

'Bolshevist' China

By LEWIS S. GANNETT

WHEN Wu Pei-fu came back to power in Hankow three years ago, loudly applauded by the Americans and British in China, he ordered his subordinates to cut off the heads of the leaders of the railwaymen's unions—and they did. When the Canton Nationalists arrived at Hankow in September they sent their young men out to organize unions in every trade and industry of the city and a great wave of strikes swept the industrial center up the Yangtze. In the last two and a half months of 1926 there were 160 strikes, involving 200,000 workers in the Hankow region. Some were settled the day they broke out; some lasted two weeks. And when the strike wave subsided these wild Bolshevists had established the ten-hour day in heavy industries and the twelve-hour day in commercial establishments, and had raised the minimum wage in the district from \$1.50 a month, gold, to \$3.75 a month. That is Chinese "bolshevism."

There is a split in the Kuomintang, the Chinese Nationalist Party. But it is not so much a split between "moderates" and "Bolshevists" as between militarists, who would be satisfied to have the Nationalist movement stop when it had put generals of the Southern party in the places of power previously occupied by generals of the Northern party, and civilian democrats who want to put an end to military despotism and extortion and really to create a new China.

The Nationalist movement is at a dangerous crisis. It has won such sweeping victories that its enemies are joining it, and it runs the risk of being swamped. The Shanghai foreigners, who have always been able to bribe old-fashioned Chinese generals and politicians, want to see it swamped. In the past, when one Chinese general defeated another, he put his own friends in the chief revenue-bearing offices, but accepted and retained the old subordinate officials. The old channels of graft flowed on unchanged; for the masses of the people the shift of overlords meant no change at all. But the Kuomintang generals are subordinate to the civilian councils of the party. When a loyal Kuomintang general conquers a province, he does not stay to exploit it; he turns its administration over to the party committees, and moves on to fight new battles. The so-called "moderate" split threatens because some of the new-found allies of the Kuomintang—perhaps even Chiang Kai-shek himself—look longingly upon the fleshpots of the old system.

The Kuomintang political leaders intend to make it impossible for a hostile general to recapture a Kuomintang province. This may be called Bolshevist technique; whatever its name, it is effective. It creates chaos and excitement for a time; but it explains the invulnerability of the Nationalists. They organize workers in trade unions, peasants in farmers' unions, women in women's organizations; for all these oppressed classes they produce results, and out of them they create a public spirit which makes reconquest almost impossible. Mere honesty goes a long way. Take the financial situation of Canton Province, still their strongest base. Since the 1911 revolution tax collections in that province had never exceeded \$15,000,000

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gold; in the ten years before the Kuomintang took power they had averaged \$10,000,000. In the first year that T. V. Soong, the Harvard graduate who is the Kuomintang Minister of Finance, was in charge, they rose to \$24,000,000; in the second year to \$33,800,000, and Soong's credit was by that time good enough to borrow—honestly borrow—\$15,000,000 more. He did not raise the tax rate; he simply forced the local grafters who had kept their collections to turn them over. He increased the appropriations for education, justice, trade, and agriculture fivefold and still had enough left to finance the start of the Northern Military Expedition!

In Hupeh Province, where Hankow lies, the militarists had for years collected special taxes which were supposed to be used for building dikes to hold back the river floods. But no dikes were built; the money was squandered. The Hankow “Bolshevists,” not yet six months in power there, are already building dikes—they have appropriated \$4,000,000 for the purpose. They have engaged an American engineer, Oliver Todd, who for years had served with the International Famine Relief, to assist them.

The Nationalists encourage the formation of farmers' unions, and these agitate against high land rentals. In the old days the farmers often organized for self-protection—sometimes in protest against militarists who forced them to grow opium poppies. Again and again the local gentry (landlords) forced the arrest of such farmers; now the gentry who try to interfere with the farmers' unions suffer arrest. They do not yield gracefully; and they can still buy occasional military support. On December 30 sixty soldiers suddenly appeared in Sanpu, near Hankow, where the farmers' union had led an anti-opium campaign, and attempted to arrest its leaders. One farmer was killed, several were wounded, before the raid was beaten off. Near Hanyang the farmers rose against the corrupt local gentry who had misappropriated dike funds and had even kept from the small farmers seed grain intended for them; there again there was a bloody conflict, and the new Nationalist authorities gave their aid to the farmers.

Wherever the Nationalists go they open schools—schools for workers, schools for farmers' union leaders, schools for women, schools for political leaders. They are indeed agitators, they seek to destroy the whole rotten fabric of the old governmental system, and to create a new. It is part of their technique to excite people. They do not stop to be fair to individuals. They interrupt foreign as well as Chinese trade and business; often their revolutionary agitation means a temporary closing of all the old-fashioned schools, including the mission schools. Foreign opposition to the Nationalist movement of course helps to crystallize it and to fix its determination to reestablish complete home rule for China; but the anti-foreign and anti-Christian outbreaks are essentially mere excrescences. They would disappear quickly if the foreigners did not defend with such an insane show of force privileges which they must know they will soon lose.

All China has been won to half the Nationalist program—that which is directed to the reestablishment of national independence. The fundamental conflict between “moderates” and “extremists” is, I think, between short-sighted men who think that the Nationalist passion can subside without causing fundamental changes in China's social fabric, and those who recognize the inevitability of industrialization in China and are determined that their country shall not pass through all the miserable phases

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of capitalistic industrialism which created a disinherited proletariat in the West. You may call them Communists—some of them call themselves Communists—but in judging them and the men who oppose them it is well to remember that the outcome of their extremism in Hankow is that men who were paid \$1.50 a month now receive \$3.75, and instead of working sixteen hours a day work twelve.

