
UNIT 13 STRUGGLE FOR CONTROL: THE COMMUNIST PARTY AND THE GUOMINDANG*

Structure

- 13.0 Objectives
- 13.1 Introduction
- 13.2 The Communist International and China
- 13.3 Formation of the United Front
- 13.4 The Communist Party of China
- 13.5 Achievements and Successes
- 13.6 Mass Movements and the CPC
- 13.7 Break and Repression
- 13.8 Reasons for the Break
- 13.9 Evolution of a New Strategy by the CPC
- 13.10 The Jiangxi Soviet
- 13.11 Let Us Sum Up
- 13.12 Answers to Check Your Progress Exercises

13.0 OBJECTIVES

This Unit will examine:

- the rivalry between the Guomindang and the Communist Party of China and what led to form a united front;
- how Guomindang emerged as a strong social force in Chinese national movement;
- the conflict between the two parties and the reasons for the failure of the united front; and
- the Communist Party's strategy of building bases in remote areas.

13.1 INTRODUCTION

The period following the May 4th, 1919 incident was marked by far reaching changes. Sun Yatsen's party after series of name changes became the Guomindang (GMD) and held its first Congress in 1924. The Communist Party was founded in 1921. Both parties came under the influence of the revolution in Russia and the Comintern began to play an important role in China bringing the two parties together but not for long. Sun Yatsen died in 1925 and Jiang

Jieshi became the leader of the party. Jiang Jieshi launched a successful Northern Expedition in 1926 to defeat the warlords but also carried out a 'party purification' expelling CPC members from the GMD. The brutal tussle between the two parties reflected the differing views about how to transform China. The CPC, under Mao undertook to nurture and protect its strength by creating bases in remote areas, as well as building its support among the peasantry.

The experiment with republicanism in the decade after the 1911 Revolution brought neither economic nor political stability in China. The ineffectiveness of the Republican government made Sun Yatsen think in terms of evolving new ways of fighting the imperialists and the warlords and underlined the importance of having a modern army. The rising tide of the left and the workers' movement added new diversions to the struggle for national liberation. It meant that the nationalist forces could be enlarged in their social base to include the workers and peasants of China.

Sun Yatsen began to look at the transformation of Russia after the October revolution, to understand how the Bolshevik's had established their power. Their experience could provide lessons for how to re-organize the Guomindang and win the support of a wider social base. A reorganized Guomindang, he felt, would attract the support of all sections of Chinese people. This meant a United Front with the Communists, and the friendly help of the Soviet Russia.

13.2 THE COMMUNIST INTERNATIONAL AND CHINA

There was an overall disillusionment with the Western powers. The Communists of USSR had taken the initiative to renounce all privileges and claims to territories, and also over the Manchurian railway in China which the previous Tsarist government controlled. It was natural, therefore, that the major political groups in China should establish friendly ties with the Soviet Government as well as the Communist Party there.

On the other hand, it was a firm opinion of the Soviet Government, the CPSU, and the Communist International that not only the CPC but also the Guomindang in China was a progressive and revolutionary political formation. This understanding was based on the analysis that all the political and social forces in colonial and semi-colonial countries that were struggling for national liberation had a positive role to play in world politics. They considered all political groups which were against imperialism to be playing an important role in the worldwide struggle against a common enemy of the newly emerged socialist country Russia. These groups included the workers and communist movements in the rest of Europe, as well as of the colonial and semi-colonial countries like India and China. Therefore, there was a strong case, in the opinion of the Soviets and the Communist International, that they should collaborate as and when they could against the common enemy.

The Communist International, which based itself on the ideas of Marxism, also had a stake in promoting revolutions in other countries, as these revolutions would necessarily represent the interests of large sections of the people (in China or India) in opposition to those of the vested interests there. In China they saw that not only the workers and the peasants, but also the bourgeoisie and the middle classes were opposed to Warlordism. This opposition to Warlordism

was there because the warlords were the mainstay of feudalism in China. The social and political hold of the warlords not only represented the interests of the landlords as opposed to the peasants, it also hampered the development of capitalism and modernization in China. Since the class interests of the bourgeoisie lay in the development of a modern China, they were opposed to the warlords. Their interests were represented by the Guomintang which struggled against Warlordism. The interests of the Chinese bourgeoisie also lay in opposing imperialism, because imperialism too was an obstacle to the growth of advanced capitalism in China. The Western powers siphoned off all the profits and the Chinese bourgeoisie could not compete with them. Therefore, the Guomintang opposed the Western powers. (See also Unit 11).

