECCI with the much-needed information on which to base future policies.

While all might agree that temporary cooperation with the bourgeoisie was necessary, this left plenty of ground for disagreement. Severe differences arose about the practical application, the best form of collaboration and, especially, how much independence should the communist organization retain? Sneevliet urged caution about the potential for a communist revolution and stressed the positive contribution that the GMD could make. Others, including Safarov and Roy, focused on the bourgeois nature of the Southern Government and saw a greater possibility for the development of a strong communist movement. For one group, it was “support but remain separate” while for the other it was “remain separate but support—if necessary” (Whiting, 1954, p. 89).

The general nature of the Comintern prescription and Sneevliet as the man on the ground allowed him sufficient space and flexibility to place his own stamp on the tactic. The Comintern could access other sources of information, especially during the first year but Sneevliet's reports were most influential in Moscow and certainly he carried weight with the CCP as “Moscow's representative.” Yet, this did not prevent opposition growing both in Moscow and in China.

Sneevliet's July 1922 report, letters, and articles in the Dutch and Russian press enable us to reconstruct his ideas on cooperation and where opposition emerged. Sneevliet saw the precise form of cooperation between the CCP and the GMD as his own idea. Shortly before leaving in China in 1923, writing to Liao Zhongkai, he noted that because clear, distinct classes had not yet emerged, the communists had to carry on the fight within the nationalist movement. Consequently, he “proposed and succeeded” in persuading the communists to enter the GMD (Letter from Sneevliet to Liao Zhongkai, July 21, 1923, S.A. no. 231).

Sneevliet's starting point was the very limited possibility for action by the communists. No significant proletariat existed to provide the CCP with a power base. He was struck by the “primitive methods of production,” even in Shanghai and he was especially critical of the role of the guilds. The guild system under which workers in the same factory belonged to different organizations, made joint action very difficult and impeded the development of a modern labor movement.¹⁴ There was very little chance for the development of a revolutionary socialist movement with the situation much worse than in

14 Maring [Sneevliet] (November 9 and 10, 1921); see also Bericht des Genossen H. Maring, July 1922. He made the same points in his letter (June 7–9, 1921 [2011]) to the Far East Secretariat of the Comintern.

Japan and even than in the Dutch East Indies. In comparison with their counterparts in Java, the “Chinese coolie, factory worker and artisan are seriously backward” (Sneevliet, November 9 and 10, 1921). This did not render labor work impossible. Despite pessimism, the one bright spot in Shanghai was the Chinese Labor Secretariat (August 1921), an organization that he had initiated.

He was similarly negative about the role of the peasantry, observing that the peasantry did not participate in political life and experienced very little economic differentiation. Unlike with the Russian peasants earlier or the Indian peasants today, there was no class struggle. Consequently, the peasantry was “totally indifferent” and without “political importance” (Bericht des Genossen H. Maring, July 1922). Earlier, he had written that the majority of Chinese inhabited their own economic system independent of the capitalist world. The Chinese peasants were small landowners with no big landlords, producing their own food, while the old farming methods accounted for their poverty (Sneevliet, June 7–9, 1921 [2011]). This led Sneevliet to counter Lenin’s view that the peasantry should be brought into the revolutionary process. For Lenin, in a pre-capitalist environment the involvement of the peasantry was vitally important.

By summer 1923, Sneevliet had somewhat modified his view. Shortly before leaving China, he wrote that special attention should be paid to revolutionary propaganda among the “masses of poor peasants, the young, modern working-class.” The communists had to find ways to reach the peasantry as their political awareness would not arise spontaneously.¹⁵ The article was written in May (published July 18), thus predating the Third Party Congress decision (June 1923) on the Peasant Question and the reception in Guangzhou of the Comintern’s May Directive, which called for the peasant question to be the focal point of policy.¹⁶ On May 31, Sneevliet informed Bukharin that what the communists needed most of all was an agrarian program.¹⁷ Guidance from Moscow shaped this conclusion as he was certainly aware that the Theses of the Comintern’s Fourth Congress (November–December 1922) noted the peasantry’s role in the revolutionary movement in the East.¹⁸ Sneevliet was in Moscow in January 1923 and must have become aware of the prevailing thinking.

15 “Survey of the Nationalist Movement in China. The Past and Future.” This draft was published under the title “Zhongguo guomin yundong zhi guoqu ji jianglai” (The Past and Future of China’s Nationalist Movement), *Qianfeng* (*The Vanguard*), no. 1, July 18, 1923.

16 At the end of May, Sneevliet sent a copy to Radek and Safarov, Letter from Sneevliet to Radek and Safarov, May 30, 1923, S.A. no. 231.

17 Letter from Sneevliet to Bukharin, May 31, 1923, S.A. no. 230. At the time, Bukharin was the Chair of the ECCI.

18 Certainly, it led Chen Duxiu, who attended the Congress, to pay more attention to the role of the peasantry.

His perspective about the absence of a modern working-class, an undifferentiated peasantry and the ineffective communist party organization, made him “very pessimistic about the movement in China and its possibilities” (Bericht des Genossen H. Maring, July 1922). This sense of hopelessness dissipated somewhat after his visit to Sun Yat-sen’s headquarters and to Guangzhou. In the summer of 1923, Sneevliet wrote that if he had not seen the actions of the nationalists, his experiences with the communists in Shanghai would have led him to suggest support only for Profintern work and not for the creation of an “artificial” communist party. This could not have been received well by Voitinsky who had been instrumental in pushing for the establishment of the CCP. Not surprisingly, Voitinsky and others in Moscow, such as Zinoviev, clashed with Sneevliet about the party’s role and capabilities.¹⁹

Sneevliet was not alone in this assessment of the GMD’s role and the weakness of the CCP. Three other reports echoed his views.²⁰ Lidin, who had been sent to China in October 1921, blamed the lack of success with the workers’ movement on the “intellectual group of the CCP,” which was isolated from the workers. The Labor Secretariat was “divorced from the masses” and the real workers’ movement had passed the communist small groups by.²¹ In June 1921, Zhang Tailei, a key informant of Sneevliet, raised the same problem with the Comintern. With very few exceptions, the labor landscape was populated by one form of traditional organization or another. The only “real unions” that Zhang Tailei identified were the Shanghai Machinists’ Union, the Five Metals’ Union and the Printers’ Union and those in Hong Kong. The Chinese economy was built on the peasantry and contemporary capitalism, despite imperialism, had not impacted on Chinese life. The challenge of how to operate without a modern proletariat but with a large peasantry was a crucial one during Sneevliet’s time in China and throughout the CCP’s early years.

Lidin complained that there was no “unified party” and no “single party” whose leadership could be concentrated under an authorized CCP. There were a few local communist groups, operating independently with little capacity for practical revolutionary work. The groups contented themselves with a “kind of greenhouse culture of communism.” In April 1921, Sokolov-Strachov wrote positively about the possibility of working legally in the South and noted that

19 Letter from H. Sneevliet to Zinoviev, Bukharin, Radek and Safarov, June 20, 1923, S.A. no. 231. This letter was written when Sneevliet was being criticized by Radek, Safarov and Zinoviev for maintaining too close relations with the GMD and underestimating the strength of the CCP.

20 These were not available outside of Russia when the research was conducted for the original publication of the Sneevliet Archive.

21 This report was sent to the Far Eastern Department of the ECCI in May 1922, Doc. 21.

Chen Duxiu had gone there to work under Chen Jiongming. However, he noted that there were different views within the government, with a pervasive air of pessimism.

Such reports highlighted how little there was to work with in terms of the proletariat or the peasantry and that the CCP was not an effective organization to promote the revolutionary cause. This perspective focused attention on the nationalist movement yet views differed about which leader represented the best option with which Russia and the CCP could collaborate. Sneevliet saw Sun Yat-sen as the best of the bunch but he remained ambivalent. Sun was more militant than Ghandi, thinking only about a quick military solution to the problems facing him (Isaacs, 1971, p. 104).

The main problems derived from the influence of tradition on the party's mentality and its leader, together with its militaristic approach to resolving China's problems. Nationalist and revolutionary propaganda did not receive enough attention. For Sneevliet, the 1911 Chinese Revolution resembled the German Revolution of 1918, with the same class dominating after the revolution; rather than shaking off the imperialist powers, the "revolution" had enabled the same class to tighten its grip on the country (Sneevliet, July 15, 1923). The political situation in China meant that the revolutionary movement was forced to use methods more suitable for a conspiracy.

Sneevliet felt that the GMD's organization had never evolved fully and, indeed, he laid out an organizational restructuring that Borodin would implement.²² The GMD operated like the old "secret societies" (it is unclear here whether Sneevliet is referring to the forerunners of the GMD), getting money from the Chinese émigrés and then using the money to finance military uprisings. The idea of a modern, mass political party was unknown in China and political groups tended to be cliques focusing around one specific leader. The GMD was no different, and indeed neither was the CCP. When Sneevliet tried to pressure Sun into reorganizing the party, Liao Zhongkai remarked that it would not be Chinese always to emphasize the party (Report from Sneevliet to Davtian and Joffe, July 13, 1923, S.A. no. 230). Sneevliet was told by a "prominent Northern militarist" [possibly Wu Peifu] that there was no such thing as the GMD, only a Sun Yat-sen party (Sneevliet, July 15, 1923). Obedience to Sun was the party's highest principle and Article 6 of the GMD's Constitution

22 For schematics of Sneevliet's plan for the reorganization of the GMD see "Two Drafts of a Plan for the Reorganization of the KMT [GMD]," S.A. no. 289 and "Schemes for Reorganization of the KMT, Including Budget Estimates," S.A. no. 290. These were elements of the reorganization plans that he and Chen Duxiu presented to Sun Yat-sen at the end of May 1923.

(adopted November 9, 1920) called on members to swear an oath to observe the party's principles: "to sacrifice his own life and body, liberty and rights to follow Mr. Sun in order to establish the Republic ..." Sneevliet perceived such a personification of politics as a major problem for the national revolution and asked "What is a nationalist movement in a colonial and semi-colonial country without a well-organized, strong, nationalist party?"

Further, the absence of a modern party was linked to militaristic solutions and the lack of sufficient propaganda work. Given the realities, Sneevliet did not deny the importance of the military question but he viewed the establishment of a mass party to be more important. The tunnel vision of the GMD leaders, who viewed revolutionary activity as simply organizing military ranks, was deplorable. It was a great mistake not to adopt other methods of struggle (Sneevliet [Sentot], November 8, 1922a).

This concern about the GMD's militaristic tendencies led Sneevliet to criticize the financial and military help the Soviet Government pledged to Sun from May 1923.²³ This seeming ambivalence weakened Sneevliet's position with those within the Comintern who wanted to build up the CCP as a more independent force and were not convinced that Sun was the best choice for collaboration. Sneevliet had initially supported aid for the GMD but for him it was dangerous to grant the assistance before the party was reorganized: aid should not be given "as long as the old danger exists that it will only serve to continue the old tactics and for the support of generals who know nothing of national-revolutionary principles" (Maring, May 31, 1923 [1991]). Aid should only be given after ensuring that it would not be used for military activities in the South.²⁴ Sneevliet's fear was that any aid would strengthen the militaristic tendencies within the GMD. Given the subsequent emergence of Chiang Kai-shek as the leader of the GMD, this might seem prescient. In a letter to Liao Zhongkai (July 21, 1923, S.A. no. 231) he wrote:

The exclusively military activities have made necessary permanent compromises with the feudal militarists as well as foreign imperialists. These tactics had for result [*sic!*] that the work of political education and

23 In March 1923, Soviet Russia decided to provide Sun's movement with 2 million gold rubles to help its development. This information was transmitted by Soviet envoy, Joffe, to Sun on May 1. Sun telegraphed his approval and acceptance of the conditions on May 12. Telegram from Joffe to Sneevliet, May 1, 1923, S.A. no. 234, and the telegram from Sun Yatsen to Joffe, May 12, 1923 S.A. no. 232.

24 Letter Sneevliet to Joffe, Davtian and Zinoviev, May 31, 1923 S.A. no. 231. He reiterated these fears one month later commenting "I am more convinced than before," Sneevliet to Joffe and Davtian, June 20, 1923, S.A. no. 231.

agitation was neglected totally ... Instead of being the leader of the nationalist movement the party became a feudal militarist among the militarists.

This must have weakened his position in his disputes with Voitinsky, Zinoviev and others. Having pushed the CCP and the Comintern to adopt his proposal for cooperation, such criticism must have been appreciated by those who harbored doubts about his views on China and the value of collaboration with the GMD. It rendered impossible his reappointment as the key person to work with Sun.

In July 1922, Sneevliet highlighted the weakness of propaganda in GMD work, a point he consistently returned to in his writings. Without good propaganda, the fighting would be meaningless, rendering it impossible to form a proper revolutionary army. Not surprisingly, he suggested the Soviet Red Army as the model to be emulated (Sneevliet [Sentot], November 8, 1922a). Only with a strong political mass party could a real army be created that would be devoted to the ideas of the national-revolutionary movement. This would avoid repeating Chen Jiongming's June 1922 "betrayal," when he had driven Sun Yat-sen out of Guangzhou. Propaganda work would strengthen the party by winning over the hearts and minds of the Chinese population for the revolutionary cause. Without this work, the GMD would remain indistinguishable from other warlord armies. The propaganda had to be launched on a national scale and not simply confined to the southern province of Guangdong. As Sneevliet reminded his allies "we are Chinese nationalists not local schememakers [*sic*]" (Sneevliet [Sentot], May 9, 1923).

Sneevliet still favored the development of the GMD into a revolutionary mass party stimulated by revolutionary propaganda but the slow pace of work caused him to become more pessimistic than during his first enthusiastic trip to the South. Frustration with Sun Yat-sen even led him to envisage a GMD without Sun as its leader. Sun's need to curry favor with the British authorities in Hong Kong meant that if he remained in Guangzhou, the CCP would have less influence over him. This relationship was far more important to Guangzhou than a mere two million rubles from Soviet Russia.²⁵

Despite the increasing disillusionment, in 1923 once Sneevliet began the work of cooperation, he saw no viable alternative: if the GMD had not existed, it would have been possible to create a more effective party to promote the nationalist revolution (Letter to Joffe and Davtian, June 20, 1923, S.A. no. 231).

25 Sneevliet, "Für die genossen Joffe und Davtian. Hachsatz zu den Brief vom 13 Juli. Ueber die Position Sun Yat Sens" (For Comrades Joffe and Davtian. Addendum to the Letter of July 13. Concerning Sun Yat-sen's Position), July 18, 1923, S.A. no. 231.

Yet, it existed and was influential and thus there was no alternative other than to work with it. He cautioned against precipitate action by CCP members that could speed up a schism with the GMD as this could only work to the CCP's disadvantage. Unlike the views of some, the moment of choice was a long way off (Letter Sneevliet to Zinoviev, Bukharin, Radek and Safarov, June 20, 1923, S.A. no. 231). This response was addressed to the Comintern leadership dealing with China with whom he had clashed over the question of the role of the CCP and the labor movement. This was during discussions in December 1922–January 1923. It was a clear attempt to acknowledge problems with the GMD while not undermining his view that the CCP was incapable of building a mass party centered around the working-class to assume leadership of the national-revolutionary movement.

Within the Comintern leadership, a majority harbored suspicions about the entire project of cooperation with the bourgeoisie and, as noted, both Zinoviev and Safarov had been harshly critical of the “bourgeois” GMD at the First Congress of the Toilers of the East. Some within Narkomindel preferred cooperation with the Northern Warlord Wu Peifu who, for a time at least, appeared to have democratic pretensions and tolerated socialist propaganda within his domain. The feasibility of Wu championing the revolutionary-nationalist cause was ended by his brutal suppression of the February 1923, Beijing-Hankou Railway Workers' Strike. The Profintern, despite Sneevliet's enthusiasm, had little interest in China where there was only a small, undeveloped working-class.

To convince the Comintern leaders that the GMD was the best organization for the national-revolutionary movement, he devised the novel construct that it was not a bourgeois party based on a single class but rather an amalgam of four different groups. This method of classification dominated thinking about China work up until 1927 when the CCP was crushed by the GMD. Sneevliet needed to portray class forces in China to reflect the framework laid down at the Comintern's Second Congress. Despite Sneevliet's rather loose terminology and weak class identification, the four groups identified later formed the basis for the Stalinist concept of the four-class bloc. First, there was the leading intelligentsia, most of whom were influenced by socialist ideas, which they had explored while studying abroad. Sun Yat-sen had even said that he considered himself to be a Bolshevik (Bericht des Genossen H. Maring, July 1922).

Second, there were the emigrants living in other colonial countries, who generally came from South China. This group was the “motive force in the Chinese nationalist movement” rather than the Chinese capitalists, since the capitalists were tied too closely to the interests of the foreign

powers (Sneevliet, September 13, 1922). The emigrants provided the GMD with financial support and expected, in return, the reunification of China, the establishment of law and order, and an end to both warlord rule and domination by foreign powers (Bericht des Genossen H. Maring, July 1922). However, Sneevliet foresaw a contradiction between the aspirations of these emigrants, who were after all large-scale capitalists living overseas and the “radical” leadership of the GMD.

Third, there were the soldiers who belonged to the army of the Southern government. While some of the generals were hostile to the political organization of the soldiers, the younger officers were willing to spread propaganda among the rank-and-file. Many, including Sun Yat-sen himself, were interested in the experiences and examples of the Soviet Red Army.

Finally, there were the workers. Sneevliet’s perception that the seaman’s strike was a nationalist strike led by the GMD influenced his pro-GMD perspective, a positive assessment that by early 1923 had become more muted. He was disappointed by Sun’s lack of engagement during the February 1923 railway workers’ strike, writing that “up until now,” Sun had understood “*very little* of the importance of the workers’ movement for the national liberation struggle” (Sneevliet, April 5 and 6, 1923). Given Sun’s weakness in the North and that the strike was promoted by CCP members working in the North, his lack of engagement is not surprising.

The flexibility of the GMD party program meant that this array of groups could be accommodated in one political party. As a result, CCP members could work within the GMD and openly conduct socialist propaganda in the South. Summing up his position in September 1922 he wrote:

The theses of the Second Congress can be implemented in China, where the proletariat has only developed slightly, in such a way that we actively support the revolutionary nationalist elements in the South. It is our task to try to keep those revolutionary nationalist elements together and to push the whole movement to the left.

SNEEVLIET, September 13, 1922

The positive assessment was not fully accepted either within the CCP or in Moscow, where other reports that had been received had queried Sun Yat-sen’s capabilities leading to flirtation with other possible partners. Sneevliet was not blind to Sun’s shortcomings but when promoting the tactic in Moscow and with his Chinese colleagues, he relegated them to secondary importance. In 1923, after his tactic was accepted and cooperation with Sun began, he dwelt more on the shortcomings. Now his objective was to transform the GMD into

the driving force of the revolutionary nationalist movement and the problems with Sun became major points of frustration.

To counter Sun's militarism and "dictatorial habits," Sneevliet sought to push a "democratization" of the GMD by drawing in students, workers and peasants thus broadening the organization's social base. He tried to persuade the party to devote more attention to propaganda to reduce Sun's dependence on support from a few generals (Sneevliet, 1926 and Isaacs, 1971, p. 104).

In Moscow, Sneevliet dealt primarily with Radek, who was entrusted with Chinese affairs on behalf of the ECCI. During their discussion, the idea was raised of Sneevliet accompanying Joffe to China (Isaacs, 1971, p. 107). Sneevliet provided Radek with the information for the "August Instruction" that he took back to China.²⁶ In July–August 1922, concrete opposition in Moscow to Sneevliet's ideas had not crystallized and the ECCI adopted his ideas without any apparent criticism. Despite this, Sneevliet was dissatisfied with his discussions with Radek. The ECCI was more interested in military affairs than in propaganda, a view that fitted well with Sun's priorities. Sneevliet thought that two different centers of gravity were already emerging: the center of Russian interests and the center of revolution (Isaacs, 1971, p. 107). Of course, this reflection came much later after the divisions between Stalin and Trotsky were fully formed and resolved in Stalin's favor.

To push work forward, Sneevliet proposed setting up an office for the Comintern and the Profintern in Guangzhou as it was the only city in the Far East where permanent representation was possible without being troubled by the authorities. The office was to be run by a joint representative of the organizations together with one representative each from China, Japan and Korea. It was to take care of the sale of communist literature as well as its translation into the local languages, coordination and support of the nationalist and communist movements in China and Korea, and regular reporting to the Comintern and Profintern. The office could serve as a center for work among youth and women (Bericht des Genossen H. Maring, July 1922). Sneevliet was appointed representative of the Comintern and the Profintern for a one-year term to run until September 1923.²⁷ The authorization called for him to maintain contact with the CCP leadership and to act on behalf of the two organizations in dealings

26 Letter from Sneevliet to Zinoviev, Bukharin and Radek, June 20, 1923. The report on the ECCI session of July 17 mentions that "Comrade M." [Sneevliet] was entrusted with drafting a letter for the Chinese and the Japanese Communist Parties. However, it is not entirely clear whether this refers to the "August Instruction." See "Aus der Internationale: Sitzung der Executive," *Internationale Presse Korrespondenz*, No. 145, p. 930.

27 "Authorization for H. Sneevliet to Represent the Comintern and the Profintern in South China," July 1922, *Klassefront*, May 1937.

with “the leaders of the national-revolutionary movement in the South.” He was authorized to conduct similar liaison work with the Dutch Indies.

Aware of the opposition in China to his tactic of cooperation with the GMD, Sneevliet returned with two instructions from the Comintern, while the ECCI sent a letter to the CCP Central Executive Committee (CEC) that reflected the ideas that it had heard from Sneevliet, Voitinsky and others. The letter, almost certainly drafted by Sneevliet himself,²⁸ reflected the common view that the CCP comprised intellectuals who had little contact with the working-class. The ECCI criticized the secret nature of the party’s work, meaning that the “masses of workers” were unaware of its existence. It added the caveat that the ECCI understood the necessity for secret work in the North but criticized the lack of activity with respect to strikes and called for the party to work with the national-revolutionary movement when opposing the major powers. The ECCI called on the CCP to develop its influence with the workers’ organizations connected to the national-revolutionary movement. Propaganda among the workers was to be linked to the Profintern, in practice Sneevliet, and the purpose was to strengthen work among women and the young. For the ECCI, only when the party understood how to set up workers’ organizations could it become a “genuine workers’ political party.”

The first of the two instructions was the July 18 decision of the Presidium of the Comintern instructing the CCP CEC to move its seat to Guangzhou and work “in close contact with Comr. PHILIPP” [Sneevliet].²⁹ Moving to Guangzhou would facilitate cooperation with the national-revolutionary movement and force the CCP to replace its preference for covert work in Shanghai for overt work in Guangzhou. It is remarkable that although Sneevliet, in his July report, had mentioned that Sun Yat-sen had been driven out of Guangzhou, the decision was still taken for the CCP to move its headquarters there. This suggests that Sun Yat-sen was not indispensable for good working relations with the nationalists in the South and it should be remembered that some favored Chen Jiongming as a better ally.

28 A document from July 30, 1922 refers to Comrade x (Sneevliet) being entrusted to draft a letter to the CCP and the Japanese Communist Party, *Zhonggong zhongyang dangshi yanjiushi di yi yanjiubu* (ed.) (1997), vol. 2, p. 241. This is a brief summary of Sneevliet’s report to the ECCI.

29 “Order of the Comintern to the Central Committee of the Chinese Communist Party,” July 1922, S.A. no. 239. Interestingly, given his later conflicts, it was authorized by Voitinsky. Under the pseudonym of Philipp, Sneevliet was appointed a correspondent for the Far East for the Communist International and the International Press Correspondence. For the authorization, signed by Radek, see S.A. no. 224.

Especially important were the “Instructions for the Representative of IKKI [ECCI] in South China” as they formed the basis for discussions with CCP representatives in Hangzhou once Sneevliet returned.³⁰ The document was a ringing endorsement of Sneevliet’s tactic, calling for the ECCI representative to base all his activities on the resolutions of the Comintern’s Second Congress. The GMD was described as a revolutionary organization and two tasks were outlined for the CCP. First, the CCP was to educate “ideologically independent elements” to form the nucleus of the CCP in the future. Second, the party was to organize groups of followers in the GMD and the trade unions. The Communist Party would grow along with the “growing split between the bourgeoisie—petty bourgeoisie and proletarian elements.” Until this time, the communists were to support the GMD and especially the wing that “represented the proletarian elements and manual workers.” To fight against foreign imperialism (Japanese, American, and British), a special propaganda organization was to be established. If possible, this work was to be in agreement with the GMD but carried out separately. This was because, on occasion, the GMD in the Southern Government would need to avoid conflict with the “imperialist elements.” Finally, with respect to workers’ organization, the main task was the establishment of trade unions. Significantly, no mention was made of the peasantry.

This version contains points five and six and other key sentences that are omitted in a version published by Soviet scholar, Kartunova (Saich, 1991, vol. 1, pp. 328–29).³¹ Importantly, discussion in China was based on this six-point text as this was the one that Sneevliet brought back to China. The edits by Kartunova erased evidence that might have led to a critical view of Stalin’s China policy during the 1920s (Pantsov and Benton, 1994, p. 53). The excluded sections concern the assessment that CCP members in the GMD would only remain until it developed the capacity to act independently: “Till that time the Communist are obliged to support the party KuominTang [GMD] and specially this wing of the party which represents the proletarian elements and the manual workers.” Section 5 stated that the communists most important task was to organize the laborers, work made difficult by the persistence of local guild organizations. The fact that many were devoted to “the cult of the ancestors or local divinities” rendered organizing modern unions even more difficult. This

30 This is hand-written by Sneevliet in English, S.A. no. 224. According to Sneevliet, the instruction was written by Radek based on Sneevliet’s statements about China. See the letter from Sneevliet to Zinoviev, Bukharin, Radek and Safarov, June 20, 1923, S.A. no. 231.

31 It is interesting to note that points 1 through 4 have Roman numerals, while points 5 and 6 are numbered 5 and 6. It is unclear if this is significant and whether it explains why Kartunova omitted these last two sections.

meant that local conditions would dictate the establishment of “industrial and professional organisations.”

Thus armed, on July 24, 1922, Sneevliet set out for China in the company of the Soviet diplomat Joffe. Joffe arrived in Beijing on August 12 where he remained while Sneevliet went on to Shanghai. Their mission was twofold: Joffe was to negotiate on behalf of Narkomindel with Wu Peifu in Beijing but Sneevliet would conduct secret negotiations with Sun Yat-sen in Shanghai. The relationship with Joffe determined much of Sneevliet's second stay in China. In the field, a close relationship existed between Narkomindel in the person of Joffe and the Comintern in the person of Sneevliet, who was also representing the Profintern. Until the end of February 1923, Sneevliet was busier with work for Narkomindel, with one important exception. Joffe acted as his direct boss demanding and receiving regular reports until Sneevliet's departure. This focus of Sneevliet's work and promotion of the national-revolutionary movement produced a sharp rebuke from his Comintern masters. The important exception to his work with Joffe during this period was critically important and required that he persuade the CCP to buy into his vision of collaboration with the GMD.

Cajoling the Chinese Communist Party, Uniting with the Guomindang

Sneevliet returned to China to ensure that the members of the Chinese Communist Party (CCP) would accept the tactic of working with the Guomindang (GMD) but the precise nature of the cooperation was not yet decided. In his absence, important changes had taken place that affected the work environment.

1 The Changing Scene in China: the Chinese Communist Party Shifts its Stance

In the short war of April–May 1922, the Zhili Clique defeated Zhang Zuolin's Fengtian Clique. The victors proposed a “government by good men,” an idea that appealed to many in China, including some of the communists in Beijing. Further, they proposed that both the Northern President, Xu Shichang, and the Southern President, Sun Yat-sen, resign with Li Yuanhong taking over as President of a unified China and with the old parliament restored.

On the night of June 15, Chen Jiongming's supporter, General Ye Ju, drove Sun Yat-sen out of the Presidential Palace in Guangzhou. This followed his return on June 1 to deal with the growing opposition to his policies. After the coup d'état, Sun sought sanctuary on a gunboat but troops loyal to Sun were swiftly defeated by those loyal to Chen Jiongming. Subsequent negotiations failed and Sun moved to Hong Kong where, on August 9, he boarded a ship bound for Shanghai (Wilbur, 1976, pp. 71–72).

Sneevliet was aware of Sun's defeat but still told the Executive Committee of the Communist International (ECCI) that Guangzhou offered the best place to promote his tactic. This played into the debates about the most suitable nationalist with whom to collaborate. Even after the Hangzhou Plenum (August 1922) had clarified support for Sun, communist party members in Guangzhou supported Chen Jiongming (Cai Hesen, 1926 [1980], p. 39). Despite the best efforts of the Central Bureau to change their preference, they persisted even after Chen Gongbo, a key supporter, was expelled from the party (Cai Hesen, 1926 [1980], p. 60; Chang Kuo-t'ao, 1971, vol. 1, p. 249; and Chen Gongbo, 1943).