The Communist International also realized this to be the situation and established friendly relations with the Guomintang, apart from the CPC. This friendly collaboration with both, the Guomintang and the CPC, enabled the Communist Party of the Soviet Union (CPSU) to act as an intermediary in initiating the formation of the United Front of the CPC and the Guomintang.

13.3 FORMATION OF THE UNITED FRONT

In the spring of 1921, the Dutch agent H. Maring, as representative of the Communist International, met Sun Yatsen. Sun was keen to learn about the Soviet organizational system, its army, and education system.

This proved to be the starting point of the negotiations for a United Front. After that, the problem was considered at a Congress of the Communist Parties in Moscow in January 1922, and then by the Central Committee of the CPC in August 1922. In the same month another representative from the International, Adolf Joffe, came to China to work out the basis of Soviet-Guomintang CPC co-operation. After lengthy negotiations he persuaded Sun Yatsen to adopt a policy of alliance with Soviet Russia and allow the communists into the Guomintang. This policy, approved by fifty-three nationalist leaders at a conference in Shanghai on September 4, 1922, became the blueprint for the reorganization of the Guomintang and a United Front policy.

The Third National Congress of the CPC (held in Canton in June 1923) took a formal decision to form a United Front with the Guomintang. Sun sent Jiang Jieshi to Moscow to learn first hand how the Soviets system was working. He wrote letters of introduction to Lenin and Trotsky. Jiang Jieshi's experience in Russia turned him into a staunch anti-communist.

In June 1924 the Guomintang held its First National Congress in Canton. Li Dazhao, Mao Zedong and other Communist leaders also attended the meeting. This Congress passed a resolution to admit members of the Communist Party in their individual capacity into the Guomintang. A new party programme and constitution were adopted. It also decided on some concrete measures regarding the reorganization of the Guomintang. The Manifesto of the First National Congress of the Guomintang in China was adopted here. Sun Yatsen gave a new interpretation to his Three Principles in the Manifesto. The Congress declared its three policies to be:

- friendly relations with the Soviet Union,
- the development of the workers and peasants movements in China, and
- co-operation with the Communist Party of China.

The Guomindang was a revolutionary organization capable of leading the struggle for national liberation and against Warlordism in China. The entry of the Communists into Guomindang meant that the capabilities and experience of a great number of very dedicated revolutionaries was harnessed to the nationalist struggle. There were eight communists and those sympathetic to their views among the twenty-four elected to the Central Committee and the Presidium of the GMD was Li Dazhao, a founder of the CPC making them an influential force in shaping policy. As a result there emerged a strong left wing within the Guomindang. This meant that the Guomindang as a whole became far more radical in its politics and support to the workers and peasants movement than it had ever been in the years prior to 1924.

The new interpretation given to the Three Principles also suggests the same:

- i) Nationalism now had a much stronger anti-imperialist content which laid emphasis on an independent struggle and also advocated full equality for all the nationalists within China.
- ii) The new principle of Democracy stressed the democratic rights of not only the privileged and the educated, but of all the working people as well as of all the individuals and organizations that opposed feudalism and imperialism. In practice this entailed the right to free speech, to organize and struggle for a better living.
- iii) In relation to livelihood for all, it included anti-feudal demands such as “equalization of landownership”, “land to the tillers”, “control of capital” and improvement of the living conditions of the workers. This meant opposing the control of national wealth by a small section of capitalists and landlords.

The United Front led by Guomindang called for a coalition of the national bourgeoisie and the workers and peasants to work towards the establishment of a democratic coalition government. This was precisely the immediate tasks underlined in the CPC programme.