Finally, the Second Party Congress (Shanghai, July 16–23, 1922) began the process of shifting from the original hostile stance to cooperation.¹ The Congress Manifesto abandoned the sectarian position and recognized the need to cooperate with the nationalists. This shift did not yet align fully with Sneevliet's tactic and was not only the result of Sneevliet's promptings before returning to Moscow. Dalin, a representative of the Communist Youth International in China also applied pressure amidst the changing political landscape. In April–June 1922, Dalin was in Guangzhou to help arrange the Congress of the Socialist Youth League (SYL) and his memoirs mention a CCP meeting held in late April, early May that discussed establishing a united front with the GMD. Debate was lively, lasting several days and the Guangzhou group clearly supported Chen Jiongming rather than Sun.² Zhang Guotao and a few others denounced the proposed cooperation but eventually, the majority, including Chen Duxiu, came to the realization that a united front was necessary (Xu Hang, 2013).³ With so many reservations aired, the Central Bureau refrained from adopting a resolution to allow further discussion (Dalin, 1975 [1981], p. 91).

Dalin took the opportunity to discuss the political situation with Sun Yat-sen. Their conversations were dominated by discussion of the Soviet view that, given China's current development, it was necessary to organize a united national-revolutionary front (Wilbur, 1976, p. 122). Dalin (1975 [1981], p. 101) noted that their earliest meeting took place on April 27, 1922 but the June 15 coup interrupted further meetings although Eugene Chen's intermediation kept them in contact. Chen informed Dalin that for Sun, Russia was the only friend of the Chinese revolution and that because of this belief, Sun had decided to go to Shanghai to continue the struggle and should this fail, he would go to Russia.⁴ While Dalin's and Sneevliet's promptings encouraged CCP members to shift their isolationist position, the changing domestic environment was also influential. Zhang Guotao mentioned that the Zhili Clique's

1 Twelve delegates represented 195 party members. Chen Duxiu attended as did Zhang Guotao but Li Dazhao from Beijing, Mao Zedong from Hunan and the delegates from Guangzhou did not arrive.

2 They were not alone, Vilensky-Sibiriakov in the Appendix to the letter he sent to Lenin went to great lengths to explain Chen Jiongming's background as a great revolutionary who had served the GMD for over twenty years. He was the "most popular figure in bourgeois-national China" and "one of the greatest personalities in young China," March 15, 1922, Doc. 19.

3 Given later evidence, clearly Zhang was a consistent opponent of close cooperation.

4 Wilbur, 1976, p. 123. According to another of Dalin's memoirs, Sun told him that "I have been disappointed in almost everything I previously believed in. But now I have become convinced that the only real and sincere friend of the Chinese Revolution is Soviet Russia." S.A. Dalin, *In the Ranks of the Chinese Revolution*, 1926, p. 115, quoted in Holubnychy, 1979, pp. 182–83.

victory in Beijing (June 1922) and the promise to restore the 1912 Constitution caused the CCP to moderate its stance (Chang Kuo-t'ao, 1971, vol. 1, pp. 242–44).

The first public sign of a shift in the CCP's attitude came with the promulgation of "The [First] Statement on the Current Situation" (June 1922) that was far less critical of the GMD. The GMD was the only existing political party that could be called a revolutionary party, although it was only "relatively democratic and revolutionary." Involvement of the Southern Government in the labor movement was viewed favorably but the GMD's occasional dalliance with the imperialists externally and with the Northern militarists internally was criticized. Such dalliance would surely end in defeat for the GMD.⁵

Even before the release of this public statement, Chen Duxiu's attitude was evolving. The earliest sign of a shift came in a March 19, 1922 speech to the Pudong Branch of the Shanghai Textile Union. He noted that Shanghai workers outnumbered those in Guangdong but there were already over seventy genuine unions in Guangdong, whereas in Shanghai two-thirds of the forty unions had nothing more than a sign. Answering his own question as to why this should be the case, Chen claimed that Guangdong workers were very enthusiastic about the unions but Shanghai workers were rather cold and in one place the political powers protected labor: in the other they sought to repress it (*Minguo ribao*, (Republican Daily) March 21, 1922, noted in Xu Hang, 2013, p. 81). On May 23, Chen followed up with an article basically acknowledging the need for a united front. Among the political parties, only the GMD expressed sympathy for the workers' movement and Chen acknowledged that it was more influential among the workers than the CCP. He called on the communist party, the anarchist party, the GMD, and other party groups to come together in a united front (*lianhe zhanxian*) with respect to the work of the labor movement. Yet, the CCP still played the key role in the revolution (*Guangdong qunbao*, Guangdong Masses, May 23, 1922). This more moderate attitude toward Sun and the GMD was reflected in Chen Duxiu's letter to Voitinsky (Chen Duxiu, June 30, 1922 [1985], p. 55). If the GMD could be reformed under Sun's leadership, it would be possible to work together, a possibility he rated as having very little hope.

The CCP's Second Congress adopted "The Decision on the 'Democratic United Front,'" outlining the party's thinking on the question of cooperation with other forces in the revolutionary struggle ("*Erda*" he "*sanda*", 1985, pp. 66–68). This confirmed the party's willingness to join the democratic revolutionary movement in a temporary union to fight feudal militarism and imperialism. In the crucial passage, the Decision noted for "the people's welfare, it is necessary

5 "Zhongguo gongchandang duiyu shiju de zhuzhang" (June 15, 1922), *Xianqu* (Pioneer), no. 9, June 20, 1922.

for democratic elements to overthrow feudalism. If the proletariat cannot bring about the revolution alone, they must be helped by the democratic elements in the revolution against feudalism.” This did not mean renouncing CCP independence as the “democratic elements” were “not a political party that represented the proletariat nor struggled for its benefit.”⁶ Since a democratic revolution was beneficial to both the proletariat and the bourgeoisie, the CCP was to “unite with all the nation’s revolutionary parties, organize a democratic united front to realize the overthrow of the feudal militarist and imperialistic oppression and establish a real democratic, independent nation.” However, the proletariat was never to forget to maintain its own independent organization. The Decision did not stress an unqualified preference for cooperation with the GMD but did call for the GMD and the SYL to convene a representative conference to discuss how best to pull other revolutionary parties together. This cooperation was a “bloc without”: a horizontal alignment alongside the GMD (Brandt, 1966, p. 30). It fell to Sneevliet to persuade the CCP to shift from acceptance of a “bloc without” to a “bloc within” with CCP members joining the GMD.

2 Hangzhou: a Time of Decision

Sneevliet was not pleased by the discussions and the decisions adopted by the Second Party Congress. On August 12, he returned to China and shortly thereafter convened a Central Executive Committee (CEC) Plenum at West Lake in Hangzhou (August 28 to 30, 1922), the first ever held by the CCP.⁷ The meeting was agreed upon in discussions between Sneevliet, Zhang Tailei, Chen Duxiu and possibly Deng Zhongxia. Apart from the members of the CEC, it was decided to invite Li Dazhao from Beijing. A Plenum was chosen as it was not thought feasible to convene a new Party Congress so shortly after the one held in July (Chen Duxiu, June, 1923).⁸ In all probability, the meeting was attended by Chen Duxiu, Li Dazhao, Cai Hesen, Zhang Guotao, Gao Junyu, and Sneevliet with Zhang Tailei as interpreter (Wang Jianying, 1983, p. 9).

Before the Plenum, Sneevliet wanted to ensure that he would have nationalist support for his tactic. He discussed the question of cooperation with Sun

6 Clearly by “democratic elements” the document includes the GMD.

7 The date is in Sneevliet’s handwritten notes concerning his activities between August 12 and September 3, 1922, S.A. no. 291. Qu Qiubai (1930 [1981], p. 167) in a series of lectures on the history of the CCP gave the date of August 29–30.

8 This is a Chinese translation of a Russian text, dated August 18, 1923 but as the editors point out, it is a mistake.

Yat-sen, Zhang Ji and Sun Hongyi. After arriving in Shanghai on August 14, Sun was now in a weak position and busied himself with finding new allies. His precarious position caused him to look more favorably upon relations with Soviet Russia and the possibility of some form of concrete cooperation with the CCP.

Sneevliet returned with the two documents that would enable him to push through his tactic. Elleman (1995) disputes Sneevliet's claims that he was not under orders from Moscow and that it was his own idea for CCP members to enter the GMD (Isaacs, 1971, p. 106). Elleman suggests that the move to Guangzhou and the "Instructions" came from the Comintern's highest levels. The reality is more complex and individual agency was important for defining the precise nature of cooperation. Sneevliet was instrumental in shaping these important documents. While the Comintern approved them, Sneevliet was the driving force, drafting them and bringing them back to China.

In addition to the two documents, he carried a letter for Sun Yat-sen from Joffe, brought by courier. He discussed the contents with Sun, probably on August 25 at the house of a non-GMD member in Shanghai's French Concession. Sun's defeat made him realize the need for closer relations between the national-revolutionary movement and Soviet Russia (Sneevliet, 1926, p. 68). As before, Sneevliet stressed the need for the GMD to concentrate on propaganda work in Shanghai and not to focus on recapturing Guangzhou through purely military means. Naturally, they also discussed cooperation with the CCP.⁹

While progress was being made with Sun Yat-sen, problems arose within the CCP. Following the Second Party Congress, serious divisions caused the party to begin to fall apart completely. Immediately after the Congress, Zhang Guotao had formed a "small group" to strengthen party activities. Dalin had left Sneevliet the message that, after the Congress, the party had split into two factions (Letter to Zinoviev, Bukharin and Radek, June 20, 1923, S.A. no. 231.) In fact, at the time of the Congress, party members were meeting in small groups to facilitate secrecy. Zhang Guotao's group was based on members of the Labor Secretariat and after the Congress they continued to meet to discuss general policy issues and to review how to implement the decisions of the

9 Sneevliet, 1927, p. 143 and S.A. no. 291. In his interview with Isaacs (1971, p. 107), Sneevliet stated that his views provoked a mixed response within the GMD. The right rejected them as they wished to realize their nationalist aims without mass activity. In contrast the left, headed by Liao Zhongkai, favored his approach. "A Brief History of the Communist Party" refers to a CCP representative calling on Sun to suggest cooperation. Sun is said to have agreed to the proposal at once and to have been supported by the most prominent GMD members in Shanghai. The "Brief History" implies that this was before the Hangzhou Plenum where a resolution on the "amalgamation of the KMT [GMD] and the KCT [CCP] in terms of internal organization" was adopted. Wilbur and How, 1989, p. 51.

Congress (Chang Kuo-t'ao, 1971, vol. 1, pp. 250–51 and Cai Hesen, 1926 [1980], p. 43). The group drew in activists and they saw it as a way to overcome the inactivity of members such as Li Hanjun. Zhang Tailai discovered the meetings and immediately reported them to the CEC.¹⁰ When Chen Duxiu was made aware of what was happening, he resigned as chair of the CEC (Cai Hesen, 1926 [1980], p. 43).¹¹ Four of the five members elected to the CEC at the Second Party Congress were members of Zhang's "small group": Zhang Guotao, Cai Hesen, Gao Junyu and Deng Zhongxia.¹² Rather than a "small group," this suggests that it was the most powerful force within the CCP. At the Third Congress, Zhang and Cai were vocal opponents of Sneevliet's tactic and Gao and Deng were not elected to the new CEC, presumably because of their opposition.

Given this background, when the members came together in Hangzhou for the Plenum, they had two issues on the agenda: the internal problems created by the presence of the "small group" and the broader question of tactics and collaboration with the GMD.¹³ The perpetuation of the "small group" after the Congress was criticized and its continuation was attributed to the Congress not dealing effectively with the passivity of members such as Li Hanjun. In particular, the "small group" was criticized for implementing reform of the Shanghai branch in breach of CEC decisions. Moreover, the Labor Secretariat began to take over the functions of the CEC, arranging work for activists without seeking approval. Zhang Guotao's power increased because he was unwilling to delegate work but, at the same time, his high-handed manner caused his popularity with other party members to fall (Cai Hesen, 1926 [1980], p. 44).

Sneevliet was not satisfied with the composition of the CEC and suggested its expansion by adding Li Hanjun and Li Dazhao (Cai Hesen, 1926 [1980], p. 43), presumably because he thought they would support his view of the GMD. Despite their earlier squabbles, Sneevliet thought highly of Li Hanjun as a theoretician and agreed with Li's view that it "would be a tactical mistake

10 Zhang Tailai was particularly concerned that at the "small group" meeting he attended, the idea of CCP members joining the GMD was criticized, Chang Kuo-t'ao, 1971, vol. 1, p. 251.

11 Sneevliet noted that Chen had handed in a letter stating that he did not wish to serve on the Central Committee (Central Bureau or CEC) any longer. Letter to Zinoviev, Bukharin and Radek, June 20, 1923, S.A. no. 231.

12 CEC membership is taken from Wang Jianying, 1983, pp. 8–9. The three alternate members were Li Hanjun, Li Dazhao and Xiang Ying.

13 S.A. no. 291. Other issues were the size of the CEC and CCP publications. Cai Hesen (1926 [1980], p. 44) mentioned the problems of the "small group" and the different attitudes toward the GMD as the two topics of discussion.

to try and reach the masses with the current small group [CCP].¹⁴ Li Dazhao would have strengthened Sneevliet's position and had accompanied Sneevliet to meet with Sun. Expansion was opposed by the Shanghai and Beijing party groups (Chen Duxiu, June 1923 [1985]).

To promote its political positions, the party had decided to launch a Beijing daily paper (*Yuandong ribao*, Far East Daily) but Sneevliet opposed this as he felt that the party lacked sufficient capacity and feared that it would soon falter. Instead, he proposed launching a weekly (Cai Hesun, 1926 [1980], p. 36) and indeed the Plenum decided to launch the *Xiangdao zhoubao* (*The Guide Weekly*).

Sneevliet got his way on the most important issue, cooperation with the GMD but there is controversy over the degree of opposition and whether he invoked the authority of the Comintern to push through his tactic. Chen Duxiu's accounts note extensive opposition at the Plenum whereas Sneevliet's accounts minimize the level of dispute over tactics.

Zhang Guotao (1971, vol. 1, pp. 253–54) remembered that Sneevliet stressed that the only practical way to implement cooperation was for CCP members to join the GMD. Sneevliet emphasized the weakness of the proletariat and the fact that the immediate task was the national democratic revolution. For Sneevliet, the GMD was a “strong, democratic, national-revolutionary political party,” formed from an alliance of revolutionary elements drawn from different social strata. The CCP could learn from experiences in Western Europe where communists had joined fronts with Social Democratic parties and trade unions. Once concluded the CCP would work to push the GMD in a more revolutionary direction, enabling it to attract the working masses to the communists' side.

Chen Duxiu, Cai Hesun, Zhang Guotao, and Gao Junyu were adamantly opposed and Chen also named Li Dazhao as an opponent, something that seems unlikely given his prior views.¹⁵ These opponents viewed the GMD as a bourgeois party and Chen argued that just because there were non-bourgeois

14 “Report on the Situation in China and Our Work in the Period 15–30 May 1923,” S.A. no. 297. Because of the differences that arose after the February 1923 railway workers' strike, Li Hanjun left the party. The fluidity of the party in these early years is shown by the fact that the Third Party Congress (June 1923) elected Li to serve as an alternate member of the CEC!

15 Li Dazhao supported Sneevliet's views and together they had already discussed them with Sun Yat-sen. In 1929, Chen, 1929 [1970], p. 227, claimed that all members of the Central Committee were opposed to Sneevliet and includes Li. However, Li was not a full member at this time and Chen was probably confusing him with full member, Deng Zhongxia. Further Zhang Guotao remembers that Li adopted a conciliatory attitude.

members, this did not mean that they could overlook its essential bourgeois character (Chang Kuo-t'ao, 1971, vol. 1, p. 254). In 1929, Chen Duxiu (1929 [1970], p. 227) claimed his opposition to an alliance was based on the fact that it would confuse the class organizations and restrain the CCP's independent policy. Similarly, Cai and Zhang feared that the approach would cause the CCP to lose its independent identity and they argued that it would be possible to establish a united front but with members remaining outside of the GMD, a "bloc without" rather than a "bloc within." A united front committee could be elected with Sun Yat-sen as chair and with two GMD members for each CCP member (Chang Kuo-t'ao, 1971, vol. 1, p. 254).

Chen Duxiu (1929 [1970], p. 227) claimed that it was only when Sneevliet invoked Comintern discipline that the CEC was compelled to accept "the proposal of the International and agree to join the GMD." If the Comintern decision was absolute, the CCP would have to abide by it and confine itself to expressing dissenting opinions (Chang Kuo-t'ao, 1971, vol. 1, p. 254). Yet, Chen's obedience was conditional, only supporting the policy if Sun revoked the ruling under which new members had to pledge personal allegiance to him and to place their fingerprints on the party oath. Chen called for the reorganization of the GMD on democratic principles, certainly an approach that Sneevliet could agree with.

Sneevliet remembered the meeting differently. In 1935, he stated that the great majority at Hangzhou accepted his views, bar only one or two opponents, most notably Zhang Guotao (Isaacs, 1971, p. 106). His contemporary accounts also do not mention significant opposition. In notes drawn up after the Plenum, he wrote "with our group no serious objections. The active groups in *Peking* and *Changsha* directly adopted ... Only Canton [Guangzhou] against ... where they supported Chen Jiongming."¹⁶ The conflicts he did acknowledge concerned organization but not the question of joining the GMD.¹⁷

In 1935, Sneevliet denied invoking Comintern discipline, having no "concrete specific instructions from Moscow."¹⁸ He stated that he had "no document" in his hand and had always been opposed to forcing people to submit to discipline; his ideas were based on his experiences with the Sarekat Islam. Yet,

16 "Notes of Sneevliet's About Cooperation with the KMT," end November–early December 1922, S.A. no. 270.

17 In June 1923, he wrote that, "many conflicts have developed in the small group, not about the differing tendencies of tactics but mainly about the question of centralization." Letter to Zinoviev, Bukharin and Radek, June 20, 1923, S.A. no. 231.

18 Isaacs, 1971, pp. 105–06. It is interesting that in his notes to a Dutch translation of Chen's 1929 letter published in 1931, he did not comment on Chen's remark about Comintern discipline. Sneevliet, 1931.

as we have seen, Sneevliet did come back from Moscow with an instruction—one that he had drafted. Further, in June 1923, he wrote that “since August (1922) the party has been forced to help the nationalist movement in the GMD organization” (Letter to Zinoviev, Bukharin and Radek, June 20, 1923, S.A. no. 231). Finally, in his speech to the Third Congress, he referred explicitly to the ECCI directives and made it perfectly clear that on this occasion at least, he was perfectly willing to use discipline to get his views accepted.¹⁹

Whatever the level of opposition, the Plenum passed the historic decision to call for individuals to join the GMD while retaining their CCP membership. The CCP was to provide direction for work within the GMD and lead the task of organizing trade unions. As far as Sneevliet was concerned the necessary freedom for the communists existed. The *Guide Weekly* was to criticize the GMD and prompt it to undertake stronger anti-imperialist actions.²⁰ The basic contradiction within the tactic of cooperation was set: CCP members joined the GMD as individuals but the CCP as an organization was to act critically and push the GMD in a more radical direction.

Given their later clashes, interestingly, Voitinsky’s August 1922 letter to the CEC supported Sneevliet (Doc. 32). It is unlikely that the letter arrived before the Hangzhou Plenum but it would have reinforced the idea of cooperation even if not referring specifically to the tactic proposed by Sneevliet. Voitinsky called on the CCP to form a close relationship with the “great political party of the national bourgeoisie—the GMD—to establish a democratic united front.” While supporting propaganda against the imperialist powers in support of the interests of the national bourgeoisie, members were to ensure support for the legality of the CCP and its work in the labor movement. The letter left open space for differences over the extent of independence, a key area that led to sharp differences between Sneevliet and Voitinsky.

Following the Plenum, Sun Yat-sen was informed of the Decision and concrete arrangements were set in motion. Sneevliet discussed relations with the GMD with Li Dazhao and Chen Duxiu and also with Zhang Ji (S.A. no. 291) and Sun (S.A. no. 292). Li Dazhao was the first to join the GMD but Sneevliet makes no mention of the order, merely noting that on September 4, Chen Duxiu, Li Dazhao and Zhang Tailei became members of the GMD.²¹ On September 6,

19 “Discussion on the Relations Between the CPC and the Kuomintang,” June 1923, S.A. no. 277.

20 “Notes of Sneevliet’s About Cooperation with the Kuomintang,” end November–early December 1922, S.A. no. 270.

21 Wang Jingwei, 1927, p. 2854; “Notes of Sneevliet’s About his Activities from August 12 to September 7,” S.A. no. 291. Zhang Guotao, 1971, vol. 1, p. 260, remembered that Chen Duxiu, Li Dazhao, Cai Hesen and Zhang Tailei were sponsored by Zhang Ji and all joined together at a ceremony officiated by Sun Yat-sen.

Chen Duxiu was named to the nine-person commission set up to plan the reorganization of the GMD.²² Following a final talk with Sun, Li Dazhao returned to Beijing to see Wu Peifu, perhaps because of Sun's worries about Wu's pro-English disposition (S.A. nos. 291 and 292).

Despite initial opposition, shortly after the Plenum, Chen was expounding the new line in *Xiangdao zhoubao* (September 20, 1922a, p. 16). He argued that Chinese industry had not yet developed to the point where there was a clear distinction between the bourgeoisie and the proletariat. Consequently, the time was not ripe for a proletarian revolution, only a national revolution. Once the national revolution was completed, the focus would be on developing the economy and the proletariat under CCP leadership. Elsewhere in the same issue, Chen supported the GMD playing the leading role in the national revolution because its "Three People's Principles" were for the welfare of the "masses in general" and not for a specific class. He echoed Sneevliet's analysis of the composition of the GMD by noting that membership embraced elements of all classes (Chen Duxiu, September 22, 1922a, p. 16).

Despite this historic decision, initial practical implications were slight. The relative powerlessness of Sun Yat-sen and the difficulty of implementing the tactic explains the acquiescence of Sneevliet's opponents. Indeed, the first serious attempts at cooperation were not with Sun but with the Northern warlord, Wu Peifu, a cooperation that would have traumatic consequences for the young communist party. In June 1922, the CCP had discounted any kind of collaboration, noting that power in Beijing was in "the reactionary hands" of Cao Kun and Wu Peifu. Defeat for the reactionary forces could only be assured by engaging in revolutionary struggle and by renouncing the policies of conciliation and compromise.²³ These were prophetic words.

3 Sun Yat-sen, Wu Peifu and Soviet Russia

As these events were taking place in Hangzhou and Shanghai, Joffe had arrived in Beijing and set about pursuing relations with influential Chinese who could help support Soviet interests. He had multiple objectives in connecting with

22 For the list of the commission members see *Geming wenxian* (Documents on the revolution) (Taipei: Committee for the Compilation of Materials on Party History, CEC of the Zhongguo KMT), vol. 8, pp. 1040–41. The commission convened until December 1922 and produced a declaration that proclaimed the reorganization of the GMD. How active Chen Duxiu was is open to doubt as by November 5, he was in Moscow attending the Comintern's Fourth Congress.

23 Zhongguo zhongyang diyici duiyushiju de zhuzhang" (The First Manifesto on the Current Political Situation), June 15, 1922.

the official government in Beijing, the Northern warlord Wu Peifu and GMD head, Sun Yat-sen. Clearly, Soviet Russia wanted to keep options open concerning exactly which “nationalist” was the best to work with. In his discussions with Radek in Moscow (July 1922), Sneevliet managed to discourage further interest in Wu (Isaacs, 1971, p. 107). This may have been true for the Comintern, with many members lukewarm at best about cooperating with national-revolutionary movements but it was most certainly not the case for Narkomindel. Its members continued actively to court Wu Peifu and Joffe supported an alliance between Wu Peifu and Sun. In 1927, he wrote that “actively and outwardly—friendly relations were thus maintained with Wu Peifu, Zhang Zuolin and Sun Yat-sen” (Joffe, 1927).

In his formal position as Russia's negotiator with China, Joffe had three priorities. First, he needed to promote a regime in Beijing sympathetic to Russian interests. Second, he wanted to gain support and understanding for Russia's position and the presence of Russian troops in Mongolia. Third, he wanted to reach a similar understanding about Manchuria, including the question of control and ownership of the Chinese Eastern Railway (CER). While conducting negotiations with Wu, Joffe was fully aware that victory by Sun and Zhang over Wu would enhance Soviet influence in Beijing and might ease Russia's problems with negotiations over the CER. Sneevliet's strong preference for Sun Yat-sen even provoked a critical word from Joffe, who wrote that he had “again fallen under Sun's influence” (Letter Joffe to Sneevliet, November 7, 1922, S.A. no. 231).

Sun's position in Shanghai was weak but he used his time to scheme to oust Chen Jiongming and negotiate secretly with Wu Peifu to return to Beijing as president, a project encouraged by Joffe and Soviet Russia. Sun's dealings with Russia were directed toward achieving this objective (Wilbur, 1976, p. 32). However, the situation was much more complicated, with all the actors harboring ulterior motives and requiring the cooperation of the others. Sneevliet persuaded the CCP to join the GMD for which he needed Sun's active agreement. Sun, driven out of Guangzhou and shunned by the foreign powers, needed Russia's military and financial support. Soviet Russia had not yet decided which nationalist to support and wanted to keep its options open and thus wished to deal with Wu Peifu to receive recognition from the “Central Government.” At a minimum, the communists needed Wu Peifu's acquiescence to develop their organization among the railway workers in the North. In turn, Wu needed the support of the communists on the railway to break up the power of his opponents in the Communications Clique and to ensure his supply lines during the war with Zhang Zuolin.

In negotiating with Wu, Joffe was merely continuing the Narkomindel's seeming preference for the Northern warlord. The 1920 victory of the Zhili and Fengtian Cliques over the pro-Japan Anfu Clique, aroused interest in Wu Peifu (on the earlier relations between Wu and Soviet Russia see Wou, 1968, pp. 198–206). In October 1920, Vilensky-Sibiriakov praised Wu's pro-Russian inclination and thought that the new cabinet would have a favorable view of Soviet Russia (quoted in Wou, 1978, p. 202). Wu's call for the creation of a National Citizen's Convention to draw together the North and South increased his prestige among Beijing intellectuals as well as demonstrating his democratic credentials. Establishment of the Convention would benefit development of the labor movement since its representatives would be included.

Li Dazhao met with Wu Peifu and they decided that in return for Wu's protection in the Central China region, the communists would strive to ensure railway workers' support on the arteries of the Beijing-Hankou railway, crucial for Wu's struggles with Zhang Zuolin. Zhang exerted influence over the railways through his appointees in the Ministry of Communications (Wou, 1968, pp. 203–04). Communist support proved vital for Wu's victory over Zhang (spring, 1922) and, in return, Wu included the protection of labor in his political program. He proposed that the National Assembly should develop legislation to protect labor and establish a Bureau of Labor Affairs (Wou, 1968, pp. 203–04).

With Joffe preparing to leave for China and Sneevliet delivering his report to the ECCI promoting cooperation with the GMD, Narkomindel was presenting its preference for Wu Peifu. In July 1922, A. Khodorov sharply attacked Sun Yat-sen for trying to forge an alliance with Zhang Zuolin in opposition to Wu. This was an "unholy alliance," with Sun "using the masses as cannon fodder" (Khodorov, July 29, 1922, pp. 41–46). Vilensky-Sibiriakov was Wu's strongest advocate. Earlier in the same month, he sent a telegram to Chicherin and Trotsky claiming that Wu was the most important person in Chinese politics. With Sun gone from Guangzhou, he thought that most of the Southern provinces were leaning toward Wu. On June 27, he met with Wu and they discussed the unanimity of Soviet and Chinese interests in the Far East and felt that the basis had been laid for military and political cooperation.²⁴

24 Telegram from J.D. Janson to L.M. Karakhan marked top secret: it was from Vilensky-Sibiriakov to Chicherin and Trotsky, Doc. 22. Vilensky-Sibiriakov (August 12, 1922) published the contents in an article warning of Wu's tendency to ally with the heavy industrial interests in China.

The next month, as Joffe was writing to Sun and Wu, Vilensky-Sibiriakov went public with his preferences. His article dealt with Sun in passing but was positive in his appraisal of Wu. Wu was a genuine nationalist, strongly opposed to those warlords who served the interests of foreign imperialists and enjoyed close relations with Beijing's liberal circles.²⁵ Even as late as January 1923, Vilensky-Sibiriakov was proclaiming that entente between Sun and Wu was possible and that Wu would appoint Sun "President" to bring about the unification of China. This alliance would be perfect for Soviet Russia, providing support from the most powerful Northern warlord and probably permitting formal recognition in Beijing. At the same time, Russia could claim that it was supporting a legitimate national-revolutionary movement and incorporating the veteran Southern revolutionary, Sun Yat-sen. Such an alliance could have ended the argument about which "nationalist" to support. Sneevliet saw Vilensky-Sibiriakov's promotion of Wu as a problem, although his sharpest criticism did not come until April 1923 after Wu Peifu had crushed the Zhengzhou railway workers. He blamed Vilensky-Sibiriakov for creating the vision of Wu as "a national hero" and consequently weakening sympathy for Sun Yat-sen (Letter to van Ravesteyn, April 3, 1923, van Ravesteyn Archives, no. 18).

In Shanghai in August 1922, an alliance with Wu was also foremost in Sun's mind. His precarious position led him to seek cooperation with his former sworn enemy but mistrust lingered and this rendered an alliance all but impossible. His enthusiasm was heightened by pressure from the Soviet representatives who saw such an alliance to be in Russia's best interests. Undoubtedly if it opened the door to Soviet aid, Sun would have countenanced it.

Joffe viewed the alliance between Sun and Wu as a real possibility and through letters to the two men and Sneevliet's actions, he tried hard to bring this about. Before the Hangzhou Plenum, Joffe sent letters from Beijing to Wu Peifu (August 19, 1922, Doc. 24) and Sun Yat-sen (August 22, 1922, Doc. 25), indicating that Russia wanted to gain as wide support as possible for their policies in China.²⁶ Both letters began by praising the two leaders, with Joffe declaring his ignorance of Far Eastern affairs, thus requesting their advice and support. He wanted support from both men on two important issues for Soviet Russia: persuading China to join negotiations with Russia while Russia was negotiating with Japan and an understanding of Russia's position in Mongolia.

Joffe explained that Russia was compelled to negotiate with Japan because of its desire to expel the country from Russian territories. He had been

25 Already on October 17, 1921, Vilensky-Sibiriakov had referred to Wu as "a liberal leader of the Chinese bourgeoisie."

26 The letter to Wu Peifu is marked top secret, whereas the letter to Sun is not.

entrusted with these negotiations.²⁷ Joffe deliberately delayed these negotiations to travel to China to establish relations. He urged Wellington Koo, the Foreign Minister, to conduct negotiations with Russia simultaneously while Russia was negotiating with Japan. Joffe insisted he could deal with both at the same time. When this request failed, he asked Koo to send a trusted person to Japan so that Joffe could consider China's concerns in any negotiations. This suggestion was also refused.

The other issue vexing Joffe was Mongolia, upon which the "world imperialists" had designs. Joffe argued that Russian troop withdrawal was not in China's interests as this would result in the Japanese or Zhang Zuolin moving in. Despite this commonality of interest, he felt that the Chinese Government did not trust Russian motives and was simply pursuing its own interests. He wanted to dispel the distrust. Joffe called on both men to encourage China to enter into talks with Russia. The historical legacies were so intertwined that they could not be broken down into separate issues.

Sun replied (August 27, 1922, Doc. 27) that he shared the concerns about whether Russia would sacrifice China's interests when negotiating with Japan. He counted on Russia to ensure that Japan did not become entrenched in Northern Manchuria and thought that "some powers" wanted to prevent China and Russia from coming to any agreement before they could dictate terms to China. The Beijing Government was powerless and he advised Russia to wait until Sun changed the administration. He expected this to happen soon, resulting in a government that truly represented China's interests. Sun wrote that he fully believed in the intentions of the Russian Government and that Russia did not wish to annex the territory from China. He accepted that Russian troops should remain in Mongolia until a reconstructed administration was formed in Beijing as removal would indeed only "serve the imperialist interests of a particular power."

In addition to these broader questions, Joffe asked Sun's advice on five specific questions about Chinese politics. First, he wanted to know whether Zhang Zuolin was simply an agent of Japanese imperialism or whether he supported national liberation, despite being a little more reactionary than the others. Joffe was unclear who in Beijing supported Zhang and what was his class base. Sun replied emphatically that Zhang was a Chinese and it was inconceivable that he would wish for the enslavement of his country. His support derived from the military rather than from any social class and no one in Beijing supported him. However, Sun added that the administration in Beijing was an irrelevancy.

27 Joffe apologized that he could not meet with Wu at the present time but he noted that he was sending Hekker [Gekker] to represent him and he asked Wu to treat Hekker well.

Second, Joffe asked why Sun had entered into an agreement with Zhang against Wu Peifu, wondering whether this was simple expediency or whether Sun felt that Zhang's policy for China was actually useful. Sun replied the agreement came while Sun was in Guilin preparing for his Northern Expedition. Sun insisted Zhang cooperate with the Northern campaign and even oppose Japan, if necessary. The previous year, Sun had forged a similar agreement with Duan Qirui. Agreement with Zhang was preferable to having to fight both Zhang and Wu. Unification of China was the most important issue and Sun expressed his willingness to work with any leader who accepted his conditions.

Third, Joffe admitted that Sun's differences with Chen Jiongming were unclear to him and he could not understand why the question of whether Beijing or Guangzhou should lead national reunification was sufficient reason to "begin a bloody war." To answer, Sun attached a statement of his and denounced Chen as an evil person, who had clearly broken his support for Sun. This was the August 15 manifesto that called for national reunification, the abolition of the system of military governorships and the disbanding of troops.²⁸

Fourth, Joffe wanted to know why Sun did not recognize the parliament, given the role of the GMD, especially in the South. Sun replied that the facts had already answered this question and he had asked all GMD parliamentarians to go to Beijing and that the parliament had an inalienable right to meet. He was critical of the actions of the "Northern militarists" who prevented its meeting. With this problem solved, Sun did not want the actions to be seen as "acknowledging the legality of the Li Yuanhong administration."

Finally, Joffe was unclear about relations with Wu Peifu and whether the Chinese Ministry of Foreign Affairs was pursuing policies that were not in sync with those of the GMD and the "true interests of the Chinese people." Sun said that he was not in contact with the Ministry, referring Joffe to earlier comments in the letter. Joffe, of course, did not mention that he had also written to Wu.

Cao Kun and Wu received Joffe's message positively, providing hope for his preference for a Sun-Wu alliance. Writing to Sneevliet from Changchun (September 18), Joffe made it clear that the most important task was for Sun and Wu to work together to form a government and secure reconciliation with Zhang Zuolin, or at least to receive his support for the government. Such a government would receive Russian and Comintern support. He requested Sneevliet's support to persuade Sun Yat-sen. He was sending Colonel Hekker to meet with Sun and subsequently he would meet with Wu Peifu. He was

28 Sun's manifesto was published in the *North China Herald*, Shanghai on August 19, 1922, p. 511.

carrying a letter for both men and again he asked for Sneevliet's help in facilitating the work.²⁹

By September, cooperation between Sun, Wu, and Cao appeared to be a distinct possibility. The positive response from Cao Kun and Wu Peifu to Sun's August Manifesto provided an opening, with the formation of the "Able Men Cabinet" (September 19, 1922) marking the high point of the warming relations. The majority of members supported Wu but four of Sun's supporters were appointed.³⁰

The letters Joffe had delivered to Sun (September 15, Doc. 36) and Wu (dated September 18, Doc. 38), again expressed the view that an alliance between the two men was best for China and Soviet Russia would provide whatever support it could to such a government. His view had been strengthened by discussions with Foreign Minister Wellington Koo, who was concerned about the reaction of the "foreign powers." Joffe expressed to Wu his disappointment that the new government he had expected had not materialized with only a few new faces. He highlighted the difference between Soviet Russia and the imperialist powers who were taking advantage of China and not only seeking to maintain the old chains but also to impose new ones. In the letter to Sun, he commented that if Zhang Zuolin gave up his title and ranks and joined the government, he would be willing to accept this.

Writing to Sun, Joffe claimed that Soviet Russia had no desire to participate in the division of China but it did have specific interests with respect to the CER, interests that he felt were well understood by China. He raised his other territorial concern about Northern Manchuria where Russia would not recognize any Japanese interest. The situation in South Manchuria was different as the defeated Tsarist Government had to accept the Japanese presence. In contrast, Soviet Russia would stand strong and not accept any agreement that adversely affected Russian or Chinese interests. He did not want Russia's enemies to use Northern Manchuria as Mongolia had been used. Joffe pointed out that initially the Japanese wanted to negotiate first with the Far Eastern Republic and then with Russia but Russia's refusal meant they would negotiate with both at the same time. The negotiations covered only territory in the Far Eastern Republic.

In his letter to Wu Peifu, Joffe reiterated concerns about Northern Manchuria, which was a "question that could greatly hinder relations with Russia." The

29 Presumably these are the letters of September 15 to Sun Yat-sen and September 18 to Wu Peifu, Doc. 36 and Doc. 38.

30 Wang Chonghui was Premier, Xu Qian, Minister of Justice, Sun Tanlin, Minister of the Interior, and Luo Wengan, Minister of Finance.

territory must not be used like Mongolia as a haven for White Russians to undermine Soviet Russia. This was not an issue to be dealt with separately but had to be part of a comprehensive agreement with Russia. On Mongolia, he informed Wu that it “is already a serious obstacle to the initiation of friendship” and the obstacle could only become greater if “the faulty policies” were continued. He was especially concerned about reports that there were calls to move Russian troops from Mongolia, which he felt would simply lead to Zhang Zuolin moving in.

Replying on October 12, Wu Peifu (Doc. 40) was apologetic but wrote that there were too many obstacles preventing them from fulfilling their objectives. He hoped there might come a time when things could move forward. Progress with Sun was better. Sneevliet reported that during the meeting between Hekker [Gekker] and Sun, Sun declared basic agreement with Joffe’s September 15 letter.³¹ Discussions again pushed the Soviet view that a Sun-Wu alliance was in the best interests of all and this could trigger the kind of Russian support that Sun was asking for. Sun thought it was impossible to avert war between Wu Peifu and Zhang Zuolin, a war that Zhang would win. Hekker disagreed. Sun reaffirmed that Zhang was not merely a Japanese tool and that a victory for Wu would be a victory for the UK and the US. For his part, Hekker reaffirmed the view that Manchuria should not become “another Mongolia.” Sun mentioned that he had sent a representative to Zhang to help him understand that Russia was “our friend.”

Sun remained focused on a military solution to achieve reunification and was especially interested in Russian support to help achieve this objective. He wanted to establish military strength along the Northwest border or in Turkestan to facilitate not only communications with Russia but also the supply of weapons and food. Once the conflict between Wu and Zhang was settled this could be done and the process should start even before it was resolved. Sun ended by suggesting that if Joffe could agree to this idea, he would send a representative to Changchun for further discussions.

Initially, the CCP supported cooperation between Sun and Wu. In the first issue of *Xiangdao zhoubao*, published just after the Hangzhou Plenum, Cai Hesen (September 1922, pp. 4–6) wrote favorably about such an alliance. He could not predict its success but he called on Wu to distance himself from the “decadent warlord,” Cao Kun and for Sun and Wu to combine to defeat Zhang

31 “Vermerk von H. Maring über ein Gespräch von A.I. Hekker mit Sun Yatsen,” Shanghai, September 26, 1922, Doc. 39. Goorman from *Shanghai Life* was also present.

Zuolin so as to reunify China.³² In later articles, Cai Hesen laid down more specific conditions for cooperation between Sun and Wu. Cai (October 4, 1922) criticized Wu's continued support for the "pro-British, pro-American Foreign Relations Clique in Beijing" and for allowing "American capitalism to exploit China." An alliance with Sun could only be formed after Wu defeated this clique and clarified his stance on foreign relations. More specifically, he called on Wu to declare his support for Sun Yat-sen's policy statement of cooperation with Russia and Germany.³³ At the end of October, Cai Hesen (October 25, 1922, pp. 53–55) called on Wu to accept Sun's "Three Principles of the People." Cai interpreted the principle of nationalism as calling for a foreign policy that provided China's independence, going hand-in-hand with cooperation with Russia and Germany. Under the principle of democracy, he would be expected to abolish the Security Law, while the principle of the people's livelihood would result in Wu preventing the "American imperialists" from intervening in the Tangshan strike. The strike at the British Kailuan Mining Administration was suppressed on October 19 by troops under Wu Peifu's direction, a harbinger of things to come.

Despite the interest of both men and the prompting of Joffe and the Chinese communists, the two were unable to build on the foundations established by the "Able Men Cabinet." By late October/early November, it was clear that serious differences and mutual mistrust hampered further progress. Sun made clear his frustration with Wu's unwillingness to cooperate in a letter to Joffe (November 2).³⁴ This did not prevent Li Dazhao from predicting (November 6) that a Sun-Wu government remained a possibility as Sun supporter, Wang Chonghui, had been instructed to negotiate with Wu (Letter Joffe to Sneevliet, Beijing, November 7, 1922, S.A. No. 231). Also, the situation did not prevent the CCP from moving its headquarters from Shanghai to Beijing in late-November. The expectation persisted that they would benefit from Wu's supposedly more liberal disposition. On November 7, Joffe complained that he had heard nothing from the CCP about the move. Moreover, the crushing of the Tangshan strike revealed the necessity of the move, otherwise "much would be lost."

32 As we have seen, Soviet Russia did not rule out the option that a Sun-Zhang alliance might defeat Wu.

33 In his discussions with Hekker, Sun had also warned of Wu's pro-UK and pro-US position.

34 He declared that he could not agree with the conditions for cooperation, Letter from Sun Yat-sen to Joffe, Shanghai, November 2, 1922, Doc. 43. The "Able Men Cabinet" had been convened by Li Yuanhong and was comprised of experts who were to sit above party politics. They never achieved this goal and the Cabinet fell apart when Li arrested the Finance Minister on charges of corruption based on shaky evidence. The Minister was later exonerated.

In early November, while Joffe shared the optimism of a possible alliance, he placed the blame for the impasse on Sun's shoulders. Wu had more reasons to be distrustful than Sun and wanted little from Sun, just the retirement of Xu Shuzheng and Zhang Zuolin, yet Sun had arranged neither. The possibility that Sun could get Zhang to retire was non-existent!³⁵ Dismissing Sun's fears, as relayed by Sneevliet, that Wu was in cahoots with Chen Jiongming, Joffe wrote "this eternal distrust on both sides is a boring matter and must be stopped" (Joffe to Sneevliet, November 7, 1922, S.A. no. 231). Sun's fear was very real and Sneevliet criticized the possibility of any such cooperation; Chen was an "autocratic militarist and a lackey of British capitalism" and he warned Wu against dirtying his hands through contacts with such a traitor. Sneevliet saw the hand of foreign capitalists behind the attempts to bring the two together and blamed the *North China Herald* for promoting the idea (Sneevliet, November 8, 1922b and November 15, 1922).

For Joffe, rumors concerning Wu's cooperation with Chen Jiongming were "absolutely groundless" and stood in stark contrast to Sun's on-going relationship with Zhang Zuolin. Joffe asked Sneevliet to inform Sun that "the possibility of a victory by Zhang over Wu *disquiets Russia very much*" (Letter Joffe to Sneevliet, November 17, 1922, S.A. no. 231). Joffe's preference for Wu must have produced a sharp response from Sneevliet because on November 17, Joffe wrote

To end our old struggle and to prevent all the jokes about my sympathy for General Wu reemerging, I repeat once again that of course I see Dr. Sun as a real revolutionary and General Wu as a self-seeking militarist. However, that does not mean that I agree with Dr. Sun's policy nor that I shall have no contact with Wu.

Joffe's conviction that the two could work together was weakening but he tried his best. The optimal approach was for Sun to come to Beijing and take a more active role in Beijing politics.³⁶ Joffe tried to pressure Wu to realize cooperation and he wired him that he greatly valued reconciliation with Sun, urging him to grant Sun his wish concerning Fujian (Letter Joffe to Sneevliet,

35 Xu, a prominent warlord, was the right-hand man of Duan Qirui and a prominent member of the Anhui Clique.

36 Sneevliet agreed that Sun was marginalized politically while he remained in Shanghai, noting that Sun had been forgotten in Beijing, "Notes of Sneevliet's for his Report Concerning Activities After the Hangzhou Conference," S.A. no. 292.

November 7, 1922, S.A. no. 231).³⁷ To push matters along, on November 16, Joffe sent his military aide, Colonel Hekker and Professor Ivanov to meet Wu to outline his position. They conveyed three messages. First, Wu needed to speed up reconciliation with Sun. Second, they reaffirmed that Russia did not wish to become entangled militarily in a Chinese domestic struggle. Both Wu and Sun anticipated Soviet military help to defeat their enemies and reunify China. Sun was worried about rumors that Soviet Russia would ally with Wu to drive Zhang Zuolin out of the Northeast and Sun sent Zhang Ji to Beijing for discussions. Joffe assured Sun that Russia would neither take action against him nor defeat Zhang Zuolin militarily (November 17). While Sun feared Soviet military support for Wu, he expected such support for his own plans. On November 7, Joffe informed Sneevliet that he had reported to Moscow "Sun's fantastic plans about building a revolutionary army in East Turkestan." Again, Joffe signaled his unwillingness to see Soviet Russia involved militarily, informing Moscow that it would not be possible to try to occupy China, even by appealing to Sun, as long as he was not an official in the Chinese Government.³⁸

Third, Joffe repeated the demand for Wu's support in negotiations between Russia and China, support that he again demanded from Sun (Letter November 17, S.A. no. 231). Joffe's negotiations in Beijing had run into considerable opposition on the questions of Mongolia and the CER. Joffe had been well received by Beijing's intelligentsia but he met with strong opposition especially from Foreign Minister, Wellington Koo. Koo's first reaction to Joffe's suggestions for full-scale negotiations was measured. On September 7, Koo made it clear that the removal of Soviet troops from Outer Mongolia was a precondition for negotiations to commence. The CER was a key stumbling block preventing any progress in negotiations. An article by Kazanin in Narkomindel's official journal (October 3, 1922, pp. 26–32) indicated that Russia was shifting its emphasis from the economic importance of the railway to the political. The "political side" of the affair could only be resolved

37 On October 21, Sun's Northern Expeditionary Army captured Fuzhou, Fujian Province, thus raising the specter of recapturing Guangzhou in the future. Presumably granting Sun his wish on Fujian refers to this, perhaps asking Wu to cede control of the province to Sun.

38 Sun considered it possible to capture Beijing through an attack from the Northwest supported by Soviet Russia. In December 1922, Sun wrote to Joffe about his plan to lead an army of 100,000 soldiers from Sichuan via Gansu to Inner Mongolia to attack Beijing, along the historic line of attack, again hoping for the support of Russian arms and equipment. He asked Joffe whether and to what extent Russia could help. See Letter from Sun Yat-sen to Joffe, December 20, 1922, Shanghai, marked top secret, Doc. 51.

by direct Russian participation in the administration, a demand that Soviet Russia would soon make (Whiting, 1954, p. 189).

Joffe was clearly frustrated with the situation and sought to pressure the Chinese Government. His November 3 statement accused the Chief Engineer of the CER, Ostroumov, of mismanagement and corruption, demanding his dismissal. His claim that only Russia had the right to intervene in the affairs of the railway and that it was Russia's property unless Russia decided "of its own free will" to hand over ownership rights effectively ended any chance of a deal with the Chinese Ministry of Foreign Affairs. Also, it cost him valuable support among the pro-Soviet Chinese intelligentsia. The best China could hope for was the appointment of a new railway administration in agreement with Russia to replace the administration of the Russo-Asiatic Bank (*The North China Herald*, November 18, 1922, p. 421).³⁹ On November 5, Joffe went further and announced that Russia was no longer bound by its previous generous declarations of 1919 and 1920.

If he thought that he could pressure the Chinese authorities in this way, he was very much mistaken and any hope of success in Beijing ended. He underestimated the extent of Chinese nationalist feeling and how such sensibilities were upset by both the Mongolian question and the CER. Wellington Koo replied by agreeing to investigate Ostroumov but refusing any joint administration (November 11, in *North China Herald*, November 18, 1922, p. 426). The point was academic in any case as the railway ran through Zhang Zuolin's sphere of interest, beyond Beijing's direct control and hence engaging Joffe's continued interest in negotiations with Zhang. Further, Koo called for the railway to be turned over to China in accordance with what he believed to be Russia's previous pledge in the Karakhan Declaration of 1919. Joffe's reply did nothing to help the situation. He denied that the Declaration ever included the disputed passage that Russia would hand back the railway to China without any compensation. For Joffe, there was only the suggestion that a treaty be concluded to regulate the CER (November 14, in Woodhead, 1924, p. 862).

Joffe's increasing frustration was coming to the boil by the time he wrote to Sneevliet on November 17. The struggle against him had intensified and he suspected that Wellington Koo was encouraging the newspapers to write articles hostile toward Soviet Russia. Wu was increasingly isolated in Beijing and this

39 Ownership of the CER was formally vested in the Bank. In April 1918, the Bank registered itself as a French company and transferred its seat to Paris. Beginning in January 1919, management of the railway was taken over by the Inter-Allied Technical Board. In October 1920, the Chinese authorities formed a new agreement with the Bank that placed a number of Chinese officials on its board.

was exacerbated by General Feng Yuxiang's arrival to support Cao Kun. With Wu's increasingly unfavorable situation, even if Sun and Wu could come to an agreement "they will no longer be able to form a government." Cao Kun was preparing a crack-down and he asked the chief of the Beijing police to draw up a list of people to be arrested, with Li Dazhao and Hu Shih topping the list. Joffe intervened via Putnam Weale, an advisor to the President, to try to drop the list, informing him that such actions would be taken as directed against Soviet Russia.

For all intents and purposes, on November 18, any possibility of cooperation between Sun and Wu evaporated with the collapse of the "Able Men Cabinet," brought down by Cao Kun and his supporters. Cao's protégés in the Cabinet accused the Finance Minister, a Sun acolyte, of bribery, thus causing the resignation of Premier Wang Chonghui and the collapse of the Cabinet. In Cai Hesen's view (December 6, 1922, pp. 93–94), Cao Kun was worried about possible rapprochement between Sun and Wu and was particularly angered by the role Wang Chonghui played in laying contacts between the two men.

Although disillusioned, Joffe did not give up entirely his hopes for cooperation between the two men, hoping that the politically isolated figures might link up and "march in the vanguard of the revolution" (December 12, see Joffe, January 5, 1923, p. 2). More importantly, this article indicated Joffe's positive shift toward the GMD that he described as the closest thing to a political party in China and one that could serve as a meeting point for nationalism and revolution (Whiting, 1954, p. 210). The path was opening for the Sun-Joffe Joint Statement. In Beijing, there remained little more for Joffe to do, hopes of a diplomatic agreement had disappeared and the prospect for cooperation between Sun and Wu had slipped into the realms of wishful thinking.

4 Sun and Joffe Reach an Understanding

Frustrated, Joffe left Beijing and stopped off in Shanghai on his way to Japan to negotiate with Sun. In Shanghai, he was successful and on January 26, 1923 the Sun-Joffe Joint Statement was issued. As he arrived in Shanghai, Sun's fortunes were on an upward trajectory. On January 15, military forces in Sun's pay had succeeded in driving Chen Jiongmeng from Guangzhou and preparations for a return to the South must have been foremost in Sun's mind. His imminent return to Guangzhou (he returned on February 21, 1923) improved his ability to bargain with Soviet Russia. On November 22, 1922, he had already written to Chiang Kai-shek stating that he needed a power base to improve

his bargaining power with the Russians: without anything to bargain with, the GMD would fare no better than the CCP. The fact that the “leaders in Moscow” had advised the CCP to join the GMD demonstrated the necessity of first recapturing Guangdong.⁴⁰ Sun remained suspicious of Joffe and was not pleased by his attempts to secure a deal with Beijing and he was equally wary of the possibility that Joffe might agree a military alliance with Wu Peifu and drive Zhang Zuolin out of the Northeast. In their exchange of letters from August to December, Joffe was at pains to point out that Soviet Russia’s foreign policy was different from that of the imperialist powers. He wished to take into account Chinese national interests when negotiating with various parties. Sun was never entirely convinced.

Late in the evening of January 17, Joffe arrived in Shanghai and took up residence at the Palace Hotel.⁴¹ The following day the two men met over a dinner hosted by Sun and thereafter held a number of discussions. The police in the French Concession reported that the two men met on January 19 at the Palace Hotel and discussed the question of financial aid for the Southern Government, labor organization and the strike movement.⁴²

On January 22, Joffe visited Sun at his home for “tiffin” and a lengthy discussion ensued. They discussed methods to compel the Japanese to move out of Manchuria, abolish extra-territoriality in China and how to establish an alliance between China and Soviet Russia. According to “well-placed sources,” Joffe offered the GMD Russia’s moral and financial support in return for agreeing to three conditions. First, the GMD should immediately and publicly recognize the Soviets as the legitimate government of Russia. Second, it should publicly conclude a treaty of alliance with the Soviet Government. Third, it should not restrict Bolshevik propaganda in China. Sun agreed to the first two conditions but rejected the third and, as a result, the negotiations ran into difficulties.⁴³ The final agreement reached was for Sun and the GMD to recognize the Soviet Government once they had achieved supremacy in China. In return, Sun would receive Soviet moral and financial support.⁴⁴ Finally, Joffe had not

40 Letter from Sun Yat-sen to Chiang Kai-shek, November 21, 1922, in Sun Yat-sen, *Guofu quanshu*, 1960, p. 817. The relevant section is translated in Wou, 1968, p. 215.

41 International Settlement Police Daily Report, January 18, 1923, Shanghai Municipal Archives.

42 French Concession Police Report, January 22, 1923, Shanghai Municipal Archives.

43 International Settlement Police Daily Report, January, 23 1923, Shanghai Municipal Archives. This account presumably formed the basis of the British Intelligence Report “Secret Report on Activities of M. Joffe in Shanghai,” March 24, 1923. This report suggests that Sun could not agree to the third condition because of his dependence on the wealthy capitalist members of the GMD, Wilbur, 1976, pp. 136–37.

44 International Settlement Police Daily Report, January 26, 1923.

given up his hope for cooperation between Sun and Wu Peifu. Before leaving Shanghai, Joffe sent Colonel Hekker to meet with Wu to inform him that he could count on Bolshevik support against Zhang Zuolin if Wu came to an understanding with Sun and were to grant the latter “a voice in the direction of Government affairs.”⁴⁵

On January 26, the two men issued their four-point joint statement, providing useful propaganda for both sides. Joffe conceded that the communist and Soviet systems could not be introduced into China as the proper conditions were lacking. He denied that Soviet Russia had any imperialist aims in Outer Mongolia nor did it intend to cause it to secede from China. In return, Sun did not call for an immediate withdrawal of Soviet troops, especially as the present government in Beijing could not guarantee that such a withdrawal would not be followed by a rise in activities by the White Russians. Sun was willing to accept a temporary reorganization of the CER on the basis of the less dramatic Karakhan Declaration of September 27, 1920.⁴⁶ Sun insisted that Zhang Zuolin, through whose territory the railway ran, should be consulted (*China Year Book, 1924–25*, p. 863). The statement made no mention of Soviet aid to Sun’s movement.

Thus, Joffe could leave China safe in the knowledge that one influential Chinese leader agreed with the Russian desire to keep its troops in Outer Mongolia and that the administration of the CER would be “temporarily” reorganized based on an agreement by the Chinese and Russian Governments. For Sun, such promises were easily made as he had no influence over the situation in Outer Mongolia and despite his alliance with Zhang Zuolin, he could exert very little influence there either. However, the joint statement was an important step in Soviet diplomacy, stepping back from the initial grandiose promises of the new Soviet regime on territorial ambitions and gaining majority control from the Japanese over the CER but not leading to troop withdrawal from Mongolia.⁴⁷

Sun finally received the recognition from a foreign power that the British and the Americans had denied him. Even after the agreement, he continued to attempt to gain favor with the US but to no avail, which pushed him closer to the Soviets. He had agreement that China was not ready for the Soviet system

45 International Settlement Police Daily Report, January 30, 1923.

46 This was the more cautious version of the Declaration and it did not offer as did that of July 25, 1919 to return, without compensation, all Tsarist concessions in China including the CER.

47 On the successes for Soviet diplomacy that worked against the interests of the CCP, see the excellent work of Elleman 1997. On the question of Outer Mongolia see Elleman, 1993, pp. 539–63.

and what Sun wanted most of all was not cooperation with the CCP but access to Soviet aid, advisors and weapons (Elleman, 1995, p. 466). His wishes would be fulfilled later in the year.