Check Your Progress 1

- 1) Sun Yatsen was influenced by developments in the Soviet Union to broaden his base and build a strong military force. How did this influence his Three Principle's?

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- 2) Discuss the role of the Comintern in helping to bring the GMD and CCP together.

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13.4 THE COMMUNIST PARTY OF CHINA

There were some differences within the CPC over the formation of United Front. However, the emphasis on the world politics as well of the social and political force in China was by and large accepted by the CPC. The Communist movement had, in fact, emerged in China in the context of the growth of nationalism and the movement for democracy, National liberation was, therefore, a primary goal of the CPC. The leaders of the CPC realized that there could be no democracy and no improvement in the lives of the people without first freeing China from the strangle hold of the imperialist powers. Moreover, at times there was a political understanding between these powers and the warlords. Therefore national liberation was inseparable from a struggle for social emancipation in China.

The CPC saw that Guomintang was opposed to both — Imperialism and Warlordism. Its leaders also realized that the Guomintang in 1924 was a much stronger force in China than the CPC was. It had:

- a much larger mass base and support among the Chinese people,
- more intellectuals and professionals as members,
- more influence within the armed forces, and
- greater finances and military equipment at its disposal.

It could, therefore, be a useful ally in a struggle against the common enemy, even if it did not represent the everyday demands of the workers and peasants. The CPC leaders had moreover a good opinion of Sun Yatsen, the Guomintang leader. In the context of the immediate political tasks before them, they agreed that there was greater scope for collaboration than differences. They also felt that this collaboration need not mean that the CPC confine its activities to the common tasks. Therefore, they decided on the United Front with the express understanding that the CPC would continue with its independent demands even as they fought together with the Guomintang for national liberation and against the warlords.

The United Front was, therefore, the only way to unite large sections of the Chinese people in order to isolate the enemies.

13.5 ACHIEVEMENTS AND SUCCESSES

The first success for the United Front policy came even as the negotiations were going on. Supported by the Communist Party, Sun Yatsen formed a revolutionary government in Guangdong in March 1923. The Soviets sent Michael Borodin, an expert diplomat, to help re-organize the GMD and Gen. Galen to help train the army. Along with them came 40 other advisers. In August 1923, Jiang Jieshi, a young general, was sent to the Soviet Union to study the Soviet military system. With the help of the Soviets Sun Yatsen was also able to establish the Whampoa Military Academy near Canton. The building of the nationalist army was a significant achievement because it enabled the first major victory against the armies of some warlords. The control over the Canton base was complete by 1925. The Nationalist government was moved to Wuhan in October 1926 and the GMD troops began a military campaign for the unification of China. This came to be known as the Northern Expedition.

Another important feature of the United Front was its crucial role in promoting the development of popular movements during 1925-26. The May Thirteenth Movement of 1925 particularly led to a series of strikes, boycotts and anti-imperialist demonstrations throughout China. It was precipitated by an incident which led to the killing of ten demonstrators by the police of Shanghai's International Settlement. The workers played a leading role in this movement. According to some scholars, this movement so radicalized Chinese political life that it can be said to have worked the beginning of a truly revolutionary period. The British business was paralyzed during this movement due to the actions of the working class.

The GMD government, which controlled the area, backed the striking workers and provided them with funds. The student associations, the Shanghai Chamber of Commerce, associations of street merchants (who represented small business) and the General Union of Shanghai answered the call of the Communists to come out in protest. This wide spectrum reflected the political nature of the United Front and the success of the United Front strategy. The merchants and commercial interests which backed the movement financially benefited from stoppage of work in the foreign factories because they were in competition with them.

Apart from Shanghai, there were strikes of solidarity in all the areas controlled by the warlords. There were attacks against foreign companies, boycotts of foreign goods and political agitations. The unity of different sections of Chinese people was expressed in these areas in the same manner as in Shanghai.

13.6 MASS MOVEMENTS AND THE CPC

The advance of the revolutionary movement also led to a reawakening among the workers. The new Canton government officially supported the workers' struggles. A number of new labour unions came into being. There were mass strikes in big cities; political demands became common; Peasant unions too grew in number — particularly in the territories controlled by the Canton government in Hunan, eastern Guangdong and Western Jiangxi. Apart from an economic struggle against property owners for lower rents, peasants also exerted control over distribution of grain, refused to pay taxes and challenged the social and political power of the landlords. Armed militias were also organized. The GMD sponsored a Peasant Movement Training Institute where Mao Zedong was the teacher. More than a million members were represented at the First National Congress of the Peasant Movement, held in 1926. The North, which constituted the heartland of the warlords, also saw an advance in the peasant movement. By June 1927 there were altogether about 9,150,000 members of peasant associations throughout the country.

Since the Communists were the most active in organizing these popular movements, the period between 1921-27 also saw a tremendous growth in the membership and political strength of the CPC. As a result of the May Thirteenth Movement of 1925 the membership increased tenfold in six months. It became 10,000 in November 1925, whereas in the early part of the year it had been only 1,000. By July 1926 the membership grew to 30,000 and by early 1927 to 58,000.

The composition of the Young Communist League also changed. Before 1925, 90 per cent of the members had been students. But by November 1926 only

35 per cent were students, the larger majority being of workers. The CPCs capacity to mobilize masses also increased tremendously. When Chiang Kai Shek's Revolutionary Army launched its offensive it was the CPC which organized 1,200,000 workers and 800,000 peasants to provide a solid popular base and political strength to the military offensive.

Following the pattern of the Soviet Red Army, the CPC introduced a system of political work in the Revolutionary Army. This was an important factor in the ultimate success of the expedition. The Army in its Northern Expedition was actively supported by the workers and peasants all along its route. When the Army set out, the workers who had taken part in the Guangzhou- Hong Kong strike organized transport, propaganda and medical units. This involved a march of thousands of people along with the army. In Hunan and Hupei too, the workers and peasants gave considerable support in making possible the control of these provinces.

The highest point of the revolutionary development during the United Front was achieved in the working class uprising in Shanghai. The third in a series of worker uprisings, it began with a call for a general strike on March 21, 1927 under the leadership of the CPC. By the next day the city was in the hands of the revolutionaries even before General Jiang Jieshi's army entered the city or fired a single shot. The workers had stopped the trains, cut the water and power supply, occupied the Police Headquarters, the telephone and the telegraph houses. With the support of the entire working people the biggest commercial and industrial city in China was brought to a stand-still. The CPC held a mass rally of Shanghai citizens to elect officials of the Shanghai People's Government. Finally, Nanjing was liberated on March 24, 1927.

13.7 BREAK AND REPRESSION

This highest point of the revolutionary movement within the framework of the United Front also resulted in a break of the Front on March 24, 1927 itself. The British, U.S, Japanese and French warships shelled Nanjing killing and wounding 2,000 soldiers and civilians. This incident signaled the beginning of a large-scale and determined intervention of the imperialist countries to crush the Chinese revolution.

On the other hand as the popular movements developed, there had already emerged a Right reactionary wing within the Guomindang opposed to these movements. Sun Yatsen had died in 1925. After his death Jiang Jieshi emerged as the most important GMD leader. Since he was also the Commander-in-Chief of the army, his political position assumed great significance. He decided to throw in his lot with those opposed to the CPC and the popular movements and provided leadership to the Right wing. On April 12, 1927 he unleashed unprecedented repression in China, with a surprise attack on the Shanghai trade unions. The weapons of the workers were seized and they were slaughtered by the thousands. This was followed by similar brutalities in other areas. Strikes were banned and peasant associations liquidated, Communists were hunted down, the Soviet embassy at Beijing was attacked and Soviet advisers expelled. On July 15, 1927 the GMD announced the formal expulsion of the Communists from the GMD. The Communists were pushed into the remoter provinces of China. In 1928 Jiang Jieshi defeated the Beiyang Army and nominally unified China starting what some called the Nanjing decade. Large parts of the country,

however, still remained under the control of local governors or warlord's, and there were military confrontations such as the Sino-Tibetan war of 1930, or in Xinjiang where the governor secretly signed a treaty with the Soviet Union in 1931. Jiang Jieshi backed an Uigur rebellion against the governor.