The agreement was not received well by the communists. Although no direct opposition was expressed, they clearly were offended that the matter was never discussed with them and their role in China was undermined by the statement that the communist system could not be introduced (Chang Kuo-t'ao, 1971, vol. 1, p. 268). In Moscow, the event slipped by unnoticed in the official press. Although it was issued as a press release, it did not receive so much as a mention in the journals of Narkomindel, Comintern, or Profintern. The *Rosta* dispatch published in *Izvestia* and *Pravda* omitted the agreement that, at the current stage, communism or the Soviet system could not be introduced in China (Whiting, 1954, p. 204).⁴⁸ This suggests either differences between Joffe and those in Moscow or that the Russian public was not ready to understand a sudden shift of emphasis from Wu Peifu to Sun Yat-sen or quite simply that the Joint Statement was not considered sufficiently important.

For Sneevliet, he could look back on his second visit to China positively. Since returning from Moscow, he had convinced the CCP to adopt his tactic for entry into the GMD and Joffe had issued the Joint Statement with Sun Yat-sen, Sneevliet's preferred nationalist. He had received written assurance from Joffe that he saw Sun as the real revolutionary, while Wu Peifu was merely a militarist. Yet, both he and Joffe had become concerned about certain traits of Soviet policy in China that were beginning to place national interests over those of proletarian internationalism. Sneevliet's engagement in high-level diplomacy with Joffe meant that, "apparently he tended to forget his liaison mission between the Comintern and the CCP" (Chang Kuo-t'ao, 1971, vol. 1, p. 264). Just as things seemed to be falling into place, concern in Moscow increased about Sneevliet's too close involvement with the GMD and the relationship between building a mass political party and the united front. In addition, influential members of the CCP still harbored doubts about the form of cooperation with the GMD and they were not happy that their role had been reduced to an almost irrelevant sideshow. Returning to Moscow, Sneevliet discovered that he would have to defend his views on the form of cooperation against key members of the Comintern establishment.

48 In this context, it is interesting to note that an article written by Joffe in January 1923 was not published in Moscow for five weeks. The article offered high praise for Sun and referred to the joining together of the GMD and the communist movement as providing the mass party necessary to unite China and to oust foreign imperialism.

Doubts in Moscow, Continued Opposition in China

On December 23, 1922, Sneevliet arrived in Moscow to deliver his second report on his work in China to the Executive Committee of the Comintern International (ECCI) (Letter to van Ravesteyn, April 3, 1923, van Ravesteyn Archive, no. 18). While away, concern and even opposition had grown in Moscow about his work. Differences focused on three aspects. First, there were differences about which nationalist to support and whether Sneevliet had become too naïve in his views of Sun Yat-sen. Support for Wu Peifu was blown away in February 1923 once he attacked the Beijing-Hankou railway workers. Second, some felt that he had spent too much of his time on work with Narkomindel, especially with Joffe. Views differed about how Russia's claims on the Chinese Eastern Railway (CER) and Outer Mongolia were impacting support for the Soviets in China. The dominance of Russian national interests over those of the international revolutionary movement were emerging.¹ Third, the main issues debated at the ECCI sessions were the tactic of cooperation with the GMD, the role of the labor movement and whether a “mass party” could be developed under the current circumstances.

Joffe and Sneevliet had both become dissatisfied with certain aspects of Soviet China policy. The problematic negotiations in Beijing caused Joffe to think again about Soviet policy and he worried especially about Narkomindel policy on the CER. Sneevliet later wrote that, at Joffe's request, he had gone to Moscow to discuss the question of the CER and Soviet attitudes toward the railway and to gauge the views of others. Sneevliet discussed this at the highest levels, including with Bukharin, Karakhan, Stalin, and Trotsky (Sneevliet, July 20, 1929 and August 1929, p. 234).² With Stalin he discussed the issues of the CER and Outer Mongolia that were causing frictions with the Beijing intelligentsia.³ Much later in 1942, when interrogated by the Nazis, Sneevliet

1 For a strong argument that from the beginning the Bolsheviks had worked to promote Russia's narrower national interests, see Elleman, 1997.

2 In a letter to Karakhan, he mentions that he had sent a copy of talks with two members of the Far Eastern Republic to Trotsky, indicating that they had had contact on issues of Soviet policy in the East, Letter February 3, 1923, S.A. no. 231. During his interrogation by the Germans in 1942, Sneevliet (March 29, 1952, p. 2) mentioned that while in Moscow he had met with Trotsky.

3 A brief introductory letter from Bukharin to Stalin introduced Sneevliet as a worker for Joffe [sic] and asks Stalin to discuss the CER with him. Letter from Bukharin to Stalin, January 1923, S.A. no. 323.

(March 29, 1952) remembered suggesting that for propaganda purposes, the CER should be returned in its entirety to the Chinese. Stalin rejected the idea, as recent events in Persia had set a worrying precedent. The withdrawal of Soviet interests had simply resulted in an increase in American influence. This persuaded Stalin that Russia should not renounce its interests in such an important railway. Trotsky confirmed this view (Letter to Joffe, January 20, 1923, marked top secret, Doc. 58), noting that in general terms, the Politburo supported his suggestions but admitted that the question of the CER was very complicated. Trotsky did not understand why abandoning imperialist aspirations should mean that Russia renounce its property rights. It was unclear to him “why the Chinese farmer should have the railway at the expense of the Russian farmer.” For Trotsky, Russia’s stance did not amount to imperialism. He supported stabilizing the Sun Yat-sen regime and step-by-step it could share and then replace Russian expenditures for the CER.

Sneevliet also wanted to get a sense of Russian policy in North China, especially attitudes toward Wu Peifu, Sun Yat-sen and Zhang Zuolin. Joffe expressed his views and raised certain proposals in a series of reports to the leadership of the Soviet Government and the Comintern. On January 13, he warned that conflict between Sun Yat-sen and Wu Peifu was increasingly likely with the latter’s attitude toward Soviet Russia worsening. Joffe was using all his influence to avoid a split between the two men but if it came to a moment of choice, “the decision no doubt has to be made” for Sun. If Sun were successful and a link could be made via Mongolia and Turkestan, Joffe raised the question of whether Russia would have to continue negotiations with the Central Government, which was “imprisoned” by the imperialists. Sun suggested to Joffe that Russia should view his “revolutionary government” as the only legitimate government and it should deal only with it. However, Joffe raised the familiar warning that the GMD was really a Sun Yat-sen party but “our influence” had helped it on the road to becoming a political party of the Chinese masses.⁴

On January 26, as he was signing the joint statement with Sun Yat-sen, Joffe wrote again to the leadership of the Bolshevik party, the government and the Comintern.⁵ Progress with Sun led him to raise three suggestions, all of which he supported and two of which eventually enjoyed full Soviet support. First, he asked whether Russia was willing to provide 2 million gold rubles, or any other amount, in financial support to Sun. Second, would Russia be willing to distract

4 Letter from Joffe to Chicherin, Stalin, Lenin, Trotsky, Kamenev, Zinoviev, and Radek, January 13, 1923, marked top secret, Doc. 57.

5 Letter from Joffe to Chicherin, Lenin, Trotsky, Zinoviev, Stalin, Kamenev, and Radek, January 26, 1923, marked top secret, Doc. 60.

Zhang Zuolin with an attack on Beijing? However, the Politburo was wary of any proposal that might cause Japanese intervention.⁶ Third, Joffe asked whether Russia was ready to provide Sun's army with weapons over a year or two and, if not, when might such aid be possible? On March 8, the Politburo agreed that it was appropriate to lay the foundation of a revolutionary army in the west of China and to form an alliance. In the meantime, it was decided that, if he consented, political and military advisors should be sent to help Sun. In an appendix to the letter, Joffe outlined some of the consequences of the cooperation with Sun. He was concerned that Sun's success might hamper discussions with the Beijing Government and arouse the "imperialist powers" to promote anti-Soviet propaganda. The Japanese were especially concerned about Manchuria and Mongolia. The two issues of Mongolia and the CER were holding up negotiations and their solution was important and indivisible.

Consequently, Joffe called for Sun's plans to be kept secret and that his actions not be purely military but also include the "widest agitation" nationwide for a national agreement. He counselled against forming an independent government in Guangzhou if it acted as before by boycotting and not recognizing the Beijing Government. On the knotty questions of Mongolia and the CER, Joffe wanted to obtain the following agreements. First, an open proclamation that the Russian military should not withdraw from Mongolia as it would not be in the interests of the Chinese people. Zhang Zuolin's agreement on this was especially important. Second, he wanted an open declaration about Russia's position on the CER, noting that Zhang's agreement was even more important here. The current situation was unstable and an agreement was needed that abolished the "fictitious administration" of the railway company and stipulated instead that the administration would be appointed jointly by the Chinese and Russian Governments.⁷ The Sun-Joffe Joint Statement provided these guarantees.

Concerns about the direction of Russian policy caused Joffe and Sneevliet to put their ideas on paper.⁸ Their starting point was that in the colonial and semi-colonial countries pure Comintern work was impossible because class differentiation had not progressed very far. Pure party activities were unsuitable and had to be combined with conditional support for the national liberation

6 This was approved by the Bolshevik Politburo on March 8, 1923. See Notes from the Protocol of the 53rd session of the Politburo, Doc. 64.

7 "überlegungen van A. A. Joffe über die Perspektiven und die möglichen Folgen einer Zusammenarbeit mit Sun Yatsen," January 26, 1923, marked Top Secret, Doc. 61. Sneevliet was sent to Changchun [Mukden] to negotiate with Zhang.

8 "Concerning Our Work in Colonial and Semi-Colonial Countries in General and in China in Particular," S.A. no. 294.

movement. Russian foreign policy had to support this by being “nation friendly and anti-imperialistic.” Under no circumstances should policy be perceived as similar to that of the imperialist countries. Clearly the issues of the CER and Mongolia, which were hampering negotiations in Beijing, were on their minds and differences were eroding Chinese sympathy for Soviet Russia. A different approach was vitally important as Russia’s enemies were claiming that it was no different from other imperialist states. Now that the imperialist powers were seeking accommodation with the Eastern nations, the revolution had to be backed by deeds as well as by ideas. The fact that for a long period, the revolutionary movement would be a nationalist one hampered this because cooperation in domestic matters would be construed as interference. This highlighted the importance of the workers’ movement “where the internationalist spirit is stronger.” They called for Russia to promise help for the GMD so that it could develop into a mass party. In contrast, Russia must not support the “self-seeking interests of the different party leaders.” These views were not accepted in their entirety in Moscow.

1 Opposition in Moscow?

Shortly before Sneevliet’s arrival, the Comintern held its Fourth Congress (November 5 to December 5, 1922). Disillusioned about the potential for revolutionary activity in the West, the meeting paid far more attention to the question of the revolutionary movement in the East. The Congress reaffirmed the need for communist parties to form a united front with non-communist workers’ parties and organizations. The “Theses on the Eastern Problem” spelled out the different forms of the united front in the East and the West. In the West, a united workers’ front was necessary, whereas in the East, a united anti-imperialist front was the order of the day. The prospect of a prolonged struggle caused the Comintern to express support for all national-revolutionary movements in their struggle against world imperialism. Neither the theses nor Radek’s speech referred to the specific form of the alliance developing in China whereby individuals joined the GMD. Indeed, the workers’ movement was first to ensure its independence in the united front and only then should it enter an alliance with bourgeois democracy.⁹ This assessment was crucial

9 “Theses of the Fourth Congress of the Communist International on the Eastern Problem,” in Eudin and North, 1957, pp. 235–36. Roy was still wary of cooperation with a party of the bourgeoisie. He stated that, “This united front ... cannot be organized under the leadership of a bourgeois party.” Whiting, 1954, p. 96.

for the subsequent debates about the relationship between the CCP and the labor movement and the degree of independence of action. The Theses were opportunistic, calling for communist parties to participate in any movement that improved their contacts with the masses. To improve popular appeal, communist parties and national liberation movements were to develop agrarian reform programs and legislation.

Chen Duxiu and Liu Renjing were among the CCP delegates to the Fourth Comintern Congress, with Liu introducing the situation in China. He defended collaboration with the GMD and announced that without this, the CCP would remain isolated. Contrary to the idea of a bloc without, the bloc within would provide the communists with the opportunity to gain control of the only organization in Chinese society capable of winning mass support. First, such an arrangement meant their propaganda should reach the greatest number of workers to win them over to the side of the communists. Second, imperialism could only be defeated if the petty-bourgeoisie and the proletariat combined forces. The CCP "would be able to demonstrate that while fighting for the still far-off goal, we can work for the day-to-day demands of the masses. We can rally the masses around us and split the GMD" (*Protokoll der Vierten Kongres*, 1923, p. 615). Sneevliet could not have put it better himself.

Radek was not impressed with the Chinese communist movement. He lambasted the Chinese communists for their unworldliness, remarking that they behaved like traditional Confucian scholars, a common refrain. Locking themselves away to study Marx and Lenin meant that they had failed to "associate themselves with the laboring masses." He informed them that neither socialism nor the Soviet system was on the immediate agenda and that the party's current task was to work together with the "revolutionary bourgeois elements" to "organize the struggle against European and Asiatic imperialism." (*Protokoll der Vierten Kongres*, 1923, p. 141). These remarks must have been based on the reports by Sneevliet and others about continued resistance within the CCP to cooperation with the nationalist movement and complaints that the party was comprised primarily of intellectuals who had little real engagement with the proletariat. Given this predisposition, Radek should have welcomed Liu's comments.

Chen Duxiu (November 1922, S.A. no. 271) did not address the Congress but we can discern his thinking from a document he wrote while in Moscow, which showed that he had followed the debates closely. Chen was a member of the Commission that drafted the "Theses on the Eastern Problem," and wrote that the Third and Fourth Congresses of the Comintern pointed out the need for "the Democratic United Front and the Anti-Imperialist United Front." The

weak position of the proletariat and the bourgeoisie's failure to oppose sufficiently the foreign imperialist and native feudal class were key factors. The proletariat had to mobilize its economic power to convince the bourgeoisie that a united front was needed to overthrow these common enemies. The proletariat could "only develop its strength and its own independent class struggle in the complex process of the struggle within the united front."

Chen argued strongly for the CCP to maintain its independence while collaborating with the GMD. The GMD was the "only revolutionary democratic group in China" but there was a danger of compromise with the imperialists or "reactionary and dark forces," which had to be "ruthlessly" opposed. Making his point clear, Chen wrote:

In a word, in any struggle which we may take up or in any combination we may make with other parties, we must always show our true face to the masses. Furthermore, we must maintain our complete independence in any arrangement we may make in a United Front."

While the fight had to be directed against all imperialists, it was possible to work with certain parties against certain imperialists, such as Japan. The temporary compromise was sanctioned by the Theses if better, long-term results could be achieved.¹⁰

Chen picked up on the emphasis the Theses placed on the role of the peasantry. Only rural revolution could arouse the most people to emancipate themselves from the "despotism of the Great Powers," thus, for success, the revolutionary movement had to be "based on the action of the peasant masses" (Eudin and North, 1957, p. 233). It was crucial to define clearly an agrarian program and force the bourgeois nationalist parties to adopt it. Chen's comments on the peasant question are worth noting as they constitute the first detailed handling of the issue by a senior CCP leader. They stand in marked contrast to subsequent comments made over the following two years during which Chen showed less enthusiasm for the role of the peasantry in the revolution. In December 1924 (*Xin Qingnian*, p. 22), for example, Chen still referred to the peasantry as an ally of the proletariat but one that was inclined to compromise.

The CCP's Second Congress simply referred to the party leading "the workers to support the democratic revolution and forge a front of workers, poor peasants and petty bourgeoisie." The Congress Manifesto called for the specific

¹⁰ Eudin and North, 1957, p. 236. At the CCP Third Congress, Zhang Guotao suggested that given China's current situation, it was only possible to carry out a movement against Japanese imperialism but not against British or US imperialism.

policies to abolish the *likin*,¹¹ establish a national village land tax and limit land rents. Chen's November 1922 proposals went much further. He accepted that help from the "poor peasant masses" was necessary for the working-class movement to fulfill its revolutionary tasks in the economically backward countries of the East. Moreover, isolation from the peasantry would mean that the CCP could never become a "great mass party."

Foreign goods, floods and droughts caused by official corruption had destroyed the local economy causing the peasantry to suffer. Chen set forth six policies to deal with the problems. First, the size of land holdings was to be restricted to that of the large and middle landowners. All excess land was to be redistributed among the local tenants. Second, extending traditional practices, the peasants were to be organized into cooperatives. Third, peasant banks should issue loans at minimum interest. Investments by rich peasants and funds collected by clan and religious institutions would provide the banks' capital.

Fourth, villages would set up farmers' councils that would limit rents, which would be fixed for the district for the following year in line with the harvest. Fifth, the state was to set aside money from the taxes to enable the surplus rural populations to cultivate untilled state lands. Finally, the state should allocate money for the dredging of important river basins, especially the Yellow and Huai Rivers. However, at this stage, only in Hailufeng, Guangdong, where Peng Pai had begun independently to organize the peasantry was there any conscious attempt to organize the peasantry.¹²

Despite apparent acceptance of his views in July 1922, Sneevliet felt that some held the view that a communist mass party could be developed in the foreseeable future. This influenced views on how closely the CCP should be integrated with the GMD and the role of proletarian leadership. As other Chinese comrades developed their own lines of communication, different perspectives fed concerns within the Comintern about tactics. Sneevliet was derisive that "approximately 250 Chinese communists" could conjure up a mass party capable of "independent policy activity." Following this path would turn the CCP into nothing more than a "meaningless sect." The contrary perspective originated at the Fourth Comintern Congress, as the Far Eastern Section began to see a mass party as a realistic option in China. Sneevliet accused Voitinsky of deeming "the mass party necessary" and was surprised to find a cult around

11 This tax, introduced in 1853, was an internal tariff to fund locally recruited armies to fight the Taipings. It remained an important tax to fund local governments.

12 Peng Pai had been radicalized during his studies at Waseda in Japan. On Peng see Galbiati, 1985.

Wu Peifu, combining these delusions to think that policy “independent of the nationalists was desirable” (Letter to van Ravesteyn, February 26, 1923, van Ravesteyn Archive, no. 18).

Sneevliet spoke twice to the ECCI: on December 29, 1922 and January 6, 1923. He reasserted his previous position, providing an upbeat account of work over the past four months. The second meeting was another matter with the differences over tactics openly debated. When he arrived in Moscow, Sneevliet thought that the theses for the alternative vision “were as good as ready” and a Vladivostok Bureau was about to be established.¹³ Radek and Safarov were the main proponents.¹⁴ At the time of the Fourth Congress, Radek and others, basing their views on “false information,” began to push the idea of the communists building a mass party independently.¹⁵ Radek’s colleague, Safarov, was hostile to the bourgeoisie and had expressed optimism about the development of a strong communist movement at the First Congress of the Toilers of the East (January–February 1922). Given his comments at the Fourth Comintern Congress about the immaturity of the CCP, his skepticism about Liu Renjing’s optimism and his promotion of cooperation with Wu Peifu to increase communist influence in the North, one might have expected Radek to have been more sympathetic to Sneevliet’s approach. Yet he was the focus of Sneevliet’s ire.

Sneevliet reported (December 29) that conditions in Guangzhou had prevented the CCP center from relocating there and it remained in Shanghai. He repeated the claim that only the Guangzhou branch, which favored Chen Jiongmeng, opposed individuals joining the GMD. Party work had improved, publishing its own journal (*Xin Qingnian*) that carried analysis of current affairs in China. This was an improvement over previous publishing work that simply put out translations of works from the international movement. The new publication, according to Sneevliet, was welcomed within the nationalist movement and even carried pieces critical of some GMD activities such as the relationship between Sun Yat-sen and Zhang Zuolin. Some GMD members, but not Sun Yat-sen, welcomed such criticism and did not cause any problems for

13 Letter to van Ravesteyn, April 3, 1923, van Ravesteyn Archive, no. 18. In January 1923, the Vladivostok Bureau of the Comintern was established with Voitinsky, Katayama and Sneevliet as members. A copy of the decision to set up the Bureau is S.A. no. 244. This is a copy for Joffe.

14 This might indicate that the document from Radek discussed below is the piece to which he is referring.

15 “Report Concerning the Situation in China and Our Work in the Period May 15 to 31, 1923, S.A. no. 297, addressed to Zinoviev in Vladivostok, Safarov at the ECCI, Davtian, Joffe and the Profintern.

the CCP. The participation of key CCP figures in the GMD had eradicated competition between the two parties over control of the workers' organizations.

Perhaps providing fodder for those who believed in the feasibility of a mass workers' party, Sneevliet highlighted the increase in strike activity that had a stronger nationalist character, attesting to the workers heightened consciousness. However, he cautioned that this had not led to the development of many "stable organizations." This meant that Profintern work had to be "inextricably linked" to the nationalist movement as all relatively large strikes would be nationalist in character. This was a clear warning to those who thought that the CCP could head the workers' movement independently. The Beijing-Hankou railway workers were particularly strong with four or five staff members were forming a national organization, which Sneevliet felt had every chance of success. The railway workers in the North were under clear CCP leadership. In Hankou, they had organized some 25,000 workers drawn mainly from hardware, transport, and railway workers. The organization had called for a united railway employees' meeting to establish a national railway organization.¹⁶

Sneevliet reiterated his criticism of the GMD propensity to rely on the military to unify China while paying little attention to propaganda work. CCP participation in the GMD and Chen Duxiu's involvement in the reorganization committee would strengthen propaganda work. His hope was that this work would improve relations with Russia and promote "anti-war propaganda." In case his opponents were too encouraged by his positive words about the labor movement, Sneevliet added that this work in the GMD was the "most important thing for the further development of the Chinese Revolution." Those who thought of establishing "our own" mass communist party had no sense of reality, any discussion of the CCP's relationship with the nationalist movement had to take the situation on the ground as the starting point. Policy could not be based on "general tactics and viewpoints." In contrast to his earlier views, the situation was more favorable than that in the Dutch Indies or British India and he foresaw an inevitable split in the nationalist movement. As he outlined Comintern policies to the GMD Central Committee, the disputes that arose revealed to him that few members understood Marxism and certainly not to the same level as those Marxists within the CCP. He concluded with the plea that if the question of cooperation with the GMD had to be discussed once more, the Comintern should not shift from this basic position and the reality in China.

16 Of course, on February 7, 1923 it was this Northern railway workers' organization that was crushed by Wu Peifu.

The January 6 ECCI meeting discussed the differences.¹⁷ Sneevliet noted the dispute with Voitinsky but he saw no reason to change policy. The ECCI had set up a China Question Committee but had never met. Kolarov, Bukharin, Sneevliet, Voitinsky, Mac Manus, Eberlein and Schatkin were members. However, many disputes had arisen about the nature of the relationship with the GMD. Sneevliet called for work to be anchored on a draft from Bukharin and the August [1922] Resolution.¹⁸ There was “insignificant class differentiation” within the workers’ movement and progress had been made because of the collaboration with the GMD. He accepted that one could talk about “revolutionary optimism,” such as the opportunism in the Fourth Congress Theses but revolutionary nationalism was the required guiding principle: “We have no other way out.”

Voitinsky spoke after Sneevliet but there is no stenographic record because he spoke in English! However, we can glean the basic points of disagreement from other documents and from the comments by Schüller, who spoke in support of Voitinsky’s suggested amendments to the draft. Their basic position was that not only should the CCP have its own organization but also that this should be the focus of work for a communist movement. They rejected the view that the CCP should be merely a branch of the GMD, rather it should be the central organization. Schüller jumped on the idea that the CCP had developed a strong set of labor organizations, claiming that already there were 500,000 union members. Even Voitinsky rejected this figure, suggesting 250,000, while Sneevliet claimed that even this figure was unrealistic. Schüller accepted the necessity of cooperation with the “revolutionary nationalist political party” but emphasized that the CCP should exploit the contradictions between the various national groups to its own advantage. On this basis, he proposed adoption of Voitinsky’s suggestions for revision.

By way of summary, Bukharin noted that the key question was whether the CCP should remain in the GMD, to which he answered in the affirmative and suggested that no one would oppose this. He based this judgment on the advice given to “Comrades in Britain” with respect to the Labor Party and this could be adjusted to the specific circumstances in different countries.¹⁹ The national revolution was of primary importance in China but this raised certain

17 Extracts from the stenographic report of the ECCI session of January 6, 1923, Moscow, Doc. 56.

18 The outline from Bukharin has not been found but it may well be a draft of his January Resolution, which is referred to later in the discussion. The August directive presumably refers to the decision of 1922.

19 In 1920, the ECCI called on communists to enter the Labor Party on the condition that they maintained complete freedom and independence for their work as communists.

foreign policy issues. He feared that weakness might lead the GMD to seek an alliance with the bourgeois states. Thus, Point 6 of his draft "Resolution" called for nudging the GMD towards "Soviet Russia in the struggle against European, American and Japanese imperialism."²⁰

For the most part, Bukharin agreed with Voitinsky's suggested revisions and the remainder of the discussion focused on the wording of the "Resolution." Sneevliet tried to tone down Bukharin's emphasis on the special importance (*spezifisch wichtigste*) of developing a workers' political party. It was the most important task in the national revolution. Bukharin rejected his suggestion. Voitinsky's ideas on labor unions were acceptable and he did not believe that Sneevliet would object. The "Resolution" only covered attitudes to the GMD. The final "Resolution" contained the phrase "The specific and important tasks of the CP of China are to enlighten and organise the laboring masses, and to create labor trade unions in order to lay the *foundation* for a strong mass Communist Party." The addition of this phrase was the source of subsequent debate and serious disagreement.

Bukharin was well aware of the essential contradiction in the approach. He agreed with Voitinsky that the frontline of the national revolution should not be dissolved. Bukharin estimated that the real liberal bourgeoisie was small and that only 5 million out of a total population of 500 million could be counted as proletarian. Thus, the revolution's general task was for all revolutionary and democratic people, including the proletariat, to form a united front to promote the national revolution. The lack of an independent proletarian movement meant that the CCP's special task was to create such a movement, inevitably creating "contradictory organizational forms." Bukharin left it to Sneevliet and Voitinsky to work on the revisions and if they came to an agreement then the "Resolution" would be validated. Sneevliet did amend the language on one important issue. He opposed use of the following phrase in the draft: "Thus, under the current situation, CCP members remaining in the GMD is appropriate." To communicate the intent to the "Chinese comrades," he wanted clear, strong language that would remove any ambiguity. The final version of the "Resolution" states "Under the present conditions therefore it will be expedient for the members of the C.P. of China to remain in the 'Kuomintang Party'."

The revised "Resolution" was passed on January 12, 1923. Although the approach of July 1922 was basically accepted, it contained contradictions in

20 "Resolution Passed by the ECCI of the Comintern on the Relations of the Communist Party of China to the 'Kuomintang Party,'" Moscow, January 12, 1923, English, S.A. no. 272. An English translation of the official version of this document can be found in Eudin and North, 1957, pp. 343-44. The two versions are essentially identical.

the language that did not put an end to the different perspectives on how to promote CCP work. Considerable opposition to “entryism” remained both within the Comintern and the CCP. Indeed, reporting to the Twelfth Congress of the Bolshevik Party (April 1923), Bukharin confirmed that there had been a series of arguments concerning China within the ECCI (*The Twelfth Congress, 1923* [1979], p. 243). Voitinsky continued to push his critical views about the lack of GMD engagement with the labor movement and to promote CCP actions, even after the crushing of the railway workers in the February 1923 strike. On February 22, he wrote that, as of that date, neither the GMD nor Sun Yat-sen had expressed their views on the massacre, in contrast to the sympathetic responses from others, such as the students and even the liberal intellectual Hu Shih.²¹

Radek drafted the theses that angered Sneevliet and that supported the disagreements.²² In Radek’s view, the CCP had failed to create a proper link with the Chinese masses because of its inadequate understanding of the “essence of the political events in China” and the role that it and the working-class should play. Despite the 1911 Revolution, China consisted of separate territories under the control of different warlords. Showing the tendency to interpret developments in the East in terms familiar to the history of the West, Radek claimed that “these particular little princes” were centers of bourgeois development equivalent to the eighteenth-century absolutist kings in Western Europe. Even if these leaders displayed a “semi-democratic and even popular character,” the CCP was not to yield to them. Sneevliet found this claim especially ridiculous:

Think about the continual conflicts in Yunnan, Guizhou, Sichuan, Jiangxi, Guangxi and explain to me clearly what they have to do with the Radek explanation. The desire to find Marxist explanations for the political events in China speaks for itself—yet it can influence one and easily lead to absurdity.

Letter to van Ravestejn, April 3, 1923, VAN RAVESTEYN Archive no. 18

Radek noted the ties between these militarists and the imperialist powers and even suggested that the support given to Sun in his fight against Wu Peifu

21 Report from Voitinsky to the ECCI Secretariat on the work of the Far East Secretariat of the Eastern Department of the ECCI, top secret, February 22, 1923, Doc. 63.

22 “The Tasks of the Chinese Communist Party,” S.A. no. 282.

actually gave succor to Japanese imperialism as Sun's ally, Zhang Zuolin was its "vassal."²³

Given this environment, CCP members had to act as "front rank fighters" to bring about national unity on a democratic basis. The CCP was called on to launch the slogan of the "United Chinese Popular Republic," fight for an independent policy in alliance with Soviet Russia and only support those who ensured for the working-class "complete liberty of development and organisation." Finally, to make the communists a real force in the struggle, they needed to concentrate on organizing the working masses and creating trade unions and a "strong Communist Mass Party." The difference with Sneevliet's approach was all too apparent and could only provide encouragement to his opponents within the CCP, such as Cai Heseng and Zhang Guotao.

The Presidium appointed Sneevliet as the third member of the Far East Bureau of the Eastern Department of the ECCI in Vladivostok, joining Katayama and Voitinsky. The new mandate placed Sneevliet under the authority of the Eastern Department. The January 10 Presidium session also decided that both Sneevliet and Voitinsky should attend the CCP's Third Congress.²⁴ By the time the Congress convened, the party had moved its seat to Guangzhou and only Sneevliet was able to attend.

The new Bureau had an extensive remit. It was to advise communist parties and labor movements in Japan, Korea and China, prepare the ECCI decisions in advance of important political events occurring in these countries, direct propaganda work and political campaigns, establish close contacts between the Japanese and Chinese communist movements, bring "revolutionary" labor under the Profintern, and control the youth and women's movements.²⁵

Sneevliet was not pleased with his appointment to the Bureau and held out little hope for its success. He thought that its establishment repeated the mistakes of the old Irkutsk Bureau that he had attacked in his July 1922 report. He saw little point in going to Vladivostok and then importing the movement into Korea, Japan and China. Fearing that he might be called away from China to Vladivostok, Sneevliet asked Joffe to intercede with Voitinsky on

23 This suggests that it was Radek and Safarov who criticized Sneevliet for not opposing the donation of aid by Zhang Zuolin for the victims of the February 1923 railway workers' strike. Letter to Radek and Safarov, May 30, 1923, S.A. no. 231. In the letter, he noted that he did not speak with either Radek or Safarov during this trip to Moscow.

24 "Mandate from the ECCI Naming H. Sneevliet to the Vladivostok Bureau," January 11, 1923, S.A. no. 242, and "Extract from the Notes of the Presidium Session of January 10, 1923," January 12, 1923, S.A. no. 243.

25 "Decision to Set up a Vladivostok Bureau of the Comintern," January 1923, S.A. no. 244, In English and marked as a copy for Joffe.

his behalf. Voitinsky was puzzled by the missive from Joffe, claiming that it was never his intention to move Sneevliet away from China (Letter from Voitinsky to Sneevliet, March 27, 1923, S.A. no. 231). He was interested, however, in shifting Sneevliet and the Party Center away from Guangzhou.

In later communications with Safarov (March 8, 24 and 27), the head of the Eastern Department of the ECCI, Voitinsky criticized the decision to move the party center to Guangzhou as well as GMD work and he laid out conditions to form the basis for cooperation with Sun Yat-sen.²⁶ He thought that moving the CCP's focus of work to Guangzhou, as supported by Sneevliet, would move the party too far away from the strike action in the North of the country. Voitinsky did note that he had not written to the CCP about this matter as the decision was Sneevliet's to make and he had already raised the idea in early 1922. In fact, in July 1922 the Presidium of the Comintern had approved this and the order was signed by Voitinsky himself! For Sneevliet, the move was justified by the absence of a "true workers' movement" in Central and North China, thus depriving the CCP of a base.²⁷ Voitinsky felt that the February railway workers' strike was led by the CCP and, despite the destruction of the unions and repression of the students, it remained possible to promote further strike action in Central and Northern China. Thus, moving the Party Center to Guangzhou was inappropriate.²⁸

Voitinsky feared that at a critical moment the CCP might become isolated in Guangzhou. There was no rail link with Shanghai, Hankou and Beijing, the trip by sea would take five days and written communications were difficult. For him, these three places were the epicenters of the strike movement and he wanted to place as many party members there as possible. He accepted Sneevliet's argument in 1922 but this argument was no longer valid. Equally concerning to Voitinsky was that while based in Guangzhou the CCP might become too dependent on the GMD and become drawn into the factional divisions within the party. Voitinsky acknowledged that it remained important to take advantage of the possibilities for open work in the South but the CCP

26 Letter from Voitinsky to Safarov, head of the Eastern Department of the ECCI, March 8, 1923, top secret, Doc. 65; Report from Voitinsky to the Eastern Department of the ECCI about the Situation in China, March 24, 1923, top secret, for Safarov, Doc. 68; and Telegram from Voitinsky to Safarov, March 1923, Doc. 70.

27 In July 1922, the move to Guangzhou could not be carried out because of Sun's removal by Chen Jiongmig. "Order of the Comintern to the Central Committee of the Chinese Communist Party, July 1922," English, typed on cloth. S.A. no. 239, signed by Voitinsky.

28 Voitinsky refers to a Party Center decision to make the move. However, this document has not been found, unless he is referring to the July 1922 decision.

should not shift all work there and should maintain the “purity” of its voice among the “working masses.”

On March 24, Voitinsky reiterated his criticisms.²⁹ Reacting to comments purportedly made by Sneevliet that the defeat of the strike had left CCP members “very emotional” and “extremely pessimistic” about future work, he blamed the move to the South. He claimed that this divorced the activists from the movement and further he was perplexed why Zhang Guotao had been sent to Moscow to report on the strike when he could have been on the ground in China. A telegram or letter would have served just as well! Reporting that the party was planning to convene congresses for labor and the party in May, he expressed his preference to hold the party congress first, followed by the labor and the youth congresses. This would permit policies and strategies for these organizations to be prepared in advance. He opposed convening the CCP Congress in Guangzhou but acknowledged that meeting in Beijing or Shanghai might be difficult. He felt that the labor congress should be split between Guangzhou and Beijing, since convening a major national congress in Guangzhou would not be possible and in this way it would be cheaper.³⁰ Despite the differences, Sneevliet informed Voitinsky that he wanted him to attend the Party Congress and consequently Voitinsky asked Safarov to entrust the Eastern Department to issue formal permission for him to attend. The intention was to meet in April.³¹

Voitinsky resumed his critique of the GMD in his March 8 letter and March 27 telegram, claiming that it had failed to become a national political party and continued to act like a “warlord faction.” He was disappointed that the GMD had not taken advantage of the workers’ movement to promote political propaganda about the repression and draw to its side those students and intellectuals who were opposed to Wu Peifu. He criticized the tendency of the GMD leaders to place their faith in an alliance with Zhang Zuolin and he wrote that it was impossible to support any such alliance by Sun without

29 Report from Voitinsky to the Eastern Department of the ECCI about the Situation in China, March 24, 1923, top secret, for Safarov, Doc. 68.

30 The labor conference took place in Guangzhou between May 1 and May 7; the Third CCP Congress took place between June 12 and June 20 in Guangzhou and the Youth Congress took place in Nanjing between August 20 and August 25.

31 In the letter, Voitinsky requested that Safarov telegraph permission as he wanted to go for a few weeks to gain a better understanding of the current state of party work as well as of the situation in Japan and Korea. However, he did note that he needed someone to deputize for him if he went to China. The capacity of the Eastern Department needed general strengthening with an English speaker and to expansion of publications and propaganda work on the CER.

conditions.³² Support had to be based on the principles outlined in the CCP's June 15 Statement, hardly a ringing endorsement of CCP members entering the GMD as individuals.³³ Voitinsky wanted a clear line to be drawn concerning Sun's dealings with Zhang Zuolin and Duan Qirui for fear that it would damage the credibility of the CCP. He ended the message by requesting permission from the party to pursue his ideas.

On March 27, Voitinsky spelled out more precisely the conditions for continuing to support Sun.³⁴ The GMD should not place the focus of work on establishing military alliances with the warlords but rather should promote the development of political parties. Second, it should support the workers' and students' movement and, finally, all relations with Zhang Zuolin and Duan Qirui should be severed.

Such concerns found support in Moscow, especially with Safarov, who pushed the ideas to the Politburo and within the Comintern. Following the defeat of the February 1923 railway workers' strike, Zhang Guotao was dispatched to Moscow. His conversations increased concern about Sneevliet's role. On April 4, Safarov and Brike, on behalf of the Eastern Department, sent a sharp report to the Presidium and even called for revoking Sneevliet's mandate.³⁵ The report reflected the views of others who portrayed the CCP as moving beyond an "intellectual propaganda group" to one that was helping the workers' movement to develop a class character. For Safarov and Brike, the strikes of October–November 1922 and the February railway workers' strike demonstrated that the proletariat had reached the "highest developmental stage." By way of evidence, workers' demands had moved beyond the purely economic to include broad class slogans and even political and international slogans. This would lead to a swift increase in CCP ranks and prestige. Sun's alliances with Zhang Zuolin and Duan Qirui highlighted his lack of independence,

32 Earlier on January 25, 1923, Voitinsky had described Zhang as "a running dog of the Japanese," who carried out their policies and did not merit any support from Russia. Letter from Voitinsky to the Far East Department of the ECCI, January 25, 1923, sent from Chita, Doc. 59. Copies were sent to Radek and Bukharin.

33 This was one of the first public signs of a shift in the CCP's attitude towards the GMD and was very guarded in terms of support, commenting favorably on its involvement in the labor movement but wary of its occasional dalliances with the imperialists externally and the northern militarists internally. "Zhongguo gongchandang duiyu shiju de zhuzhang," June 15, 1922.

34 This was a telegram to Safarov, Doc. 70. He recommended that Sneevliet stay in China until the Labor and Party Congresses had been convened.

35 Report of the Eastern Department to the Presidium of the ECCI about Work in the First Quarter of 1923, Moscow, April 4, 1923, marked top secret, Doc. 71.

bringing the future of the cooperation into question. Consequently, the CCP had to ensure independent leadership within the workers' movement.

The same day, Safarov wrote to the Politburo of the Bolshevik Party, with information heavily influenced by the ideas of Zhang Guotao.³⁶ Safarov concluded that Soviet support for Sun Yat-sen, Zhang Zuolin, and Duan Qirui was based on a misunderstanding and could have "fatal consequences" for China policy. In a clear swipe at Sneevliet, Safarov commented that Sneevliet had now discovered that Zhang was not a "Japan lover."³⁷ The defeat of the communist movement in the Gilan incident in Iran should serve as a warning.³⁸ Safarov proposed not only raising slogans to denounce the militarist warlord system but also to denounce Sun's own tendencies. It was necessary to organize social forces to reunify China. He rejected a warlord alliance in favor of unifying the student movement with the GMD to carry out the national revolutionary movement—"the struggle was a political one not an alliance of warlords." The workers' movement should be independent. He called on the Politburo to revisit its decision, declaring that, if invited, he would be willing to comment. Presumably, this refers to the March 8 Politburo decision to offer financial and technical support to Sun Yat-sen.³⁹

An alternative path was being explored by influential members of the Comintern's Eastern Department and this was slowly being codified. These policy shifts did not reach the CCP leadership before the Third Party Congress and it is unclear what information the leadership received from Moscow before the Congress. We know that Bukharin's May 24 directive did not arrive in time to be debated. In his memoirs, Zhang Guotao mistakenly refers to the Directive but it did not reach Shanghai until July 18 (Glunin, 1979, p. 303).

To influence policy direction, on May 23 Radek and Voitinsky drafted a directive on behalf of the Far Eastern Department of the ECCI for their representative, Sneevliet, to the CCP's Third Congress.⁴⁰ The following day, Bukharin revised the draft noting that the changes had the full support of Zinoviev and he requested that the amendments be made and the original

36 Letter from Safarov to the Politburo of the CC of the RCP(B), Moscow, April 4, 1923, marked top secret, Doc. 72.

37 This refers to comments made by Sneevliet in a report to Karakhan and Members of the Politburo, February 15, 1923, marked secret, S.A. no. 296. He says he was told this by the German Consul General in Shenyang.

38 This refers to the united front that the Iranian communists formed with Kuček-Khan and the defeat of the revolutionary movement in Gilan, Iran, in 1921.

39 Extract from the Protocol of the 53rd Sitting of the Politburo of the CC of the RCP(B), March 8, 1923, Doc. 64.

40 Entwurf der Direktive der Ostabteilung des EKKI für den Vertreter der Ostabteilung des EKKI auf dem 3. Parteitag der KPCh," May 23, 1923, Doc. 74.

draft kept for the archives.⁴¹ Certainly, Bukharin's document was significantly different from the draft by Radek and Voitinsky. He struck a far more moderate tone and placed great stress on the role of the peasantry, with the formation of a worker-peasant alliance, so that leadership of the peasant movement was in the "hands of the party of the working-class."⁴² The peasant question was crucial in the struggle against foreign imperialism and for the eradication of the feudal system. He moved the land revolution center stage, suggesting certain radical measures that should be pursued. Importantly, he retained the notion that the primary task of the CCP was consolidation so as to make it a "mass proletarian party."

Radek's and Voitinsky's draft promoted their critique of China policy, drawing its inspiration from the Comintern's Fourth Congress and the changes that had taken place in China since the January 1923 Resolution had been drafted. The CCP's primary task was to increase its strength through organizing and educating the "working masses," establishing and restoring unions and pulling them together to provide a broader base for the revolutionary movement, thus allowing the establishment of a "mass communist party." The strikes that had taken place during the previous four or five months had revealed the significance of the workers' movement as a major factor in the national-revolutionary movement against foreign imperialism. They wanted confirmation that the movement's core task was to promote the anti-imperialist struggle and fight against their "running dogs" within the Chinese democratic revolution. The GMD had to display unconditional support for the workers' movement in the North and South. Sun Yat-sen was still to be supported but propaganda work was to help people understand the significance of his military actions, attracting the "most democratic people" to support the struggle against the Northern warlords based on the principles of "unity and democracy." This was necessary to build a broad political movement. Within the GMD, the CCP was to strive to prevent Sun's alliance with the warlords, who supported Anglo-American and Japanese capital, from causing the GMD to degenerate into a warlord struggle. Such degeneration would lead to the disintegration of the national front and would discredit the CCP and the labor movement because of their close association with the GMD. The CCP was to call for a GMD Congress to establish a broad national democratic movement. To build this movement, the GMD had to support calls for opposition to the Twenty-One Demands and an anti-Japanese boycott, combining this with a

41 Note from Bukharin to Voitinsky, May 24, 1923, Doc. 75.

42 May 1923 Directive of the ECCI to the Third Congress of the Chinese Communist Party, May 24, 1923, English, S.A. no. 274. The following chapter deals with this in greater detail.

broader anti-imperialist movement that included the British, Americans and others. The boycott movement was to focus opposition on the “cruel oppression” of workers and students by the foreign imperialists and the Northern warlord government. The CCP was to use the movement to bring together the broad group of democratic elements, the GMD and the revolutionary students’ organizations.

Criticism of Sneevliet’s tactic was growing and did not end with his departure for China. Despite the crushing of the February railway workers’ strike, key figures in Moscow believed that class consciousness had been aroused and that the CCP could use this to build the “mass party” to lead the revolutionary movement. Even though conditions were far from perfect, the alternative required that party headquarters relocate to the North. Support for Sun was to be more circumspect with core conditions attached, including a critical assessment of his relationship with Zhang Zuolin. Indeed, the more Sneevliet worked with Sun, the more frustrated he became and shared the critique of Sun’s focus on military solutions and neglect of party and propaganda work. However, the situation appeared very different on the ground from the picture painted in the Moscow drafts, as Sneevliet negotiated with Zhang over the CER, dealt with the devastation of the party following the February strike, and strove to keep the CCP onboard with the policy of “entryism.”

Chinese Communist Party Suffers a Setback, Guomindang Cooperation Cemented

Returning to China for the final time, Sneevliet continued his work for Narkomindel as well as for the Comintern and Profintern. Despite some criticism of him for spending too much time on high diplomacy, his first task was to visit Zhang Zuolin for discussions about the Chinese Eastern Railway (CER), as authorized by the International Liaison Section of the Comintern.¹ To avoid mixing signals and messages, attempts were made to integrate more effectively work in China carried out by different agencies. On January 4, 1923, the Politburo decided that all Comintern delegates and Narkomindel personnel should work together to implement policy toward the Guomindang (GMD).² In addition to engaging in more concrete negotiations concerning the CER, Sneevliet sought to move along collaboration with Sun Yat-sen and to keep the Chinese Communist Party (CCP) onboard with the tactic of joining the GMD. In this latter task, he was aided by the aftermath of the defeat of the February railway workers' strike.

1 CER Negotiations with the Far Eastern Republic and Zhang Zuolin

Leaving Moscow on January 11, 1923, Sneevliet's first order of business was to discuss Soviet Russia's policy in the region with members of the Far Eastern Republic (FER). In Chita, Sneevliet met with two representatives of the FER, Comrades Uborevitch and Kobozev. The FER clearly regarded Zhang Zuolin as the main regional threat. Recounting these meetings in 1929, Sneevliet wrote that they held the firm conviction that Zhang Zuolin was little more than a tool of the Japanese, an opinion commonly held in Moscow. This strengthened the representatives' support for Wu Peifu, who was seen as the Kemal Pasha of China! In contrast, they saw Sun as an idle dreamer, incapable of maneuvering the GMD into a dominant position. The most important task for Uborevitch

1 Certification for a trip by H. Sneevliet to China, Moscow, January 10, 1923, Russian, S.A. no. 241. He traveled under the name of Bergman Martin Ivanovich.

2 Extract from the Protocol of the 42nd Sitting of the Politburo of the CC of the RCP(B), January 4, 1923, Doc. 55. The Politburo called a meeting of all foreign affairs departments and stated specifically that the Revolutionary Committee of the Far East, the executive organ of the Far East Border Region of Soviet Russia, should not intervene in foreign policy.

was to build a force to oppose Zhang. He thought the force could be based on partisans in the region who could be brought under Wu Peifu's influence.³

Sneevliet raised Sun Yat-sen's suggestion that the GMD be allowed to set up an office in Siberia to undertake activities among the local Chinese population. The FER representatives again displayed their concern about Zhang Zuolin stating that an office could be set up as long as its main task was to attack Zhang. This was highly unlikely given that Sun and Zhang were allied against Wu Peifu. In fact, Uborevitch expressed his concern about Sun's close alliance with Zhang. He thought Sun was incapable of unifying China and was much weaker than Wu Peifu both economically and militarily. Sneevliet did not let this lie and appealed to Karakhan urging that Sun's request be sanctioned as it could lead to reconciling the Chinese living in the area to Russian policy on the railway. The office would enable the GMD to break up the intrigues of the Beijing Government among the Chinese in Siberia (Letter to Karakhan, February 3, 1923, S.A. no. 231).

Opinion was divided as to whether the Japanese posed a direct threat. While Kobozev maintained that the danger still existed and he was expecting closer US-Japanese cooperation, Uborevitch did not see current Japanese action as aggressive; it posed no direct threat and was merely focused on building economic ties with Russia and Siberia.

On the CER, the FER advice was for Russia to keep the railway, valued at over a half a billion gold rubles (Elleman, 1997, p. 115). However, Kobozev felt that Russia's weakness would prevent it from keeping Japan and the US from forming an alliance over the CER. This notwithstanding, he rejected the option of Russian military intervention. While this might have been possible three months earlier, now the good opportunity had been lost.⁴ Members of the German Consulate in Shenyang (Mukden) stressed the folly of military intervention. The Consul General, Dr. Walter, told Sneevliet that it would be better to use actions by the railway workers to force a change in the administration. He deemed military action the "greatest stupidity" as this would create an immediate crisis with the Japanese, thus turning Zhang Zuolin into an enemy. Walter supported the view that Zhang Zuolin would like an agreement with Russia to free his troops in the North.⁵

3 "Notes for A. Joffe of a Conversation Between H. Sneevliet and Two Members of Dalrevcom," February 1923, S.A. no. 231.

4 *Ibid.*

5 Report to L. Karakhan and A. Joffe and members of the Politburo, February 15, 1923, S.A. no. 296, marked secret.

Sneevliet's original intention was to proceed directly from Chita to Shenyang but a letter of introduction from Sun Yat-sen to Zhang Zuolin was not waiting for him when he arrived in Harbin. As a result, he went to Beijing arriving on January 27, just as Joffe was leaving for Shanghai.⁶ Sneevliet went to Beijing on Joffe's instruction and because the party's Central Executive Committee (CEC) had relocated there. Work was more difficult than in Shanghai where he had been able to come and go more freely. Without official papers, it was difficult to operate and he asked Karakhan if he could be attached to the Diplomatic Mission (Letter to Karakhan, February 3, 1923, S.A. No. 231). Before he received a reply, the CCP was driven out of Beijing by Wu Peifu's actions to crush the railway workers.

On February 11, Sneevliet set out for Shenyang to meet with Zhang Zuolin, meeting on February 13 for about one hour. Sun's letter of introduction ensured a warm reception, which was heightened by the fact that Zhang took him to be a German, a nation that he held in high esteem.⁷ Sneevliet was taken aback when they met; instead of the heavy, forceful and rough figure he expected, he had to convince himself that the slight figure before him was not Zhang's private secretary. Only his sharp, penetrating eyes were those of a ruler (Sneevliet, June 16, 1928, p. 2).

The two main topics discussed were the CER and the problem of the White Russians in the region under Zhang's control. On the CER, Sneevliet suggested that the R.A. Bank had no jurisdiction over the railway and that an agreement between Russia and China was necessary. Before reaching a final solution, the situation could be improved by firing the White Russians from the railway administration and appointing supporters of the Russian Government.

Zhang Zuolin viewed the question as complicated not only because of the Bank but also because of the foreign powers. He expressed interest in meeting a representative from Soviet Russia in Shenyang and suggested that firing the White Russians could be a topic for discussion. Zhang denied supporting the White Russians to oppose the Soviets and went so far as to say that he would like to get rid of them as they were costing him 15,000 dollars a month in aid. He had helped them for humanitarian reasons as he had heard that they would be shot should he drive them over the border. This could also be discussed with a Russian representative. Finally, Zhang spoke of his close

6 Sneevliet was certainly in Beijing on February 3 as he wrote to Karakhan that day. In the letter, he mentions that the day he arrived in Beijing, Joffe was due to leave Shanghai for Japan. Joffe left Shanghai on January 27.

7 Report to L. Karakhan and A. Joffe and members of the Politburo, February 15, 1923, S.A. no. 296, marked secret.

relations with Sun Yat-sen and his desire for amicable relations with the “new Russia.” Despite this, he declined Sneevliet’s request to send a representative to Moscow for information. He was willing, however, to give a representative of Sun’s specific orders.

Based on the talks, Sneevliet recommended to the Narkomindel representatives in the Far East and to the Politburo of the Bolshevik Party that a Russian consular advisor be appointed in Shenyang as soon as possible. The impression Zhang made on him was no less favorable than that of the “democrat Wu Peifu.” In a dig at Wu’s supporters in Moscow, he noted that, despite Wu’s pleasant words and letters to Russian comrades, he had just brutally suppressed the railway workers’ strike, a “strike that he, himself, had created.”⁸

Finally, Sneevliet thought that Sun Yat-sen could be used to influence Zhang Zuolin. In fact, using Sun to pressure Zhang over the CER had been and remained a key part of Joffe’s and Davtian’s policy for the next few months. From about December 1921, circumstances had forced Sun and Zhang to cease their mutual denunciations and to send out feelers for an alliance. In February 1922, Zhang sent delegates to meet with Sun in Guangzhou and C.C. Wu was sent from Guangzhou to Shenyang (McCormack, 1977, p. 63). Subsequently, their opposition to Wu Peifu kept them together.

Davtian’s initial offer to Zhang Zuolin on behalf of Soviet Russia was for a new board of administration for the CER, comprised of five Russians and five Chinese members with a Russian as President. This, Zhang was willing to accept this and realized that, in practice, this would put the Russians in control of the railway (Letter to Joffe and Davtian, June 20, 1923, S.A. no. 231). Subsequently, Russia changed the offer to give them an overwhelming dominance on the board of seven to three, a structure that Zhang would not countenance, especially as it would provide Wu Peifu with the perfect excuse to agitate against him (Letter to Joffe and Davtian, June 20, 1923, S.A. no. 231; Letter to Joffe, Davtian and Zinoviev, May 31, 1923, S.A. no. 231).

Given its “very one-sided” structure, Sun Yat-sen was also unhappy with the offer, feeling that he could not press the matter with Zhang (telegram from Sneevliet to Davtian, April 30, 1923, S.A. No. 232). However, under Russian pressure he sent Wang Jingwei and Zhang Ji to Shenyang to try to convince Zhang Zuolin that the offer “although one-sided” was better than those of other countries (Telegram from Sneevliet to Davtian and Joffe, May 2, 1923, S.A. no. 232). Sun’s reluctance and Sneevliet’s apparent unwillingness to pressure Sun further provoked a sharp response from Joffe. Joffe sent a clear warning that Sneevliet

⁸ Report to L. Karakhan and A. Joffe and members of the Politburo, February 15, 1923, S.A. no. 296, marked secret.

should not make the mistake of becoming too close to Sun as he had done while in Shanghai. It was one thing for Joffe and Sneevliet to criticize Moscow privately but it was quite another to make such comments to a Chinese, “even Sun.” Joffe demanded that the GMD not interpret Moscow’s demands as one-sided but rather it should support Moscow enthusiastically. Warning Sun, Joffe claimed that he had done much for him and would continue to do so but he insisted that Sun help him with the railway affair or “complications” might arise.⁹ Clearly, support for Sun came with the expectation that he would effectively promote Soviet interests. Sun had to ensure that Zhang accepted the demands concerning the railway and would immediately conclude a settlement (Telegram from Joffe to Sneevliet, May 11, 1923, S.A. no. 232). The pressure caused Sun to send strong advice to Wang Jingwei and Zhang Ji in Shenyang that Zhang Zuolin should accept the Russian offer (telegram Sun Yat-sen to Davtian and Joffe, May 23, 1923, S.A. no. 232). To encourage Zhang’s compliance, Joffe declared Russia’s willingness to support him if he were to march against Beijing.

Joffe overestimated Sun’s influence on Zhang. Sun was only willing to comply with Russian demands as he had just been promised Russian financial support to the tune of 2 million gold rubles as well as armaments. Zhang’s and Wang’s talks in Shenyang had no effect on changing Zhang’s mind; indeed it would have been surprising if Sun had really expected it to be otherwise. Sneevliet also changed his view about Sun’s ability to influence Zhang. On July 20, 1923, Liao Zhongkai informed Chen Duxiu and Sneevliet that the GMD could exert no more pressure on Zhang Zuolin with respect to the railway as he might become suspicious and feel that the GMD was using him. Sneevliet felt that Sun had exaggerated his influence when he said that negotiations with Zhang should go through him (Letter to Davtian and Joffe, July 20, 1923, S.A. no. 230). Finally, on June 30, Sun “strongly” advised the Russian Government to postpone the CER negotiations until the proper time (Telegram from Sun Yat-sen to Joffe via Wilde, June 30, S.A. no. 232). The proper time being when Sun took over power in Beijing.

Sneevliet ended his engagement with the question of the CER to turn his attention to the CCP and the relationship with Sun Yat-sen but this did not mean that Soviet Russia had given up. Step by step, the original promise of the first Karakhan Declaration to return the railroad to China without compensation was abolished. The railway was far too valuable strategically and financially. Over the next two years, Russia signed three protocols consolidating its control: on May 31, 1924 with the Beijing Government; on September 20,

9 Telegram No. 246 from A. Joffe to H. Sneevliet, deciphered end-June 1923, S.A. no. 232.

1924 with Zhang Zuolin; and finally, on January 20, 1925 with the Japanese. This last convention recognized Japanese authority over the South Manchurian Railway in return for Japan permitting full Russian control over the CER.¹⁰

2 Soviet Aid for Sun Yat-sen

In addition to working with the CCP, Sneevliet's main task was to promote cooperation with Sun Yat-sen (Letter to Bukharin, May 31, 1923, S.A. no. 230). Despite Voitinsky's concerns, following the defeat of the February strike, Sneevliet left Beijing to work in Guangzhou, where the CCP had moved its headquarters. While in Guangzhou, Sun and Sneevliet met three or four times a week with Sneevliet acting as liaison between Sun in Guangzhou and Joffe in Tokyo (Isaacs, 1971, p. 108). Soviet aid and the priority of reorganizing the GMD gave the work added importance and profile, although as Sneevliet discovered working with Dr. Sun was no easy matter.