13.8 REASONS FOR THE BREAK

The reasons for the break between the GMD and the CCP lay in their different ideological positions and their different support bases. The GMD had within its ranks not only the small bourgeoisie (lower middle and middle classes), but also sections of the landlords, urban merchants and financiers, who were opposed to the radical programme outlined by the revolutionary forces. This programme implied a change in the existing social order. In fact, the partial success of the United Front itself brought to surface the underlying conflicts among the disparate elements that the programme of national unification had temporarily brought together.

One must understand that this was not a static coalition. There were disparate groups pulling in different directions on social issues, even as they came together against Warlordism and Imperialism. In this first United Front the left and communist elements were strong and growing but not strong enough to ensure a radical social transformation. For the landlords and the industrialists the workers and peasants were a bigger threat than the imperialists who did not threaten their privileges. Therefore, as the workers and peasants movements grew in intensity, in the same proportion the right wing which represented the privileged sections of China was driven into the arms of the imperialists and the warlords in opposition to the CPC and the workers and peasants.

The large cities, which were the principle base of the revolutionary movement, were also the principal base of the system of unequal treaties. The opposition to the revolution was also very strong in the cities. The armed forces and the social forces which gave support to Jiang Jieshi were also concentrated here. The very success of the workers' strikes found the Chinese bourgeoisie questioning the alliances they had made in 1924. This was because the nationalist movement, following the 1924 programme, openly attacked the pillars of the social and political system on which the foreign domination rested.

A decisive issue leading to the break between the two parties was also the agrarian question. The struggle against feudalism in the countryside was a bitter class struggle. The landlords were quick to attack the peasant movement and sections of the Officer Corps of the GMD who came from the same social class soon joined them. They came out openly against agrarian reform. Laws were promulgated restricting the rights of workers and peasants to protest or form associations. The GMD no longer stood for political democracy either. Having made use of the potential strength of the working peoples' movements and the CPC's links with them, the GMD was now in a politically strong position. It had substantial areas under its control and links with the Western powers independent of the warlords. It saw itself in a position of achieving its aims without the CPC and the workers and peasants of China. The direction it wanted to give to the future course of events did not feature a transformation of the social order.

With the attack on democratic forces by the GMD the first United Front came to an end. The Chinese revolution received a major setback, but the experience of the struggle was valuable for both parties. Many political lessons were learnt

by the CPC. The reasons for failure were thoroughly debated and analyzed. In fact, the failure itself set into motion a process for reorganization of the revolutionary forces as well as the formation of a new strategy for revolution.

Jiang Jieshi's violent expulsion of the communists ensured that Chinese politics in the ensuing years developed along two separate and distinct lines. During the period of the United Front both the GMD and the CPC stood on the side of political change and social transformation. The GMD became the formal government of China at Nanjing, and represented the force of nationalism.

The CPC continued to struggle for revolutionary change of which a radical agrarian reform was the main component. It, moreover, adopted a strategy of building bases in remote areas for protection and to carry out its agrarian reforms.

Check Your Progress 2

- 1) Discuss the effect of the united front on Chinese society and politics in 100 words.

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- 2) Discuss the reasons for the break between the GMD and the CPC.

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13.9 EVOLUTION OF A NEW STRATEGY BY THE CPC

It has been suggested that after the defeat of the working class uprisings in Shanghai and Guangdong in 1927, and with the breakup of the United Front, the CPC decided that the work among the peasants had proved to be the most fruitful. Basing themselves on the successes of Hunan and Guangdong the CPC adopted the new strategy of “peasant revolution”.

- the revolution in China, unlike Russia, would proceed from the countryside to the cities
- the CPC, unlike other communist parties, would be a peasant party
- peasant nationalism would be the basis for national liberation and social transformation in China.

Related to this is the argument that the policy of a united front was the “Moscow line” (because it was at the advise of Soviet leadership and CPSU) and that the new line represented a break with the “Moscow line”. It was a specific “Chinese Path” to revolution. Mao Zedong’s writings on the peasantry, particularly his ‘**Report on the Peasant Movement in Hunan**’, written by him in 1926, is cited as the basis of this new policy.