In January, Joffe requested that the Soviets provide 2 million gold rubles to support Sun's movement and, on March 8, 1923, the Politburo of the Bolshevik Party approved the request.¹¹ On May 1, Joffe wired Sun that he had received this positive news from Moscow about the specific issues they had discussed. The loan was conditional on preparatory work for the reunification of China and the struggle for independence. The support was for one year and could be taken up in installments of 500,000 gold rubles. Soviet Russia shared Sneevliet's view that extensive ideological and political work would be the basis for military operations. Further, Russia was willing to help the GMD organize a military presence in China's Northwest and Northeast it was only willing to offer limited firepower. Finally, all aid was to remain strictly secret. Publicly, the Russians would just express sympathy with the GMD's national liberation aspirations (Telegram from Joffe to Sneevliet, May 1, 1923, S.A. no. 234).

Sun expressed his pleasure to Joffe and Narkomindel and to Davtian in Beijing. He accepted all the proposals and would send a representative to Moscow to discuss them.¹² Wasting no time, on May 23 Sun asked Davtian and Joffe to wire Moscow immediately for the first installment, maintaining that party reorganization would begin immediately (Telegram from Sun

10 For an analysis of Soviet dealings on the CER and the secret diplomacy see Elleman, 1994, pp. 115–42. In 1952, Soviet Russia turned over ownership of what was then called the Chinese Changchun Railway to the People's Republic of China, free of charge.

11 Notes from the Protocol of the 53rd session of the Politburo, Doc. 64.

12 Telegram from Sun Yat-sen to A. Joffe, May 12 1923, S.A. no. 232 and Telegram from Sun Yat-sen to Narkomindel and Polpred, May 15, 1923, *Far Eastern Affairs*, no. 2, 1987, p. 2.

Yat-sen to Polpred Beijing and Joffe, May 23 or 24, 1923, S.A. no. 232). Davtian, Joffe and Sneevliet all sought to impress upon Sun the necessity of political work. Davtian (May 5) requested that Sneevliet insist that the GMD undertake more political work in North China and Manchuria to build up a strong and well-disciplined organization. Military work alone was insufficient and had to be linked with political work (Letter from Davtian to Sneevliet, May 5, 1923, S.A. no. 230).

In the second half of May, Sneevliet and Chen Duxiu submitted to Sun their plan for the reorganization of the GMD and, during their discussions, this was accepted.¹³ The main focus, not surprisingly, was on propaganda and they suggested that one-third of the Soviet aid be devoted to party reorganization and anti-imperialist propaganda. The remainder was to be used to create a military organization in the North and West (Letter to Davtian, Joffe and Zinoviev, May 31, 1923, S.A. no. 230). To promote this work, Sun Yat-sen installed a three-person committee for propaganda work that included Chen Duxiu.¹⁴

The plan envisaged a GMD Executive Committee with twenty-one members elected by an annual congress (S.A. nos. 289 and 290). The Executive Committee composed of the president of the party, the heads of the organization and propaganda bureaus, the heads of departments and the presidents of district bureaus on Chinese soil, would meet every three months. In accordance with Leninist organizational principles, within this Executive Committee there was to be a Central Bureau to handle day-to-day affairs. Members were to include the President of the party, the heads of the organization and propaganda bureaus together with two of the heads of the departments of each of these bureaus.

As in a good Leninist party, the two most important departments were organization and propaganda. The Organization Bureau was to oversee the local departments and additionally take care of financial affairs. It was to have four departments: a general secretariat, information and financial departments (all based in Guangzhou) and a communications department in Shanghai. The Propaganda Bureau was divided into six departments: publishing, labor, peasantry, military, propaganda among intellectuals, and propaganda overseas.

The suggested personnel to head the departments provided a good example of the CCP approach to working from within the GMD. While Zhang Ji or Liao Zhongkai were to head the Organization Bureau, propaganda was to be under the leadership of Chen Duxiu. Within the Propaganda Bureau, communists

13 "Report on the Situation in China and Our Work in the Period May 15–31, 1923," S.A. no. 297.

14 "Report by H. Sneevliet on the Situation in the South, June 12, 1923," S.A. no. 230.

were to oversee labor (Zhang Guotao), peasantry (Yu Shude), intellectuals (Chen Duxiu), and the military (Lin Boqu). Further, it was suggested that Zhang Tailei head the Press Correspondence, with Qu Qiubai editing a daily paper in Shanghai and Tan Pingshan heading the Guangzhou branch. If the plan had been put into practice, it would have provided the ideal base for the takeover of the GMD from within. The plan grossly overestimated the relative weight of the CCP as compared to the GMD but Soviet Russia was footing the bill.¹⁵

Despite Sun's agreement to begin the work of reorganization, it was a slow, frustrating business for Sneevliet who clearly began to doubt Sun's sincerity. Sun's poor military situation in Guangzhou exacerbated his own fixation that the solution to China's problems was primarily a military solution. Consequently, although the three-person Propaganda Bureau had been set up, it received no funding because "there are many hungry generals and officers in Guangdong." Financial support for this work, like everything else, would have to wait until after victory in the South.¹⁶

By the end of May, prospects for a military victory appeared to be very slim. In April, the forces of Shen Hongying with the support of Wu Peifu had attempted to take the city of Guangzhou. Although thwarted, they were still pushing down from the North. By the end of May, Chen Jiongmings troops had taken Shantou (Swatow) and had moved close to Guangzhou. The danger was such that Sneevliet was unsure whether it would be possible to go ahead with the Party Congress.¹⁷ This explains why the Congress that Voitinsky and others had expected to be held earlier was not convened until mid-June.

For Sun, the war was proving to be extremely expensive. Sneevliet estimated the monthly military expenses at three million Chinese dollars but Sun's own revenues only amounted to two million Chinese dollars. This forced him to sell land and public buildings to raise enough money to continue the war. Sun's precarious position meant that it was imperative to avoid conflict with

15 When the reorganization conference of the GMD was held in January 1924, CCP appointees, although still substantial, was far more modest. Among the twenty-four full members and alternates of the CEC, three were communists (Tan Pingshan, Li Dazhao and Yu Shude) and the seven alternates included Mao Zedong, Qu Qiubai and Zhang Guotao. A Secretariat was established with eight functional bureaus in Guangzhou. Organization was headed by CCP member, Tan Pingshan, but Propaganda was headed by Dai Jitao, who became one of the harshest critics of CCP-GMD cooperation. Of the remaining six bureaus, only one was led by a CCP member, peasantry (Lin Zuhuan), but labor was under the leadership of the Left-GMD member Liao Zhongkai. *Geming wenxian*, 1955, vol. 8, pp. 1105 and 1161-63.

16 "Report by H. Sneevliet on the Situation in the South, June 12, 1923," S.A. no. 230.

17 "Report on the Situation in China and Our Work in the Period May 15-31, 1923," S.A. no. 297.

the British in Hong Kong, which Sneevliet believed had led Sun to appoint so many right-wing luminaries to influential positions. Sneevliet was particularly displeased that C.C. Wu was appointed foreign secretary, even though he was not a GMD member. Sun justified this as he needed Wu for communications with the British.

The military preoccupation led Sneevliet to doubt whether it would even be possible to reorganize the GMD. Indeed, on June 3 meeting together with Liao Zhongkai and Sneevliet, Sun informed them that reorganization would have to wait until after victory was achieved in Guangdong.¹⁸ This led Sneevliet to suggest that financial help be withheld “for the worthless campaign in the South” (Telegram Davtian, June 5, 1923, S.A. no. 232). To support his view, Sneevliet claimed that leading GMD figures were also pessimistic about the continuous wars in the South. Liao Zhongkai hoped Sun would lose in the South as it would be better for the whole movement, whereas Hu Hanmin attached no value to control over Guangdong in terms of the overall situation (Letter to Joffe and Davtian, June 20, 1923, S.A. no. 231).

Sneevliet and Sun crossed swords on two other issues: the GMD response to the Lincheng affair and the lack of response to the crisis in Beijing. On May 6, 1923, bandits held up the *Blue Express* on the Tianjin-Pukou line taking several foreigners hostage, including journalist Baden-Powell. The foreign community was outraged and the Beijing Government was criticized for its inability to exert order. GMD Foreign Secretary, C.C. Wu sent a telegram to the diplomatic corps calling for withdrawal of recognition of the Beijing Government and an opportunity to be created for the Chinese people to form a “good government.” Sneevliet thought this telegram represented the “anti-nationalist party” of China and asked Sun if he agreed with the contents. Sun was non-committal but basically did not agree with Sneevliet’s criticisms.¹⁹ Sneevliet (May 23, 1923) penned a strong attack on the GMD for betraying the principles of the revolutionary-nationalist struggle: it “is really a shame for the Chinese people” that the GMD “should fall on its knees to request the foreign diplomats” take action with respect to the Lincheng Incident. The GMD telegram provided the foreign powers with a mandate to intervene in China and to take over power.

18 Letter to Joffe and Davtian, June 20, 1923, S.A. no. 231. See also Letter to Joffe, Davtian and Zinoviev, May 31, 1923, S.A. no. 231. It seems that some argumentation momentarily had an influence on Sun. Sneevliet asked Sun what he would do upon entering Beijing victoriously without a modern, strong party. Later, Sun mentioned to Liao that it was useless to take control of Beijing without a party and that work must begin immediately. He expressed the same sentiments to Li Dazhao. Such sentiments were short-lived.

19 The meeting was on June 3, Letter to Joffe and Davtian, June 20, 1923, S.A. no. 231.

In Beijing, intrigue continued unabated and in June 1923, President Li Yuanhong was deposed by the maneuvering of Cao Kun. Li's dismissal exacerbated the power vacuum in Beijing as Cao Kun sought to win enough support to replace him, which was not realized until October 5, 1923. Sneevliet interpreted the situation as an opportunity for the GMD to go to Shanghai to place itself at the head of the movement against the machinations of Cao Kun. However, on June 19, Sun Yat-sen dismissed the events as unimportant and turned to his desire to visit Russia after one or two months before proceeding to Berlin.²⁰ Further attempts to persuade Sun to deal with the situation and promote propaganda through the GMD similarly failed. As far as Sun was concerned, all was proceeding well, "the party must not yet interfere since nothing certain can be achieved." However, Sun did accept that GMD members could participate in the movement as individuals. In a word of advice, Liao Zhongkai told Sneevliet that it was not Chinese "to emphasize always the Party."²¹

When facing the crisis, the GMD's inaction demonstrated to Sneevliet how "feeble" the nationalist movement in China was and that there was an "absence of a modern nationalist political party." He contrasted the lack of action with the Shanghai Chamber of Commerce, an organization that was doing what the nationalist party should be doing (July 11, 1923). The Chamber repudiated Cao Kun and called for a National Assembly. After the June CCP Congress, meeting with the editors of *Xiangdao zhoubao* (The Guide Weekly), Sun stuck to his position, declaring that he wanted nothing to do with Cao Kun, nor did he wish to be in the Commission proposed by the members of Parliament in Tianjin, nor would he invite the Parliament to come to Guangzhou.²²

3 The February Seventh Strike: a Sobering Experience

The game-changer for many CCP members was the crushing of the February 1923 railway workers' strike that exposed the limits of their ability to build their own strength within the working-class, rendering them more

20 Letter to Joffe and Davtian, June 20, 1923, S.A. no. 231. Sneevliet suggested that instead of Sun himself, one of his confidants should be sent. In reply, Sun said that in three weeks he would send Wang Jingwei to Russia, and that two months later he would follow.

21 "Report by H. Sneevliet on the Period June 23–July 15, 1923," S.A. no. 301.

22 The Commission was to be composed of seven commissioners under Li Yuanhong's leadership with the other members to include Sun, Duan Qirui, Zhang Zuolin and Tang Shaoyi. "Report by H. Sneevliet on the Period June 23–July 15, 1923," S.A. no. 301.

sympathetic to the possibility of working with the GMD.²³ The period from May 1, 1922, when the All-China Labor Congress convened in Guangzhou, until the February 1923 strike marked a high tide for the labor movement in general and for the Chinese Labor Secretariat in particular. This gave hope to those in the Comintern who saw a real possibility for developing a mass communist party based on the working-class.

The strength of the communist-influenced labor movement was in the North and the Central parts of the country, particularly among the railway workers and miners of Hubei and Hunan provinces. In Shanghai, China's most advanced industrial city, communist influence within the labor movement was weak. Chen Duxiu (June 1923 [1985]) informed the Third Party Congress that workers' organizations in Shanghai were "very backward" and that "great effort" was needed to develop the movement there.

Apart from the railway workers in the North, the labor movement based in Hunan, under Mao Zedong's leadership was the most promising.²⁴ Unlike the movement in the North, momentum continued after the February strike. Ironically, the strongest center was not in Hunan itself but across the border in Jiangxi, at Anyuan, Pingxiang County. It was a rebellious area and, in addition to Mao, two other key figures in the CCP, Li Lisan and Liu Shaoqi, cut their revolutionary teeth there.²⁵ It was a crucial fulcrum of the early revolution. In addition to the early labor activities, the area provided a base for the development of peasant associations and later, after the 1927 defeat, it became fertile ground for recruiting soldiers for the new Red Army.²⁶ During its heyday, it was known as "China's Little Moscow" and over one-fifth of its 80,000 citizens were CCP members.²⁷

During the summer-autumn of 1922, pressure from the authorities in Shanghai led the Labor Secretariat to move its headquarters to Beijing, bringing

23 For a vivid first-hand account of the strike and the immediate aftermath by one of its leaders see Luo Zhanglong, 1981 [1992/1993]. The analysis of the strike and its consequences draws from the introductory essay and Saich, 1991, vol. 1, pp. 148–64.

24 Shaffer, 1982. Mao was appointed to head the Hunan Labor Secretariat at the First Party Congress, established October 10, 1921, Pang Xianzhi and Jin Chongji, 2011, vol. 1, p. 82.

25 Li rose to be general secretary of the party from 1928 to 1930 before his impetuous nature caused him to be removed following a series of disastrous uprisings. Liu, the organizational maestro, served as president of the People's Republic of China before Mao turned on him and he was denounced during the Cultural Revolution as the "number one person in authority taking the capitalist road."

26 Indeed, the Autumn Harvest Uprising, seen as the origins of the CCP military, was launched from Anyuan.

27 See the wonderful account by Elizabeth Perry, 2012. I am grateful to Timothy Cheek for pointing out to me the significance of Anyuan.

it closer to an area of strength and an area under the control of the Wu Peifu. With modern industry underdeveloped in the north, the Beijing branch of the Secretariat decided to focus on the railways. This focus was strengthened by the realization that the railways were crucial to the North's economy and that control of the workforce would provide the CCP with useful leverage over the Northern warlords (Interview with Luo Zhanglong, September 1987). Wu Peifu was willing to countenance work by the communists on the railways to reduce the influence of his opponents who controlled the railways through the Communications Clique (Chen Duxiu, June 1923 [1985]). With Li Dazhao, cooperation was agreed upon and Li recommended that six CCP members serve secretly as inspectors on the six major railways.²⁸ These inspectors were expected to expose corruption, allowing the Minister of Communications, a supporter of Wu, to dismiss his opponents. At the same time, they would use their privileged positions to organize labor unions (Chang Kuo-t'ao, 1971, vol. 1, p. 275). After the defeat of the railway workers' strike, Chen Duxiu (June 1923 [1985]) defended this policy at the Third Party Congress but he added that it had not been necessary for the CCP CEC to maintain relations with Wu Peifu.

By late 1922, strike activity was on the rise but most actions were focused on material demands rather than expressing "class consciousness" and raising the kinds of political demands that the communists expected from the working-class. Of forty-one strikes in late 1922 noted by Qu Qiubai (1930 [1981], p. 172), wages were the issue in thirty-seven strikes, opposition to management in fifteen strikes, and union recognition was featured in just eleven strikes.²⁹ For the victorious Anyuan strike in 1922, Li Lisan raised the slogan: "Once beasts of burden, now we will be men!" (Perry, 2012, p. 9). This fit well with the mood of lifting the years of humiliation by domestic and foreign oppressors. In January 1923, the Executive Committee of the Northern (Beijing) Branch of the CCP discussed the lessons learned from the strike wave. It decided that, in the future, political struggles, which put forward opposition to imperialism and warlordism and the right to strike, should be waged (Luo Zhanglong, 1983, p. 254). Committee head, Li Dazhao announced that he would go to Wuhan to deliver some lectures, leaving Luo Zhanglong in charge of committee work. No one expected any problems to arise with the upcoming meeting of the railway

28 The Beijing-Hankou, Tianjin-Pukou, Beijing-Shenyang, Beijing-Suiyuan, the Longhai and the Zhengding-Taiyuan railways.

29 Mao Zedong noted the same trend in Hunan. Only two of the ten strikes he mentioned touched on issues of freedom; the rest were concerned with wages, Shi Shan [Mao Zedong], no. 1, 1923.

workers' representatives. However, in February 1923 their first major challenge over the right to organize suffered a devastating blow.

There had been warning signs. Among the successful strikes and activities, one particular defeat warned of what was to come—the October 1922 brutal defeat of the strike at the British-owned Kailuan Mining Administration (Li Xin and Chen Tiejun, 1983, pp. 603–22; Chesneaux, 1968, pp. 193–94; Chang Kuo-t'ao, 1971, vol. 1, pp. 276–77). Some 50,000 people worked in this complex that was the oldest and largest modern mining corporation in China. On October 23, the miners struck, demanding higher wages, an annual bonus equal to one month's wages, payment of medical expenses, and an increase in compensation paid for the death of an employee. The strikers organized quickly and after a few days, the additional demands of union recognition and its right to exercise control over the hiring and firing of workers were added. The union had been formed shortly before the strike began. The British administration refused to consider such a direct challenge to its rule and sent in not only the mine's police but also British marines and troops under the command of one of Wu Peifu's key supporters. On October 25, several workers were killed and the union was disbanded and its leaders arrested. With sympathy and external support, the strike staggered on until November 16 but when the workers returned, they received a mere 10 percent wage increase and an annual bonus equal to two weeks' wages. The CCP and the Labor Secretariat were marginal to the strike, provoking criticism from Joffe, who saw this as a missed opportunity (Letter from Joffe to Sneevliet, November 7, 1923, S.A. no. 231).

Frustrated with illegal operation in Shanghai, in late November, the party headquarters relocated to Beijing where it expected to benefit from Wu Peifu's presumed sympathetic disposition. Remember Wu's ally had repressed the Kailuan strikes! During the second half of 1922, workers' organizations on the Beijing-Hankou line strengthened, as the first workers' club was set up at Changxindian Station in the latter half of 1921. Others soon followed with sixteen workers' club organized by the end of 1922. These clubs formed the basis for a general union for the railway line and in August 1922, the decision was taken to locate, in Zhengzhou, the headquarters of the Preparatory Committee for the Beijing-Hankou Railway Federation of Trade Unions, with offices at Changxindian and Jiang'an. On August 24, the Changxindian Workers' Club launched a strike along the entire line; after just two days the workers were victorious.

This strike and the activity of the Kailuan miners aroused Wu's recognition of the growing threat posed by communist agitation among the railway workers. The Beijing-Hankou line was a vital artery for Wu both economically and

militarily, linking the capital with the mines in Henan, the economic center of Wuhan, and the military camps at Baoding and Luoyang.

The Preparatory Committee decided (January 5, 1923) to inaugurate the union formally in Zhengzhou on February 1 with no one expecting trouble and indeed management seemed supportive. As the delegates assembled, it was becoming clear that Wu Peifu was opposed to the meeting and reports were coming in of increasing troop strength at all the stations along the line. On January 28, the chief of the Zhengzhou police announced that the meeting was prohibited, followed by Wu's request to send delegates to meet with him. Wu informed them that because Zhengzhou was a military center, it was not possible to hold the meeting and he asked them to change the date and place. Pumped up by their recent successes, the workers rejected the suggestion and set about planning a political strike along the line, if necessary, and deciding to proceed as planned with the inaugural meeting. Despite the declaration of martial law, the meeting convened, the founding of the union was declared and the delegates began to disperse.

Some delegates, who had not dispersed quickly enough, were arrested. In response, the leading party group of the Preparatory Group convened in the evening of February 1 and took the historic decision to set up a strike committee, with a strike set to begin on February 4.³⁰ The union now demanded: the dismissal of the managing director of the rail network; a \$6,000 reimbursement for compensation; removal of the police from union premises; a weekly rest day with pay; and a week's paid holiday at Chinese New Year. They decided to move the headquarters to Jiang'an station and thereafter some 30,000 workers came out on strike. On February 7, the authorities struck with Cao Kun's troops attacking Changxindian and Xiao Yaonan's troops attacking Jiang'an. Sneevliet was sure that Wu Peifu's decision to use force had been encouraged by the Western powers (April 1923, pp. 508–09).

In the early hours of February 7, Cao struck at Changxindian, killing and wounding another thirty; in the early evening Jiang'an was attacked and thirty workers killed and some 200 wounded. To cow the workers, the chair of the Jiang'an chapter was beheaded and his head was hung on a bamboo pole. Solidarity started to fall apart and the order was issued to return to work (February 9) and published on February 10. This had an immediate effect, for

30 Members of the leading party group were Luo Zhanglong (in charge of the Northern District Committee of the party and the Beijing branch of the Labor Secretariat), Shi Wenbin (in charge of the party branch of the Beijing-Hankou Railway Federation) and Wang Zhongyi (secretary of the Northern District Committee of the party).

by February 9, 1,300 of the 1,500 striking railway personnel had returned to work and by February 10 only 100 were still holding out.³¹

As the situation unfolded, the decision was controversial and the union was unable to control it. Zhang Guotao, the leading party representative at Jiang'an, favored a return to work but local officials, such as Xiang Ying, secretary of the Jiang'an union branch, were opposed. Xiang felt that having launched the strike, the union should not pull back.³² If Zhang thought the strikers were unable to resist armed opposition, the strike should never have been launched in the first place (Chang Kuo-t'ao, 1971, vol. 1, p. 287). Xiang felt that halting the strike would result in losing the workers' trust.³³ Taking a page out of Sneevliet's notebook, Zhang overcame the opposition by appealing to discipline: "As the plenipotentiary of the CC of the CCP and of the Labor Secretariat, I ordered work to be resumed immediately, and I called upon everyone present to abide by the order" (Chang Kuo-t'ao, 1971, vol. 1, p. 288). In response, Xiang Ying felt that "we were not treated as comrades" and that Zhang talked with them as if he did not trust them.³⁴ Zhang's handling of the strike continued to cause resentment. Chen Duxiu expressed misgivings and wondered whether it might have been possible to avoid the massacre. The matter was discussed again at Li Dazhao's home and criticisms were raised again at the Third Party Congress, indicating the persistent resentment.³⁵

The reasons for the defeat were subject to different interpretations, which led to conflicting views about the way forward, especially about the question of the strength of the proletariat in the revolutionary movement. It had been a traumatic event for the young communist movement. For Cai Hesen, pessimism pervaded the party ranks and defeat raised doubts about the labor movement. On the positive side, the defeat had "educated the working-class that independent struggle could not achieve victory and that the help of each class was necessary." However, pessimism dominated any feeling of elation about the lessons learned (Cai Hesen, 1926 [1980], p. 46). Zhang Guotao (1971, vol. 1, p. 293) noted that the defeat called for a reassessment of tactics. Most

31 "Notes on the Zhengzhou Railway Workers' Strike: 4 to 10 February 1923," S.A. no. 259. CCP member Lin Yunan was criticized for leaving the scene without making any arrangements, "Notes of a Meeting at Li Dazhao's House," March 30, 1923, S.A. no. 261.

32 Following his career as a labor organizer, Xiang rose to head the troops left behind once the Red Army began its Long March (1934) but he was killed by one of his own men in 1941.

33 "Notes of a Meeting at Li Dazhao's House," March 30, 1923, S.A. no. 261.

34 "Notes Concerning the Situation on the Beijing-Hankou Railway Line and the Labor Movement in May and early June 1923," S.A. no. 264.

35 Chen Duxiu's comments were made at a party meeting held at some point between February 15 and 20, "Notes of a Meeting at Li Dazhao's House," March 30, 1923, S.A. no. 261.

importantly, the CCP was forced to realize that the earlier euphoria about the capacity of the working-class to lead the revolutionary struggle on its own was misplaced. A broader alliance was necessary to wage the struggle. The CCP CEC realized that workers' strikes could not withstand the armed strength of the warlords. Greater hope was now placed on the GMD's plans to build its armed forces and to expand the revolutionary base in Guangzhou. In Guangzhou, the communists could use the protection of the nationalist forces to develop their own strength, a tactic that had clearly failed under Wu's tutelage.

Chen Duxiu's faith in the power of the working-class was severely curtailed. Deng Zhongxia (1930 [1948]) traced the "liquidationism," with which Chen was charged after his 1927 purge from the party leadership to this defeat. He wrote "from the defeat of February 7, Chen Duxiu concluded that the working-class had no strength and his whole opportunist theory evolved completely from this time." While this is a clear case of rewriting history to fit the contemporary orthodoxy, it is true that the defeat led Chen to take the alliance with the GMD more seriously. Now, Sun Yat-sen's fortunes were in ascendance and the CCP had suffered a serious blow.

The pessimism was not shared by all in Moscow and Sneevliet argued with Voitinsky, Heller and others about the correct perception. Beyond the question of cooperation with the GMD, the failure of the strike had severe implications for party activities. A reign of terror was launched across North China with communist and labor organizations under attack. Xiang Ying investigated the situation along the line and discovered a depressing situation. Apart from the obvious problems at Jiang'an and Changxindian, at Xinyang Station the president and vice-president of the local branch had been expelled although there were attempts to set up a "small secret society." At Queshan, Xinxiang, Liulihe, and Yancheng, the union organization had been abandoned. Elsewhere, the picture was no better. Wang Hebo reported that in Pukou the union had worked illegally after the strike but it had lost one-third of its membership.³⁶ On the first day of suppression, over 40 workers were killed, 500 wounded and 100 imprisoned (Luo Zhanglong, 1980, p. 264).

The CCP lost about 90 percent of its effectiveness because of the strike and only in Hunan province did the unions escape strong persecution (Chang Kuo-t'ao, 1971, vol. 1, p. 293). Reporting to the Profintern in July, the CCP CEC noted that most of the labor unions in the country had been suppressed and that even though in Hunan labor unions were still legal, the crisis had not yet passed (Letter from the CCP CEC of the CCP to the Profintern, July 1, 1923, S.A. no. 230).

36 "Notes Concerning the Situation on the Beijing-Hankou Railway Line and the Labor Movement in May and early June 1923," S.A. no. 264.

Hunan had avoided the bloody repression as the Governor Zhao Hengti was sympathetic and the head of the West Jiangxi Military Garrison was more concerned about the nationalists than the communists (Perry, 2012, pp. 73–75). Certainly, Mao Zedong was not optimistic about the revolutionary potential in Hunan, as workers were solely concerned about improving their living standards. Mao stressed that the number of workers who could be organized in a modern way amounted to no more than 30,000 out of a population of 3 million.³⁷ Of the ten strikes in late 1922, nine had been victorious but the victories only included wage demands and did not include the right to organize.³⁸ The pessimism did not last long and, as noted above, Hunan became the strongest base for communist labor organization.

This lack of interest in politics and a concern with material self-interest was noted by others such as Wang Hebo who claimed that workers in Pukou had no interest in politics. While it was possible to convince them to join the union, it was impossible to persuade them to join the party. Even worse for the revolutionary movement, many favored the monarchy and held the republic responsible for all the disturbances.³⁹

No matter what Voitinsky might have thought, it was too dangerous for the party headquarters to remain in Beijing. When Zhang Guotao returned to the capital he found that an atmosphere of terror reigned (1971, vol. 1, p. 292). Indeed, an arrest order had been promulgated for eleven communists, including Li Dazhao and Chen Duxiu. Shortly after February 15, the party leadership met to discuss policy. They discussed Zhang's leadership of the strike and issued, in the name of the CCP CEC, a declaration denouncing Wu Peifu's actions and calling on the proletariat to overthrow warlord rule.⁴⁰ Most importantly, the meeting decided to move the central organization of the CCP back to Shanghai because in Beijing it could all too easily "fall prey to the machinations of the warlords" (Chang Kuo-t'ao, 1971, vol. 1, p. 293). Shortly thereafter, the party moved its headquarters to Guangzhou, where it could function openly under the protection of Sun Yat-sen's troops. Finally, Sneevliet proposed that Zhang Guotao go to Moscow to report on the strike while the CEC moved secretly

37 "Notes Concerning the Situation on the Beijing-Hankou Railway Line and the Labor Movement in May and early June 1923," S.A. no. 264.

38 Mao Zedong, July 1, 1923, pp. 176–77. This piece lists those groups that he felt enjoyed a new-style organization, pp. 174–75.

39 "Notes Concerning the Situation on the Beijing-Hankou Railway Line and the Labor Movement in May and early June 1923," S.A. no. 264.

40 "Zhonggong zhongyang wei Wu Peifu cansha Jing-Han lu gonggao jieji yu guomin" (Public announcement to the working-class and citizens about Wu Peifu's massacre of the Beijing-Hankou Railway workers), February 27, 1923, in *Xiangdao zhoubao*, no. 20, 1923.

to Shanghai to make new arrangements (Chang Kuo-t'ao, 1971, vol. 1, p. 294). Sending Zhang to Moscow angered and perplexed Voitinsky who felt he could serve the CCP better by remaining close to the frontlines. Perhaps Sneevliet wanted those in Moscow who did not share his views to hear first-hand about the devastation wrought by the defeat. If so, he was seriously mistaken and Zhang returned with more ammunition to oppose him.

The Chinese labor movement and the CCP suffered a shattering blow with the defeat of the strike. By the time the party came together for its Third Congress held in Guangzhou (June 1923), morale was low. The first attempts to organize a political strike had resulted in resounding defeat. The implications were far-reaching. Doubters in the party were now convinced of the need to cooperate with Sun Yat-sen's nationalist movement based in South China. The weakness of the working-class prevented the CCP from becoming the sole force during this stage of China's revolutionary process. Yet, this did not resolve the details of how cooperation should be carried out.

4 **The Third Congress of the Chinese Communist Party: Showdown**

Against this dismal background, the CCP delegates gathered together for the Third Party Congress. While Sneevliet faced growing doubts in Moscow about his approach to working with the GMD and had some differences with Joffe and Sun Yat-sen, his greatest challenge remained convincing CCP members of the necessity to work as individuals within the GMD. The Congress was the venue for a heated and sometimes angry debate about the tactic of cooperation. The disagreements began even before the Congress convened and led to a one-week postponement (Chang Kuo-t'ao, 1971, vol. 1, p. 302).

Sneevliet was incensed by Zhang Guotao's pre-Congress suggestion that he had distorted the meaning of the Comintern's January directive and Zhang's attempts to sow division between the ideas of the Comintern and Sneevliet (Chang Kuo-t'ao, 1971, vol. 1, p. 303, 306). Further, he was not amused by Zhang spreading rumors among Beijing party members that Sneevliet would soon be recalled to Moscow because the EECI was dissatisfied with his work. Sneevliet did not like Zhang's tendency to "classify comrades as good and bad." Zhang claimed that with respect to the China question, Sneevliet and Joffe belonged to the right with Radek and Safarov on the left and Bukharin in the center. Continuing his frequent digs at the CCP's lack of experience, he wrote "[w]e should not forget that the Chinese are very immature in experience and most of them lack knowledge" (Letter to Zinoviev, Bukharin, Radek and Safarov, June 20, 1923, S.A. no. 231). How Sneevliet must have regretted sending

Zhang to Moscow, as he was clearly alerted to the different views within the Comintern about China policy. As noted in Chapter Seven, the debates during the ECCI sessions in December-January revealed clear differences between Voitinsky, Radek and others on the one hand and with Sneevliet on the other about tactics. In April, Safarov and Brike had called for Sneevliet's mandate to be revoked and Sneevliet himself had made it clear that his term would be up shortly and he intended to leave China for Moscow.

The Third Congress finally met between June 12 and 20⁴¹ but it remains unclear how many formal delegates attended, reflecting the fluidity of the organization at this stage. One report cites 30 delegates, of whom 19 had voting rights, 10 had speaking rights, and an additional 10 attending as guests with no formal status.⁴² Formal status and who had what rights was not taken seriously at the meeting as we know that 40 people voted in the election for the CEC and Sneevliet wrote of one vote of 37 people.

Sneevliet played an active role at the Congress, reviewing the history of the First, Second and Third Internationals and participating in the discussions on trade union work. He used his analysis of the current circumstances of the labor movement to suggest ways that propaganda should be used to overcome the prevailing depression (Letter to the ECCI, Profintern and the Vladivostok Bureau, June 25, 1923, S.A. no. 298). However, his most important and controversial contribution was during the debate about cooperation with the GMD.

The starting point for the debate was the 1923 January Resolution, which was amended by the discussions at the ECCI and approved by Voitinsky and Sneevliet.⁴³ For the ECCI, the GMD was the only serious revolutionary group in China and it was necessary for the "young CCP" to coordinate its actions with the GMD. The labor movement was weak and not sufficiently differentiated as

41 Letter to the ECCI, Profintern and the Vladivostok Bureau, June 25, 1923, S.A. no. 298. Delegates attended from Beijing, Tangshan, Changxindian, Harbin, Shandong, Pukou, Shanghai, Hangzhou, Hankou, Changsha, Pingxiang, Guangzhou, and from the student branch in Moscow. The delegates represented some 420 members but as Sneevliet pointed out, only one-tenth of them paid their party dues and most members had no jobs, thus limiting the party's contacts with workers. Letter to Zinoviev, Bukharin, Radek and Safarov, June 20, 1923, S.A. no. 231.

42 "Zhongguo gongchandang disanci daibiao dahui (The Third Congress of the CCP), 1985, p. 96; Wang Jianying, 1983, p. 17, based on various reports and memoirs, identifies 33 Chinese delegates.

43 Zhang Guotao mistakenly refers to the May Directive of the Comintern but this did not reach Shanghai until July 18. It is mentioned by Wilde in a letter to Voitinsky in which he writes that his letter of June 18 did not arrive until July 18. He refers to the appendix that contained instructions for the delegates to the Congress. This is clearly referring to the May instructions. Letter from Wilde to Voitinsky, Shanghai, July 26, 1923, Doc. 79.

an “entirely independent social force.” Thus, the central task was the national revolution and CCP members had to remain in the GMD. The challenge was to ensure that this did not amount to the “annihilation of the specific political face of the CCP”—the party had to preserve its own organization with a strongly centralized apparatus. Important work for the CCP was to organize and enlighten the working masses and create “professional unions” to “prepare the basis for a strong mass communist party.” With respect to this work, the party was to act with complete independence but without antagonizing the national-revolutionary movement. The CCP was not to become entirely mixed up with the GMD and was not to furl its own banner. The CCP was to work to influence the GMD to unite its efforts with those of Soviet Russia to fight against European, American, and Japanese imperialism.⁴⁴

Chen Duxiu worked from the “Resolution” to present a set of theses for approval.⁴⁵ Chen reiterated that it was the task of the CCP to develop the GMD throughout the whole country. The CCP had to criticize the GMD for only working militarily and for when it formed unacceptable alliances with the Northern feudal militarists that provided Sun connections to foreign imperialists. Such alliances were incompatible with the character of a revolutionary party. The role of the CCP was to force the GMD onto the road of revolutionary propaganda and, in so doing, to create a left-wing of peasants and workers. The idea of a mass party of workers was a utopia. The CCP had to continue organizing the workers but their political interests would lie primarily with the nationalist movement. Activist workers were to support the CCP in the left-wing of the GMD. For Chen, the CCP was to remain a strongly centralized organization that would promote the nationalist movement throughout the nation.⁴⁶ The theses sparked a major debate, with Sneevliet and Zhang Guotao as the main protagonists. Whereas Zhang accused Sneevliet’s tactic of effectively liquidating the CCP, Sneevliet criticized Zhang for his “leftist” tendencies and “illusions” about the possibility of a rapid development of a mass workers’ party.

44 In summarizing and quoting from the Resolution, I have chosen to follow the copy in the S.A. no. 272. Although the wording varies slightly from the official version translated in Eudin and North, 1957, pp. 343–44, otherwise, it is the same.

45 Sneevliet stated that the main points of Chen’s “detailed theses” were based on Bukharin’s Resolution. They also contained additional points about the peasantry who could only be won over to the nationalist movement, at the present time. One must assume that Chen’s theses formed the draft for the “Resolution on the Nationalist Movement and the GMD.” Letter to Zinoviev, Bukharin, Radek and Safarov, June 20, 1923, S.A. no. 231.

46 After the Congress, Chen Duxiu wrote to Safarov presenting the same arguments to justify CCP policy. The views mirrored those of Sneevliet. Letter from Chen Duxiu to Safarov, July 1, 1923, Doc. 78. Presumably, this was part of the set of materials forwarded by Sneevliet to the Comintern.

Li Dazhao and Qu Qiubai were Chen's main supporters among his Chinese colleagues.⁴⁷ For Li, the proletariat was the leading force in the national movement and thus there was nothing to fear about the communists joining.⁴⁸ Qu based his view on his analysis of the current stage of the Chinese revolution. Although the capitalist class developed from feudal elements, it would become an independent force in society and its interests would cause the "small and big Bourgeoisie" to become revolutionary. A national party was essential to unite the differing interests. There was nothing to fear from the growth of the bourgeoisie as the proletariat would grow at the same time; separation from the bourgeoisie would not prevent its growth. The GMD, he maintained, had developed from a party with "no principle" to one that closely corresponded to the real situation. The CCP's duty was to lead the proletariat to pressure the GMD and to save it from following a capitalist policy of compromise. As the proletariat was the true revolutionary force, the GMD could not develop without its participation. If the proletariat did not join the GMD, it would have no choice other than to seek help from the militarists, the capitalists and the imperialists. There was sufficient opportunity for the party to develop in the nationalist movement and the GMD would not develop at the expense of the CCP. Propaganda among the workers would remain separate. This led Qu to conclude that the party should lead the proletariat into the GMD, thus making it revolutionary rather than causing it to seek help elsewhere.⁴⁹

For Zhang Guotao, there were three questions. First, did the GMD represent the national movement? Second, did there exist the possibility of reorganizing the GMD? Third, was this form of cooperation with the GMD the only way to develop the Chinese revolutionary movement? Answering these questions, Zhang took up the challenge, arguing that their interests would be submerged if all CCP members joined the GMD. The CCP and the GMD were two dissimilar parties that, for the sake of the national revolution, had to link more closely but, currently, the GMD did not represent the nationalist movement. It was the task

47 Cai Hesen cited Zhang Taili as a key supporter of Sneevliet and Chen's position, 1926 [1980], p. 48. This seems most probable given the close relationship between Zhang and Sneevliet. Cai called Chen's speech very "rightist," an interesting observation as this preceded Chen's dismissal and the official verdict about his "right opportunism."

48 "Notes of Delegates' Comments at the Third Party Congress on the Question of Cooperation with the Kuomintang," June 1923, S.A. nos. 275 and 276.

49 In 1928, at the Sixth Party Congress held in Moscow to denounce Chen's leadership, Qu traced "opportunism" as a system of thought to the Third Party Congress. Because the CCP wanted the united front, it was obliged to make concessions and this facilitated the "opportunism," Qu Qiubai, 1928, p. 15. Cai Hesen, 1928 [1985], p. 152, disagreed and pointed out that Qu had been a key supporter of Chen Duxiu and Sneevliet and that "systematic continual rightism" did not begin at that time.

of the CCP to force the GMD to reorganize. If this could not be realized, Zhang was not optimistic about future possibilities.⁵⁰ Zhang especially opposed CCP leaders or those engaged in labor work not connected with the GMD, joining. If there was no choice, he proposed that they should not work actively within the GMD. Relying on point 4 of the January "Resolution," he argued that was why the ECCI had included the phrase that the CCP should preserve its independent organization (Chang Kuo-t'ao, 1971, vol. 1, p. 304). Zhang suggested the GMD should only be supported where it enjoyed connection with the masses but not in the North where there was no GMD organization. There the CCP should not be expected to organize branches for the GMD. This was the view of the Beijing party branch that saw the chance to develop its own organizations in the North.⁵¹

Sneevliet reduced Zhang's argument to the need to lead an independent labor movement and build up a mass party of workers (Letter to Zinoviev, Bukharin, Radek and Safarov, June 20, 1923, S.A. no. 231). In fact, Zhang's position was more complex than this caricature suggests. Zhang acknowledged the youth and weakness of the working-class but maintained that it displayed considerable strength and could not be ignored. The nature of the labor movement could not be changed simply by stating that it was a nationalist movement. Zhang reminded delegates that organizing workers and raising their consciousness were the party's special tasks. The labor movement could be united with the left-wing of the GMD but it could not be subordinated to the entire GMD. Apart from Guangzhou and Hankou, where there was no other choice, the CCP labor movement had to be conducted independent of the GMD, a view strongly supported by the delegates.⁵²

Zhang's final point concerned how one should think about the current state of the nationalist movement. A "pure" nationalist movement did not exist, only a movement to oppose imperialism. However, the Chinese bourgeoisie was in many ways still reliant on foreign capitalists and China was a long way

50 Letter from Zhang Guotao to Voitinsky and Musin, November 16, 1923, English, handwritten, Archive of the CCP. I am grateful to the relevant authorities for providing me with the original English language version of this letter. It was a reply to a letter from Voitinsky dated October 24, 1923, in which he asked Zhang Guotao to send his views on developments in China more frequently, Doc. 88.

51 "Notes of Delegates' Comments at the Third Party Congress on the Question of Cooperation with the Kuomintang," June 1923, S.A. nos. 275 and 276 and Letter from Zhang Guotao to Voitinsky and Musin, November 16, 1923, English handwritten, Archive of the CCP.

52 Letter to Zinoviev, Bukharin, Radek and Safarov, June 20, 1923, S.A. no. 231 and Letter from Zhang Guotao to Voitinsky and Musin, November 16, 1923, English handwritten, Archive of the CCP; Chang Kuo-t'ao, 1971, vol. 1, p. 305.

from unanimous opposition to foreign oppression. Although an anti-Japanese movement could be developed, it was not yet possible to oppose American and British imperialism. Indeed, there was a tendency to support the latter in China.⁵³ Zhang concluded his speech by calling on the Congress to adopt a “little bit left decision,” claiming that a “left sickness” was easier to cure than a rightist sickness.⁵⁴ The fact that he was aware that Sneevliet had powerful opponents in Moscow gave Zhang confidence to promote his views.

Zhang’s main supporter was Cai Hesen, who saw no revolutionary significance on the part of the bourgeoisie, meaning it was important to build up an independent workers’ party. Cai (1926 [1980], p. 48) states that Cai, Zhang and Liu Renjing all felt that the CCP should only ally with the petty bourgeoisie as represented by the GMD, given the bourgeoisie’s lack of revolutionary consciousness. For Cai, there were two main aspects to the Comintern Resolution. First, there should be cooperation but, second, CCP independence had to be maintained. Cai accused Chen of undermining the “Resolution” by bringing the workers under the GMD’s direct control. An independent workers’ party was essential given Sun Yat-sen’s inclination to compromise not only with the militarists but also with the imperialists. The National Assembly was more revolutionary than the GMD! Thus, Cai Hesen concluded that the creation of an independent workers’ party would act as a spur to, rather than as a brake on, the nationalist revolution. He saw no evidence to suggest that there could not be two parties in the nationalist movement.⁵⁵

Zhang Guotao (1971, vol. 1, p. 308) mentioned Mao Zedong as opposed to Chen and Sneevliet, stressing the importance of the peasant revolution and emphasizing how localized the GMD really was. Thus, the CCP should concern itself with the broad masses of peasants throughout the country. This is a case of Zhang following later developments to rewrite history. As noted, at that time Mao certainly emphasized the weakness of the labor movement, with most workers only interested in improving their material situation and with a poor

53 “Notes of Delegates’ Comments at the Third Party Congress on the Question of Cooperation with the Kuomintang,” June 1923, S.A. nos. 275 and 276; Letter from Zhang Guotao to Voitinsky and Musin, November 16, 1923 English handwritten, Archive of the CCP.

54 “Notes of Delegates’ Comments at the Third Party Congress on the Question of Cooperation with the Kuomintang,” June 1923, S.A. nos. 275 and 276. The preference for “leftist” policies has been a consistent feature of the CCP.

55 “Notes of Delegates’ Comments at the Third Party Congress on the Question of Cooperation with the Kuomintang,” June 1923, S.A. nos. 275 and 276. See also, Letter to Zinoviev, Bukharin, Radek, and Safarov, June 20, 1923, S.A. no. 231. At the Sixth Party Congress (Moscow, 1928), Cai admitted that his position constituted a naïve leftist error, although he stated that Sneevliet’s position was also naïve, Cai Hesen, 1928 [1985], p. 152.

understanding of politics and class struggle. Mao did not see any immediate possibilities for the peasantry.⁵⁶

For Mao, the tradition of a patriarchal society was very strong, preventing the development of a modern mass party regardless of whether it was communist or nationalist. Thus, if the GMD gave up its military work, little more than its name would remain. If the “combined powers” helped only one militarist, he could unite China but without this help only local power could be maintained. For Mao, the actions of the foreign powers were more important than class organization or mass action. What the Chinese movement needed most was active diplomatic and military support from Russia, with a military force established in the Northwest. According to Sneevliet, Mao had become so fed up with the labor organization and was so pessimistic that he saw the only salvation for China to be intervention by Soviet Russia.⁵⁷ Mao told the Congress that a bourgeois revolution in China was impossible, meaning that he saw no harm in joining the GMD. A national revolution in China would only become possible after the world revolution had succeeded in overthrowing the capitalist class in the capitalist countries.⁵⁸ This line of reasoning caused Mao and the others from Hunan to vote against Chen’s theses (Letter to Zinoviev, Bukharin, Radek and Safarov, June 20, 1923, S.A. no. 231). This disillusionment did not persist for long as Mao began to work with others to develop “China’s Little Moscow” in Anyuan.

As the debate raged, Sneevliet addressed the Congress.⁵⁹ He defended both himself and Chen Duxiu against the charge that they wanted to dissolve the party, claiming that it was “foolish to believe” that his intention was to “cut off the life of the party.” He was not guilty of worshipping the GMD and he was disturbed that discussions had not been based on the ECCI “Resolution.” The Congress discussions should only have been concerned with practical questions. The debate should not have degenerated into matters of whether CCP members should join the GMD or whether an “independent labor party for a labor class which is not differentiated as a completely independent force” should be established. Two ECCI decisions had already decided the matter (August 1922 and January 1923) and he advised the “conference to follow the

56 “Notes of Delegates’ Comments at the Third Party Congress on the Question of Cooperation with the Kuomintang,” June 1923, S.A. nos. 275 and 276.

57 “Discussion on the Relations Between the CPC and Kuomintang,” S.A. no. 277.

58 “Notes of Delegates’ Comments at the Third Party Congress on the Question of Cooperation with the Kuomintang,” June 1923, S.A. nos. 275 and 276.

59 Zhang Guotao maintained that the debates lasted for one week. For Zhang’s comments on Sneevliet’s speech see Chang Kuo-t’ao, 1971, vol. 1, pp. 309–10. The following account is based on the copy of Sneevliet’s speech to the Congress, S.A. no. 277.

order which was given like Chang K [Zhang Guotao] said, after much discussion in IKKI [ECCI] and with the most important leaders of the international movement.”

Sneevliet accused Zhang of misrepresenting the January “Resolution” to imply that only those who had already joined the GMD should remain as members and that the entire CCP membership need not join. For Sneevliet, the “Resolution” confirmed the “August Instruction” that all CCP members, not just those in the South, should join the GMD. The ECCI expected its orders to be carried out and not to be thwarted by members of the CEC. He was especially critical of the view that it was unnecessary for the CCP to help set up GMD branches in the North. Ramming the point home, Sneevliet stated that the ECCI “supposes that even in the CP of China there is something like discipline and cannot make its resolutions in such a way that some or other ingenious inventor manufactures arguments to make passive resistance and sabotage on the decisions of IKKI possible.”

Sneevliet then turned to attack Cai’s analysis that an independent labor party was necessary and that the “big bourgeoisie has no value for the nationalist revolution.” Cai and Zhang were both ignoring the ECCI’s January 1923 formulation that the central task was the nationalist revolution with the consequence that the activities of the GMD and the “young CP” be coordinated. Whereas Cai proposed the establishment of an independent labor party, Sneevliet referred to the ECCI judgment that the working-class is “not differentiated as a completely independent social force.” Sneevliet concluded that he preferred the “Marxian conclusion of the IKKI to the illusionism of Ho Sen [Hesen].” The role of the “big bourgeoisie” was dynamic rather than static and he claimed that Cai was unable to analyze “conditions dialectically.” While he could see yesterday and today, he was unable to see tomorrow. Cai should have known that the development of labor as a political force depended on the development of the bourgeoisie. Cai must have been deeply offended by these criticisms of his theoretical pedigree, given his studies in France and his sense that he did indeed understand Marxism.

Their strong emphasis on the working-class derived from an overestimation of the proletariat’s potential. This stood in marked contrast to comments by other delegates such as Mao Zedong, Deng Pei and Wang Yongzhang, who emphasized the weakness of the labor movement. The weakness of the labor movement and the preoccupation of the working-class with their material conditions meant that “modern workers” were most interested in the nationalist movement. In a sideswipe at Zhang, Sneevliet commented that the development of unions was possible and the time might come when a real federation of unions would replace the Labor Secretariat.

Finally, Sneevliet attacked Zhang's contention that it was only possible to launch an anti-Japanese movement but not a movement against the other imperialist powers. It was not surprising that the anti-Japanese movement was the obvious focus of the national movement but better propaganda could widen the targets. There was no necessary logic preventing the development of resistance to all the imperialist powers.

After criticizing his opponents, Sneevliet turned to defend Chen's theses as the only correct interpretation of how cooperation with the GMD should be carried out. Sneevliet appealed for a strong majority to support the theses. Contacts with the GMD would not kill the revolutionary spirit of the workers and if the communists could join the GMD, why not workers and trade unionists? He outlined a threefold task for propaganda work: educational work would improve the "spiritual force" of party members; labor unions were to be developed in the most important urban centers and, finally, strong support was to be provided to the national-revolutionary movement by developing the GMD as a revolutionary nationalist party. This was the force that would contribute powerfully to the international struggle against world imperialism.

Sneevliet also noted that special attention should be paid to the mobilization of the peasantry in propaganda work, a view consistent with the "Resolution" of the Comintern's Fourth Congress. Shortly before the Congress, Sneevliet wrote that what the CCP needed most was an agrarian program (Letter to Bukharin, May 31, S.A. no. 230). Although it hardly amounted to a program, the Congress did adopt a "Resolution on the Agrarian Question" and Chen Duxiu delivered a lecture on the issue to the Congress.⁶⁰ Following the Congress, the party expected to begin propaganda work among the peasants in Guangdong, Shandong, Hunan and Zhejiang—areas where contacts with the peasantry already existed (Letter to the ECCI, Profintern and the Vladivostok Bureau, June 25, 1923, S.A. no. 298).

The debate over, it was time to vote. Seeing that the debate was lost, opponents proposed changes to three points, changes designed to deprive the theses of their clarity (Letter to Zinoviev, Bukharin, Radek and Safarov, June 20, 1923, S.A. no. 231). Zhang Guotao wrote that he put to the vote a revised version

60 Letter to Zinoviev, Bukharin, Radek and Safarov, June 20, 1923, S.A. no. 231. Chen's speech formed the basis for the article he published in *Qianfeng*, July 1923, "Zhongguo nongmin wenti" (The Chinese Peasant Question). After providing a system of classification for the inhabitants of the Chinese countryside, he suggested certain measures that would help promote the national movement. First, attention was to be paid to education and propaganda. Second, he proposed four organizational measures: setting up peasant associations, offices for self-government in the villages, tenant farmer associations and farm laborers' associations.

of his proposal containing three main points.⁶¹ Sneevliet maintained that a vote was taken concerning “one point in the theses that was attacked in the resolution committee” (Letter Zinoviev, Bukharin, Radek and Safarov, June 20, 1923, S.A. no. 231). We cannot be sure but almost certainly it was the same vote as Sneevliet’s contemporaneous letters and reports only mention one vote. Zhang’s memoirs (1971, vol. 1, p. 310), imply a close call, with votes evenly split between the 17 delegates before Chen cast his deciding vote thus carrying his own original proposals. This account may have been intended to boost Zhang’s arguments as Sneevliet wrote that virtually all those present cast a vote, 21 to 16 in Chen’s favor. Among the 16 negative votes there were six delegates from Hunan and six delegates from Hankou who had an imperative mandate (Letter to Zinoviev, Bukharin, Radek and Safarov, June 20, 1923, S.A. no. 231). The vote was still uncomfortably close and indicated that the issue was far from dead.

After the vote, Sneevliet kept up the pressure on Zhang, claiming that his decision to accept the majority decision but retain his opinion meant that he would continue to oppose it (Chang Kuo-t’ao, 1971, vol. 1, pp. 310–11). Zhang’s opposition notwithstanding, Chen’s theses were drafted into the “Resolution on the National Movement and the Question of the GMD.”⁶² This document represents clear acceptance of Sneevliet’s thinking about the Chinese Revolution.

The “Resolution” noted that China’s social situation demanded a powerful, centralized party to serve as the headquarters of the democratic nationalist movement. This party was the GMD and thus it was not necessary to create a “bigger more revolutionary party” as this would result in lack of unity and would undermine centralization. Since the workers’ movement was not yet capable of becoming a sufficiently powerful independent social force, “naturally a strong Communist Party—a great mass party—cannot be developed to meet the demands of the current revolution.” On this basis, the CEC approved the ECCI “Resolution” that CCP members join the GMD. However, within the

61 Chang Kuo-t’ao, 1971, vol. 1, p. 310. The three points were: first, the CCP must strengthen its leadership of the labor movement and develop CCP organizations in the national revolutionary movement. Second, the CCP should operate closely with GMD-led unions and members in the labor movement but not all members among the workers should join the GMD. Third, since the labor movement was an independent movement led by the CCP, the CCP should not adopt a policy of actively encouraging large numbers of workers to join the GMD but neither should it obstruct GMD work nor keep workers from joining the GMD.

62 In his memoirs, Zhang ignores this resolution and refers only to the Manifesto that was adopted at the Congress. This enabled him to comment that while it accepted the leading position of the GMD and expressed the hope that all revolutionary elements would rally around it, none of Sneevliet’s “high-sounding phrases” were adopted. A copy of the Resolution can be found in *“Erda” he “Sanda,”* 1985, pp. 181–82.

GMD, it was necessary to maintain the communist organization and to draw in class-conscious elements from the workers' organizations and the left-wing of the GMD, to expand communist influence, and lay a solid foundation for the CCP among the masses. Further, the CCP was to prevent the GMD from concentrating solely on military activities and neglecting propaganda among the masses. Tendencies on the part of the GMD toward political compromise and reformism of labor policy had to be resisted. The GMD was to be guided toward Soviet Russia and away from the other foreign powers. Rejecting Zhang's pleas, the "Resolution" called on the CCP to strive to extend GMD organization throughout all of China.

The vote for the new CCP CEC revealed the decline in Zhang's fortunes. He received only six out of forty possible votes and two of his fellow supporters in the "small group," Gao Junyu and Deng Zhongxia failed to be re-elected (Letter to Zinoviev, Bukharin, Radek and Safarov, June 20, 1923, S.A. no. 231). Cai Hesen was the only one to be re-elected who, despite their differences, Sneevliet described as "by far the best of the four." The result of the vote for the new CEC was: Chen Duxiu 40 votes, Cai Hesen 37 votes, Li Dazhao 37 votes, Wang Hebo 34 votes, Mao Zedong 34 votes, Zhu Shaolian 32 votes, Tan Pingshan 30 votes, Xiang Ying 27 votes and Luo Zhanglong 25 votes. Deng Pei, Zhang Liangguan, Xu Meikun, Li Hanjun and Deng Zhongxia were elected as alternates.⁶³ At its first meeting after the Congress, the CEC elected a five-person Central Bureau: Chen Duxiu, Mao Zedong, Cai Hesen, Tan Pingshan and Luo Zhanglong.⁶⁴ Chen acted as chair, Mao as secretary and Luo as party accountant (Wang Jianying, 1983, p. 18).

5 Aftermath

Sneevliet may have won the battle but he did not necessarily win the war. Within the CCP, considerable opposition remained to the policy of cooperation and Sneevliet himself became disillusioned with Sun and the progress of work in Guangzhou. Finally, his time in China was drawing to a close and it was clear that the ECCI would not send him back to China for a fourth time. Not all CCP members were willing to implement the policy and this dissatisfaction

63 Letter to the ECCI, Profintern, and the Vladivostok Bureau, June 25, 1923, S.A. no. 298 and see also, Qu Qiubai, 1928, p. 176.