However, the situation was not so simple. Firstly, every new revolutionary struggle cannot be a replica of an earlier one and neither the Chinese Communists before 1927 nor the CPSU thought so. Besides, there was no clearly demarcated “Moscow line” or the “the Chinese path”. The questions that the Chinese communists debated were also the questions that the Russian communists had debated during their struggle. Some of these questions were based on themes such as the:

- impact of the international situation and the role and place of their country in the international set up,
- class character of the state in their countries,
- correlation and balance of different social and political forces in the country,
- backwardness of their societies in relation to Western Europe,
- consequences of this backwardness for their revolutionary movement in its various stages, and
- the peasant worker alliance being a crucial aspect of their discussion.

When the Chinese communists (or even the CPSU) discussed their programme for revolutionary change in China they noted the differences and similarities with the Russian experience — just as the Russian communists in making their revolution earlier had noted the differences and similarities between Russia and the West European countries. Or just as students of capitalist development in Germany noted the differences and similarities between economic development in England and Germany. Just as England was the classical model for studying capitalist development, in the same way Soviet Russia was the first and only country to have made successful socialist revolution. Hence it was a model for all those whose eventual aim was the building of socialism in their countries.

Even as they noted the general backwardness of their country which resulted in a weak bourgeoisie as in the Russian experience, the Chinese Communists also perceived that they had a huge country like Soviet Union on their side while Russia had been alone, and that while Russia itself before revolution had been an imperialist country, China was a colonized one. These two significant factors added new dimensions to their strategy for revolution.

The lessons that the Chinese Communists learnt from their experience of the United Front with the KMT were, however, the most crucial factors determining their future course of political activity.

They realized that even the first, the democratic stage of the revolution, i.e. the struggle for national unification and democracy, must be led by the working class. Mao Zedong, in his report on the Hunan movement talked of the crucial and absolutely necessary involvement of the peasantry. At the same time Mao also underlined many social, political, ideological and religious fetters that kept the peasant in ignorance and backwardness. He could also see that the working class, in spite of extreme repression, had easier chances of overcoming its political backwardness because of the greater access in the cities to new ideas and opportunities for organization.

Hence, it is wrong to presume that Mao thought in terms of only peasantry as the leading force. The Chinese Communists also realized that so far as their

ultimate goal of socialism was concerned, the peasantry could not take a lead in any movement for abolition of private property. It had too much of a stake in hand, and the whole process towards collectivizing property will take a much longer time and struggle than in the case of abolition of private property in industry. This will be because the working class had no claims to property. It had claims only to the full fruits of its labour. Therefore, when the CPC turned its attention to the peasantry it was only correcting its earlier negligence: till the Hunan experiments where the CPC had concentrated only on the working class.

The post-United Front stress on the peasantry was in fact based on the recognition, arrived at from the experience of the United Front itself. It was realized:

- that the working class on its own was not strong enough to bring about the democratic revolution, and
- that given the vacillating position of the bourgeoisie a worker-peasant alliance was the only foundation for democracy and social transformation — much as it had been in Russia.

In fact, the anti-feudal tasks in China constituted precisely a struggle against landlordism and for agrarian reform. Given the co-relation of social and political forces in China, it was only when the peasants were won over as a revolutionary ally that victory could become possible.

It was also realized that the revolutionary struggle had, henceforth, to be an armed struggle. The revolutionaries had been defeated in 1927 because they did not have their own armed forces. If the enemy, now comprising not only the old warlords but also the troops of the GMD, had to be beaten, then it was important that a new peoples' army be created. This could come only from the workers and peasants, but primarily the peasants who constituted numerically the vast majority of China's strength. In fact, the dynamics of agrarian reform necessitated a dependence on the peasantry.

Moreover since China was still divided into spheres of influence between the different imperialist powers and the warlords, the struggle often took on a local character in terms of geographical areas and isolation of the enemies in these areas. Political power could only be exercised locally and at different places as and when these struggles gained victories or were defeated. In keeping with the logic of this kind of a struggle, guerilla warfare rather than strike became the principal form of political action.