64 When the party moved its headquarters back to Shanghai in July 1923, Tan remained in Guangzhou. In September, Wang Hebo filled the vacant position, Wang Jianying, 1983, p. 18.

found its way back to the ECCEI. In his January 1924 report, Voitinsky noted the signs that “all is not as it should be within the party.” He based this on letters he had received from Chinese communists indicating that the issue of the relationship between the CCP and the GMD was “a cause of dissension within the party.” The specific problem remained the relationship between the labor movement and the national-revolutionary movement.⁶⁵

One of the letters was from Zhang Guotao who wrote to Voitinsky and Musin outlining his views. Zhang noted that the CCP CEC recognized that attempts to reorganize the GMD from the top-down were hopeless and reorganization had to be carried out from the bottom-up. Zhang claimed to have received a letter from Chen Duxiu in which Chen wrote that now he realized that the political theses adopted by the Congress were not suited to reality (Letter from Zhang Guotao to Voitinsky and Musin, November 16, 1923, English, handwritten, Archive of the CCP).

After the Congress, the decisions were barely implemented. This was compounded by the decision of the Central Bureau (CEC) to move its headquarters to Shanghai as soon as possible thus rendering any continuity of contacts with Sun Yat-sen difficult. Zhang Guotao (1971, vol. 1, p. 314) interpreted this as tacit admission by Chen Duxiu that he was not entirely in agreement with the policy of cooperation and he did not relish the idea of staying in Guangzhou. Sneevliet’s ambivalence about Sun turned to disillusionment about the possibilities of working with him constructively. While in his report on activities between June 23 and July 15, Sneevliet was critical of how the party “prefers Shanghai’s illegality over Guangzhou’s legality,” on July 13, he wrote that “[t]here really is a deep difference between us and the GMD leaders on the question of the party’s role in the nationalist movement.”⁶⁶

Sneevliet recounted that because the Chinese comrades had decided that not much could be achieved in Guangzhou, they wanted to create new organizations in the North, either to bring about a radical change in the dominant opinions in the GMD or to create a new nationalist party—something that Sneevliet had denounced consistently and the party had voted against at the Third Congress (Report to Davtian and Joffe, July 13, 1923, S.A. no. 230). Adding to the confusion, he agreed with the move to Shanghai and although they had to work within the GMD, he wrote “[w]e hold the opinion that it is useless to remain here in the South and to try to continue to win over Sun for political propaganda” (Letter to Davtian and Joffe, July 20, 1923, S.A. no. 230). The more

65 Voitinsky, “Report to the Eastern Section of the ECCEI,” January 15, 1924, S.A. no. 331.

66 “Report by H. Sneevliet on the Period June 23–July 15, 1923,” S.A. no. 301 and Report to Davtian and Joffe, July 13, 1923, S.A. no. 230.

hope that Sun had that he could remain in Guangzhou, the less influence the CCP could exert over him. The declining influence derived from Sun's need to curry favor with the British authorities in Hong Kong; a relationship that was far more important than a mere two million rubles from Soviet Russia (Report to Joffe and Davtian, July 18, 1923, S.A. no. 231).

Sneevliet's disillusionment with Sun was profound and he even hinted at his possible removal as the head of the GMD. He thought that funds would be better spent for the communists to carry out propaganda work in Shanghai rather than squandering "the money on Sun's military affairs in the South that have no prospect of success and that, if you also want to let Sun keep control, will be *harmful* for the general movement."⁶⁷ He was starting to envisage a GMD without Sun as its head. Writing to Liao Zhongkai shortly before leaving China, Sneevliet raised the possibility, outlining the problems he saw in the GMD and suggesting that there must be a third way between withdrawal (Zhang Ji) or traitorous activity (Chen Jiongming) for those who understood the reality of the situation. Sneevliet saw this third possibility as one that renounced activities that violated the correct principles (personal loyalty to Sun and his military adventures) and took up the reorganization of the party and conducted political propaganda. The time was ripe (Letter to Liao Zhongkai, July 21, 1923, S.A. no. 231).

On June 24, when the CCP CEC met to discuss future work it adopted four decisions: to publish a manifesto about the political situation; to send a letter to Sun calling on him to give up his military campaign and go to Shanghai to convene a National Assembly; to convene a conference of workers' organizations as soon as possible; and to instruct local branches to organize demonstrations by students, workers and merchant organizations in support of demands for a National Assembly (Letter to the ECCI, Profintern, and the Vladivostok Bureau, June 25, 1923, S.A. no. 298).

The letter to Sun painted a picture of a "golden opportunity" for the GMD provided by the uncertain situation in Beijing, where there was still no president, no full cabinet and a divided parliament. They called for Sun to organize a strong executive in Guangzhou or Shanghai to coordinate activities, promote large-scale propaganda, and leave for Shanghai to convene a National Assembly. This meant abandoning the warlord method of relying on military strength to gain political power and giving up the focus on the South, which was impeding the national movement. The Assembly would create the "solution to national problems and a central force for the national revolution" (Letter from the Central Committee to Sun Yat-sen, June 25, 1923, S.A. no. 280).

67 Emphasis in the original, Letter to Davtian and Joffe, July 20, 1923, S.A. no. 230.

The CCP promoted the demand for a National Assembly and a statement to this effect was published in July. If the GMD resisted such a call and confined itself to its old methods of calling a “so-called peace conference of military chiefs,” the Chinese people should not remain inactive observers.⁶⁸

At Sneevliet’s prompting, before the Central Bureau left for Shanghai, Chen Duxiu and Cai Hesen, in their positions as editors of *The Guide Weekly*, went to discuss Sun’s plans. The talks (July 13) did not go well, with Sun repeating his refrain that the National Assembly was not possible and when they understood the situation the merchants would come to him. He would not participate in the boycott against Japan, as he might need them in the future against England and America. Military affairs were more important than party development.⁶⁹

For his part, Sun was upset by the criticism that had been published in *Xiangdao zhoubao* (The Guide Weekly) about the GMD. He blamed this on Chen Duxiu and said it could not go on. He added that he would exclude Chen if he wrote that a third party might know what needed to be done better than the GMD. Sun only tolerated Chen because of his desire for Russian aid; if it were not for this he would exclude the communists from the party! Sneevliet told Sun that he, not Chen, had actually written many of the articles.⁷⁰ Later, Chen Duxiu (1929 [1970], p. 227) stated that Sun Yat-sen had warned Sneevliet many times that CCP members in the GMD had to submit to GMD discipline. Sun threatened to expel the communists if they failed to obey this and he declared his willingness to oppose Soviet Russia if it supported the Chinese communists. Perhaps Sneevliet had inadvertently encouraged Sun in this as he told him that the question of support had nothing to do with whether or not communists could remain in the GMD (Report to Joffe and Davtian, July 18, 1923, S.A. no. 231). Chen and Sneevliet put this more hostile attitude down to pressure from the British authorities in Hong Kong as previously Sun had not been so concerned about criticism in the CCP press.

Moving to Shanghai, CCP work did not fare much better and again it ran into financial problems. Extra funding was needed from the Comintern. The monthly budget for labor work was estimated at 1,650 rubles and the CCP requested 1,000 from the Profintern noting that it would supply the remainder (Letter from the Central Committee of the CCP to the Profintern, July 1, 1923, S.A. no. 230). This was not entirely true as the party also requested 1,400 rubles

68 “Statement of the Communist Party of China on the Present Political Situation,” S.A. no. 281.

69 Report to Davtian and Joffe, July 13, 1923, S.A. No. 230 and “Report by H. Sneevliet on the Period June 23–July 15, 1923,” S.A. no. 301.

70 This meeting was with Sneevliet and Liao Zhongkai, Report to Joffe and Davtian, July 18, 1923, S.A. no. 231.

per month from the ECCI for party work. Of this amount, it was going to put 630 rubles toward trade union work, leaving 770 rubles over for propaganda (Letter to the ECCI and Safarov, July 3, 1923, S.A. no. 231). Sneevliet supported the requests for extra funding but suggested to the Party's Central Bureau that, in the future, it should expect that support for regular work would be cut back. One possibility to cover any shortfall was to derive more revenue from publications. However, Sneevliet viewed the estimate that the new magazine *Qianfeng* would pay for itself to be optimistic, considering that it only appeared three times between July 1923 and February 1924, when it ceased publication.

In late October 1923, when Sneevliet left China, his tactic had been adopted but stiff opposition remained within the still dysfunctional CCP. His view of collaboration with Sun and the GMD had dimmed and he was less optimistic that they could provide the vessel for the successful execution of his tactic. His former respect turned to disdain. He saw Sun's military fixation as an insuperable barrier to progress in the Chinese Revolution and he was moved to suggest that all aid to Sun be stopped until he began with the reorganization of the GMD. This would not have endeared him to Sun or the authorities in Moscow. They could not have been very happy to hear that they were throwing money away to hungry generals especially as Sneevliet himself had played a key role in deciding the support for Sun and the GMD. Sun could not have been very happy to hear that many of the criticisms in *Xiangdao zhoubao* were not written by Chen Duxiu but rather by Sneevliet himself.

Many key figures in the CCP were happy to see Sneevliet leave. His stress on Comintern discipline to get his way was unacceptable. Whereas Voitinsky struck up a rapport with the Chinese comrades, Sneevliet alienated many of them. This may have weighed in Moscow's considerations as it wanted someone who could ensure a smooth functioning of the relationship with the Chinese collaborators.

In the ECCI, Sneevliet's pro-Sun orientation was unpopular with the likes of Radek and Safarov, while his criticism that they, together with Voitinsky, were dreaming of the imminent creation of a mass communist party cannot have gone down too well. Thus, the Comintern was not going to renew his mandate and even though Joffe was more sympathetic, he had no job for him. He did offer Sneevliet the compromise of working as a Rosta reporter in China, something that Sneevliet rejected. Soon after Sneevliet returned to Moscow, Joffe also returned with a serious illness that removed him from the political scene. Perhaps most important of all was quite simply the fact that Sneevliet was not a Russian (Chang Kuo-t'ao, 1971, vol. 1, p. 265). Bumping into Borodin while on his way back to Moscow made it obvious that his services in China were no longer required by his lords and masters in Moscow.

Development and Disaster: Who Was to Blame?

Heading back to Moscow from Shanghai, Sneevliet ran into Borodin, who was on his way to Guangzhou to carry out Sneevliet's tactic, the reorganization of the Guomindang (GMD) and to manage the cooperation between Sun Yat-sen, the Chinese Communist Party (CCP) and Soviet Russia. It was an excruciating moment for Sneevliet. If he had not realized it before, now he understood that he would never return to China to play a key role. Sneevliet thought that any decisions about the future would be taken on the basis of the report he intended to deliver in Moscow. The decision had already been taken. The chance meeting was a seminal moment in his life and in the nature of Soviet engagement in the Chinese Revolution. Symbolically, it marked a clear step in passing the baton from the internationalist vision of a global proletarian revolution to a vision more tightly embedded in the demands and priorities of the Russian national interest. What more obvious sign could there be than the exit of the Dutch, globe-trotting revolutionary and the entrance of a Russian member of the Bolshevik Party.

In Russia, the interests of the Soviet state were increasingly identified as identical to those of the proletarian revolution on the global stage. This was not surprising. Failure of revolution in the advanced capitalist societies left Russia alone to face the threat of capitalism and its imperialist penetration throughout the rest of the world. The main priority was to protect the home of socialism and slowly but surely this became synonymous with revolutionary diplomacy. Although the process was not yet fully completed, the signs were there. Sneevliet's challenge that Moscow's policy on the Chinese Eastern Railway caused some to view Soviet Russia as no different from other imperial powers and his call for a clear anti-imperialist policy set off alarm bells. Sneevliet was and remained critical of Soviet Russia's dual-(sometimes three)-track policy. As a foreign national, Sneevliet could not be relied on to carry out Moscow's behest unquestioningly, unlike Borodin the loyal communist and Russian.

The tactic pursued and imposed by Sneevliet on the CCP left a three-fold legacy that played out through the remainder of the 1920s. First, how one viewed revolutionary work depended on where one sat. The revolution looked very different working in Guangzhou in the open, under the protection of GMD military power and developing a peasant movement, than it did hiding in safe houses and trying to mobilize workers in Shanghai. Chen Duxiu's and Voitinsky's reports painted very different pictures than those of Borodin and the Guangzhou comrades. Disparate visions led to conflicts between the two sets of comrades about the direction of the revolution.

Second, there was the challenge of justifying collaboration with the GMD amidst an evolving situation, with the CCP expanding rapidly as a serious force under its protection. This caused some GMD members to worry about the rise of CCP power. The tactic that was grudgingly adopted at the Third Party Congress, following the Comintern's January "Resolution," dictated the approach that would be followed until the disastrous events of 1927. Despite growing awareness that there was concern within the GMD about collaboration, it was difficult to break free.

Third, the "tragedy", and who should be blamed for the failure, formed a core component in the fight between Stalin and Trotsky for the heart and soul of the Bolshevik Party. Early accounts blamed Stalin (Isaacs, 1938; Brandt, 1966) for pursuing a policy that forced the CCP to remain within the GMD after its usefulness as an umbrella under which the CCP could build support had ended. The GMD, to use Stalin's metaphor, was not a lemon that could be easily squeezed and then thrown away. Trotsky and his followers placed the blame squarely on Stalin's shoulders and showed how he blocked the entreaties of the Oppositionists within the Bolshevik Party to shift course. Indeed, Trotsky claimed that Stalin's policy had been wrong from 1924 (Trotsky, 1937 [1971]).

Compounding problems of interpretation for those in Moscow were the different perceptions of the tactic and Chen Duxiu himself wavered between proposing CCP withdrawal and insisting that the CCP must remain within the GMD. There were obvious rivalries between Borodin and Chen about who should speak for the revolution and the CCP. Moscow received different signals depending on the channel. In a perceptive comment to the Fifth Party Congress (1927), Chen summarized the entire dilemma of the united front from within. Chen raised three questions: how should the proletariat withdraw from the nationalist united front with the bourgeoisie; when would the proletariat no longer need its assistance and be able to carry out revolution independently; and when could the CCP openly attack the bourgeoisie?

Until February 1926, the approaches promoted by the Party Center in Shanghai and in Guangzhou (the base of the GMD and Borodin) were often in conflict. During his self-defense against accusations of counterrevolutionary behavior (Moscow, 1930), Borodin noted the difference in perception. There had been "two lines in the Chinese revolution," one in Shanghai and one in Guangzhou (Holubynchy, 1979, pp. 376a and 377). The friction undermined the CCP's capacity to act coherently when challenged by opponents in the GMD. Whereas Chen Duxiu, on certain occasions, called for CCP members to withdraw and to create an open CCP-GMD alliance, the Guangzhou Party organization proposed the takeover of the GMD leadership from within.

The conflicting views were clear for all to see with key policies and in the drafting of competing documents. For example, there were divisions about the wisdom of Sun Yat-sen traveling to Beijing in late 1924-early 1925 after the fall of anti-communist warlord, Wu Peifu and his replacement by Feng Yuxiang, the "Christian General." Finally, Sun

decided to push for the National Assembly, something that the CCP had been urging since June 1923. Now, however, Chen Duxiu and the Party Center in Shanghai opposed the idea, hoping that Sun would stay in Guangzhou to consolidate the achievements of the revolution. In contrast, Borodin and the Guangzhou comrades saw this as a chance to expand the influence of the nationalist movement. Borodin's view prevailed but instead of a National Assembly, Duan Qirui who was in charge of the Beijing Government, convened a "National Rehabilitation Conference," which would exclude representatives from the mass organizations and was far more acceptable to the militarists. This caused a split between Sun and Duan. At the Fifth Party Congress, Chen Duxiu (April 1927) admitted that the Party Center had been incorrect in its assessment and had Sun remained in Guangzhou, he would have achieved nothing.

At the October 1925 Enlarged Central Executive Committee (CEC) meeting, the tension between the two centers came to a head. The meeting was convened to review the implications of the "revolutionary upsurge" following the May 30th Movement.¹ Naturally, Guangzhou was acknowledged as an important place for the nationalist revolution but the meeting criticized the comrades there for not consolidating and expanding the party during the "revolutionary upsurge." Party members were criticized for working individually in the labor unions, the peasant associations and among the troops under GMD control.² Consequently, a resolution critical of their work was adopted. Their attitude had confused the "masses" who could not distinguish CCP members from the GMD. The CCP appeared to the people as a "shadow" wearing the mask of the GMD. The Guangzhou comrades were instructed that their most important task was to expand rapidly the number of CCP members. To ensure compliance, the Party Center noted that it would send a "capable comrade" to help the area improve its organizational work.

In terms of later polemics in Moscow, those working in Guangzhou under Borodin's direction had moved beyond Stalin's intent to run work through the GMD while neglecting the independence of the CCP, and those in Shanghai were already flirting with a stronger independence that eventually became the key policy plank for Trotsky and the Oppositionists. It was not until February 1926 that policy shifted firmly in favor of those working in Guangzhou. By this time, Stalin dominated policy making in Moscow and events around the globe were interpreted in ways that would benefit Soviet Russia (Pantsov, 2000, p. 84; for the development of Stalin's policy, see pp. 84–98).

1 The May 30th Movement 1925 witnessed a major upsurge in nationalist sentiment and provided the party with a chance for rapid expansion, especially in Shanghai.

2 This was part of a general process of tightening up on the work of the localities by the Party Center. To assist in this, commissars would be sent to the districts and area committees. "Zhongguo xianshi de zhengju yu gongchandang de zhiren yijuean," October 1925, pp. 459–71.

The February CCP meeting convened just before Chiang Kai-shek's March 1926 coup in Guangzhou.³ Voitinsky, buoyed by the successes, spoke positively to Stalin to counter his view that the CCP was being mistreated by the GMD and that it lacked an independent organization. By contrast, Voitinsky painted a picture of a CCP with its own strong organization, enjoying freedom within the GMD, which was responsible for much of its success. This vindicated Voitinsky's views with respect to his earlier differences with Sneevliet. Stalin based his view on the reports by Borodin (Letter from Voitinsky to Karakhan, April 22, 1925, Doc. 147). Again, we see the different impressions conveyed by those working in Shanghai and those working in Guangzhou.

The changing political situation and the shifting alliances created a problem for the CCP leadership when attempting to explain the tactic to the rank-and-file, especially as CCP power grew. This led to multiple attempts to redefine the nature of the GMD. In May 1924, the CCP CEC divided the GMD into a "left" and a "right," with the CCP defined as the backbone of the "left," thus making any future clash, in reality, a clash between the CCP and the GMD-"right."⁴ The meeting was prepared and supervised by Voitinsky (Pantsov, 2000, pp. 65–66) and was called to moderate the overenthusiasm of the CCP on focusing work within the GMD.⁵ The message was disseminated in a "secret circular" calling for struggle against the right and even hinting at the creation of a new GMD.⁶ Since the proletariat formed the core of the CCP, the party was to refrain from helping the GMD to penetrate the industrial proletariat.

Yet, by January 1925 the CCP discovered that not only was there a left and right within the GMD but also a center! The left comprised workers, peasants and radical intellectuals; the right comprised the military, bureaucrats, politicians, and capitalists; the newly discovered center contained the revolutionary elements among the "petty bourgeois" intellectual class. The center, although numerically weak, was important because many were leaders of the GMD. This analysis was debunked as early as October when the CCP moved back to the idea that there was only a left and a right, many of whom had become reactionaries. Bafflingly, the meeting released a proclamation for the peasantry in which it referred to landlords and businessmen who colluded with *the center and the right* of the GMD. In November 1926, the Guangzhou Party organization

3 This followed the "Zhongshan Incident," during which Chiang claimed communists in command of a gunboat had planned to kidnap him. It provided him with the excuse to clip the wings of the communists.

4 "Gongchandang zai Guomindang nei de gongzuo wenti yijuean," May 20, 1924. This Resolution was adopted by the Enlarged Meeting of the CCP CEC, which was held from May 14 to May 16 in Shanghai.

5 This followed the GMD's First Congress, January 1924.

6 "Zhongyang tongguo di shiwuhao" (Circular Number 15 of the CEC), July 21, 1924 [1982]. It has the sub-title "The Struggle Against the GMD-Right."

even denied that there was a left-wing in the GMD leadership; there was only a group of people who could not get along with the center and the right of the party. This led Chen Duxiu to accuse Borodin and the Guangzhou comrades of suffering from a “left sickness,” lacking respect for the GMD and attempting to monopolize all work in the peasant movement.

None of these descriptions helped the CCP operate effectively as a unit within the united front, nor did it prevent the party from getting caught out by Chiang Kai-shek’s March 1926 imposition of martial law, nor by his April 1927 move to eliminate any communist in areas under his control.

The shifting definitions became caught up in the fight between Stalin, Trotsky and the Opposition. It was impossible for Stalin to accept the folly of continued cooperation with the GMD. In May 1927, the Executive Committee of the Communist International (ECCI) interpreted the break with Chiang Kai-shek in a positive light, reemphasizing the need to place the rural revolution center stage but only within the context of a continued alliance with the GMD.⁷ More disasters for the CCP followed but the Comintern placed the blame on the CCP leadership for not effectively following their instructions!⁸

Given this, it is not surprising that many blamed Stalin but the reality is more complicated. It is true that wrapping the CCP tightly into the arms of the GMD and not allowing it to break free did precipitate disaster but the reasons for not withdrawing are complex. Certainly, Stalin’s persistence that the CCP remain in the GMD carries blame (for the most recent statement see Pantsov, 2000) but developments within China were important. Initially, the tactic proved very successful with GMD protection allowing the CCP to expand more quickly than it could have done under its own steam. This growing strength awakened the anti-communist elements within the GMD and exposed divisions within the CCP about how to respond. It is not true that after the Third Party Congress, the CCP slavishly followed the Bolshevik Party and the Comintern’s directives without some comrades questioning the wisdom. The CCP remained deeply divided in the ensuing period over cooperation with the GMD. As early as May 1924, the CCP expressed doubts about the ability of the GMD to achieve China’s independence.⁹ Last but not least, the inability of the opposition that rallied around Trotsky to put forward a strategy until it was too late also played a role.

7 “Resolution of the Eighth ECCI Plenum on the China Question,” in Degras (ed.), 1971, vol. 2, pp. 384–90.

8 See, for example, “Gongchan guoji daibiao Luominneisi de baogao” (Report by the Comintern Representative, Lominadze), August 7, 1927 [1986]. He had arrived in China as the Comintern representative to replace Borodin and Roy. He did not stay long, returning to Soviet Russia at the end of 1927.

9 “Gongchandang zai Guomindang nei de gongzuo wenti yijuean,” May 20, 1924, pp. 1–3.

Debates focused on how to operationalize the “bloc within.” In Moscow, Voitinsky, Musin, and Radek raised suggestions about changing the relationship with the GMD. Musin argued that rather than weakening the GMD, the CCP should help strengthen it, even with Chiang Kai-shek as a member.¹⁰ In June 1926, Radek put forward the idea of a “bloc without” as Voitinsky had suggested, an approach that Chen Duxiu had proposed on more than one occasion.¹¹ These ideas were rejected in Moscow and thus the “bloc-within” continued. Voitinsky quickly fell in line with this policy and must have confused the Chinese leadership with his abrupt *volte-face*. On July 1, 1926, he informed the Bolshevik delegation to the ECCI of the sentiment within the CCP leadership to leave the alliance, something that should be opposed.¹² This was ironic given that he had stoked the sentiment. Now, his tactic resembled Sneevliet’s with whom he had argued extensively only several years earlier. He criticized those who favored leaving the GMD and rejected the idea that the proletariat could promote its own struggle independently of the GMD. The CCP would not take over the GMD from within but rather it would use the alliance to enhance its influence among the masses.¹³ No wonder the Chinese comrades were confused by the instructions coming out of Moscow.

Trotsky was moving in the direction of the suggestion of a “bloc without” rather than a “bloc within.” In late April, Trotsky proposed leaving the GMD, presumably taking a cue from Voitinsky and those such as Chen Duxiu, but he was rebuffed. Stalin was not willing to allow opposition and stated that a split should not be considered. Power seizure was forgotten and tactics went back to stressing cooperation with the bourgeoisie (Chen Duxiu, July 1926).

So, was there an alternative policy within the Russian Bolshevik Party and the Comintern that could have provided the CCP with a different approach? This is extremely unlikely given not only the politics within the Soviet Party but also the tardiness with which the Opposition pulled together its critique of Stalin’s approach. By the time it articulated a coherent alternative, Stalin and his supporters exerted such strong control over the party apparatus and its publication outlets that it could not get its views known or debated. Its submissions to journals such as *Pravda* and the *Communist International* remained unpublished.

The approach came together very late, after the alliance had begun to unravel. In 1931, Trotsky wrote that, “The entrance of the Communist Party into the Kuomintang [GMD] was a mistake from the very beginning.” This might have been true but it was

10 Theses of Musin, Guangzhou, April 24, 1926, vol. 2, Doc. 41. For an analysis see Felber in Leutner et al, 2002, pp. 58–59.

11 Theses of K. Radek: On the Foundations of Communist Policy in China, Moscow, June 22, 1926, Vol. 2, Doc. 62.

12 Telegram from Voitinsky to the Bureau of the Delegation of the RCP (B) at the ECCI, July 1, 1926, Vol. 2, Doc. 64.

13 Letter from G. Voitinsky to L. Karakhan, Shanghai, July 6, 1926, Vol. 2, Doc. 66.

not his view at the time. His contemporaneous writings show that he supported fully the basic principles of the united front as proposed in 1922 (Pantsov and Benton, 1994, pp. 52–66). Speaking on April 21, 1924, Trotsky proposed that if the GMD could unify China successfully under the national-democratic regime, it would speed up capitalist development. This would allow the proletariat to mobilize and would justify the “temporary exploitation of Marxism” to aid the interests of “bourgeois-progressive politics” in those countries where capitalism was only just developing (Pantsov and Benton, 1994, p. 55). He suggested communist support of the GMD to push it forward. It was only in April 1926 that Trotsky began to oppose the dominant view. Most probably, Trotsky’s reappraisal was caused by the March 1926 Incident that provided an early indication of Chiang Kai-shek’s future intent. In fact, in 1931 Trotsky claimed that it was on about March 25, 1926 that he finally proposed that the CCP leave the GMD but this idea was rejected.¹⁴

Trotsky’s problems were not only with Stalin and his supporters but also with his fellow oppositionists Radek and Zinoviev, who supported the formation of soviets and stronger CCP actions but were unwilling to abandon the idea of the CCP operating within the GMD. It was not until June 1927 that they were they willing to accept Trotsky’s view that “entryism” was no longer valid (Pantsov and Benton, 1994, p. 60). Trotsky raised the question of whether the CCP would play a lengthy role as a propaganda group recruiting isolated fellow thinkers to the GMD or whether it could assume leadership of the workers’ movement. He answered his question in favor of the latter. Yet, he was still insufficiently unsure about the situation in China to push his views openly. It seems that in May 1927, he had privately called for the withdrawal of the CCP from the GMD “left.”¹⁵

It was not until late June 1927 that the Opposition agreed and sent a letter to the party and the Comintern (Pantsov, 2000, pp. 149–50) calling not only for the establishment of soviets but also for the CCP to withdraw from the GMD. By this time, the workers’ movement in Shanghai had been crushed and it would not be long (mid-July) before the “left”-GMD in Wuhan turned on the CCP, unleashing a “white terror.” Thus, to all intents and purposes, the question of whether the CCP would have fared better if it had adopted Trotsky’s approach is moot. At a time when this might have made a difference there was no effective alternative tactic to adopt. While the opposition viewed remaining in the GMD as the correct tactic, there was no alternative. By the time an alternative was proposed, it was too late to solve the immediate challenges. In late June, it was improbable that the logistics and support could have been put in place and

14 Letter to Max Schachtman, dated December 10, 1930, quoted in Schachtman, “Introduction,” August 7, 1931 [1932], p. 13.

15 Letter dated May 10, 1927, in Evans and Block (eds.), 1976, pp. 199–203.

the Comintern workers in China and the CCP leadership could be brought onboard to prevent the “left”-GMD from turning on them.

It was not until September that Stalin promoted the view that the future burden would have to be undertaken by the CCP on its own (*Pravda*, September 1927) thus adopting one of the key ideas that the Opposition reached rather belatedly. By this time, the CCP was working on its own strategy to deal with the disaster and Stalin's influence over the CCP tactics had begun to wane. Unable to accept responsibility for the policy failures, Stalin sought to place the blame on his agents in China and the leadership of the CCP.

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