This resulted in the formation of various "red bases", "Soviet bases", "liberated areas", and "revolutionary bases", as they were variously called. The first Red bases were located in the South, within the borders of two or three provinces in regions that were remote and almost inaccessible. At first, these bases were merely seen as an expediency, a way of surviving and recouping strength, far away from areas of government control. Subsequently, however, this became a policy that eventually succeeded in bringing the whole of China under the control of the communists in 1949.

These new methods of struggle were not agreed upon overnight. They came as a result of systematic analysis of the workers' and peasants' movements during the 1924-1927 period, as well as of the reasons for defeat. The communists

were forced to make a far more thorough analysis of class relations in the countryside and the cities. They also had to learn:

- to distinguish between different sections of the bourgeoisie,
- of constituting broader support for their policies,
- of formulating policies keeping in mind the need for broader support, and so on. They debated thoroughly:
 - what form exactly the alliance between the working class and peasantry should take,
 - the different forms of struggle to be adopted in the cities and the countryside, and
 - the relative significance, at different stages, of the working class and the peasantry.

The CPC realized that the working class on its own was not strong enough to bring about the democratic revolution, the importance of the peasantry and that military strength was absolutely vital to success. This resulted in the formation of various “red bases”, “Soviet bases”, “liberated areas”, and “revolutionary bases”, as they were variously called. The first Red bases were located in the South, within the borders of two or three provinces in regions that were remote and almost inaccessible.

13.10 THE JIANGXI SOVIET

Mao established the first revolutionary base area in October 1927 in the Jinggangshan mountains, after the 1927 repression by the GMD. Yet the blockade by the GMD forced them to retreat in the winter of 1928-29 to towards other areas, where the peasant movement was developed enough to provide them strong social support. By the summer of 1930 there were about fifteen such bases in Central China. The Chinese government did not find it easy to intervene against them in these remote areas, far from the military and financial influence of the big powers. The most important of these, the Jiangxi base, became the first Chinese Soviet Republic.

In Jiangxi the armed forces of the landlords were weaker than in any other southern province, it was comparatively far away from imperialist influence, and peasant uprisings had been more widespread than elsewhere.

This new Soviet Republic was formed in November 1931, with Mao Zedong as President. It was defined as a “democratic dictatorship of the proletariat and peasantry.”

Mao writing on the class structure of rural China showed that the landlords were the chief enemies of the revolution as they had a direct stake in the preservation of the feudal system of agriculture and feudal property structure. These were the 10 per cent of the rural families who owned slightly more than half the land, and were almost the only villagers who did not till the soil.

The peasants could be characterized as rich, middle or poor, apart from the rural workers:

The rich peasants were those who employed hired labour from outside,

The middle peasants were those who could make ends meet in a normal year with either hiring anyone else or working for anyone else.

Poor peasant families were those who depended on the wages of one or more members for their subsistence, and had the least land.

With the break in the United Front with the GMD, and with sections of the bourgeoisie allied with it, Mao felt that the isolation of the communists must be compensated by a policy that would ensure support of a larger section of the peasantry, even as the thrust of the movement would be provided by the poor peasantry. The peasantry as a whole was to play the revolutionary role which the bourgeoisie could not.

The Agrarian law of 1931, therefore, provided only for the confiscation of the lands belonging to the landlords. This confiscation was without any compensation. The Soviets, which were elected organizations of peasants and soldiers in the area, were to distribute the confiscated lands to the poor and middle peasants.

The land was to be redistributed on the basis of equal distribution depending on the number of family members and labour in a peasant family. The lands belonging to religious institutions, temples and other organizations were also to be turned over to the peasantry. The rich peasant could be given some land, if he agreed to work on it without hiring labour and did not participate in any activity against the revolutionaries. Finally, only if the majority of the peasants accepted it, the new agrarian reform of equal distribution could be implemented.

It was felt that the middle peasant, since he did not exploit others, was keenly interested in the redistribution process, therefore, he would be, given political education, side with the forces of the democratic revolution. For this reason, to unite with the middle peasant was an important aspect of the policy of agrarian revolution. Besides, once land redistribution had been carried out, the middle peasants would form the bulk of the population in the countryside. The poor peasants with redistributed land would fall in the category of middle peasants.

The rich peasant did exploit the labour of others, but compared to the landlords he held not only much less land, if he had any strong links and influence this was over the rest of the peasantry in the village and not over the state structure. Therefore, the new agrarian policy sought to restrict him, permitting him to exist rather than totally exterminating the rich peasant economy.

Eliminating landlords was largely done by confiscating, giving them to middle and poor peasants. The number of landlords killed was in fact incredibly low, and done only when they opposed the revolutionary process. In fact, a much larger number of poor peasants and communists died in this struggle for social transformation.

The poor and the middle peasants, who gained from these changes by getting more land, became important supporters in the countryside. The poor peasants gained the most because they had the least before these changes.

The agrarian revolution aimed also at improving production. In fact, the change in the relationships of ownership had a very crucial bearing on the production process. It could:

- release a great amount of land from the backward, feudal methods of organizing production.

- give the entire peasantry a stake in working hard and increasing production,
- enlarge the market as more peasants had greater purchasing power.

The Jiangxi Soviet was a short lived experiment but the experience contributed to forming the CPC's revolutionary strategy.

In the Red bases established by the CPC, such as Jiangxi the formation of unions of agricultural workers and other organizations made possible the active implementation of the agrarian reform. The unions worked with the CPC cadre to carry out land redistribution. The whole procedure was open and public. Peasants and soldiers were elected to the Soviets which formed the organizational network of the new Workers and Peasants' Government. Middle peasants comprised about 40 per cent of those working in the local government at the district and township levels. At the township level, the chief cadres were poor peasants and farm labourers. They also formed the core of the new government. Thus the political advantages far outweighed the economic advantages because they now won political power and the opportunity to determine their own future and to take part in the decision making process.

Check Your Progress 3

- 1) Explain the strategy adopted by the CPC in 100 words.
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- 2) Discuss the reasons for the formation of the Jiangxi Soviet and how does it reflect changes in thinking about how to bring about a revolution in China.
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13.11 LET US SUM UP

The emergence of United Front as a social force was more of a strategy on the part of the partners rather than an ideological configuration. This combined effort initiated by Guomindang between the workers' movement and bourgeoisie aimed at a common cause i.e. fighting Warlordism and Imperialism. Hence, the United Front was an alliance between Communists and Nationalists geared up against imperialist force and Warlordism. National liberation and establishment of a democratic polity were the hallmarks of this joint strategy. This United Front served the interests of both the groups i.e. the CPC and the Guomindang initially. However, in the long run the development of many larger popular movements in China really shook the very foundation of this front and disturbed the common purpose behind it. The popular movements that arose between 1923-26 connected with the consolidation of revolutionary base at Canton and the offensive attitudes shown by the Southern armies against the warlords deepened the crisis in the organizational set up of the alliance. The victory achieved by the revolutionary wave created discontent among the Right Wing forces. Thus, there was a break within which surfaced outside and culminated

in the fall of Wuhan government in 1927. This in fact gave a death blow to the whole structural set-up of the United Front. The Guomindang adopted a repressive policy towards the workers, peasants and the CPC.

The breakdown of the Guomindang-Communist alliance known as the United Front in 1927 created uncertainty, frustration and organizational crisis within the communist movement in China. Its leaders were in search of a conceptual framework to reorganize the party structure and to bridge the gap between the party and the masses. Soviet model seemed to be the solution for the crisis that China was facing. Jiangxi Soviet was undoubtedly a major experimentation of this conceptual framework. Jiangxi soviet base mainly developed in rural China and agrarian reform was the main cornerstone of the Soviet.

13.12 ANSWERS TO CHECK YOUR PROGRESS EXERCISES

Check Your Progress 1

- 1) See Section 13.2
- 2) See Section 13.3

Check Your Progress 2

- 1) See Section 13.5 and 13.6
- 2) See Sections 13.7 and 13.8

Check Your Progress 3

- 1) See Section 13.9
- 2) See Section 13.10