
UNIT 14 CHINA AND THE WAR WITH JAPAN*

Structure

- 14.0 Objectives
- 14.1 Introduction
- 14.2 The Background: The Long March
- 14.3 The Yan'an Strategy
 - 14.3.1 Japanese Aggression
 - 14.3.2 International Situation
 - 14.3.3 Economic Factors
 - 14.3.4 Social and Political Resistance to Japan
- 14.4 The United Front in Practice
- 14.5 The Yan'an Base: A Form of Resistance
- 14.6 The Red Bases: A New Type of Society
- 14.7 The Final Phase
- 14.8 Let Us Sum Up
- 14.9 Key Words
- 14.10 Answers to Check Your Progress Exercises

14.0 OBJECTIVES

After reading this Unit, you will be able to learn about:

- incidents related with the Long March of the Communists;
- resistance offered by the Communists to Japanese aggression;
- various tactics adopted by the Communists in forming the second United Front; and
- how the Communists governed the areas under their control.

14.1 INTRODUCTION

The period of the war with Japan was also the period of the Second United Front. As was the case with the first one, it was shaped by international circumstances as well as due to the dynamics of political experiences in China. You will wonder, that if the First United Front had failed, then why this Second United Front in the war against Japan? We have been seeing that the social and political programmes of the CPC and the GMD were different and opposed to each other. Therefore, there had to be some special circumstances that should have made the CPC consider the fight with Japan as its first priority and to even make another United Front with the GMD for this purpose.

Such special circumstances were there in the international as well as the national situation, in this Unit, we will mention them and at the same time try to understand the role of the CPC in the war against Japan. This Unit also takes into account the nature of this war against Japan. What this meant for the relationship of the CPC with the GMD as well as with the workers and peasants of China is also discussed.

The Second United Front was successful from the point of view of the Communists in China. This was because it created the ground for a successful revolution, unification and independence of China. There emerged a co-relationship of social and political forces in which the working class and the peasantry became the leading actors, and Communists the dominant political force in the Chinese revolutionary movement. All these aspects have been discussed in the Unit along with the international scenario. The latter was an integral portion of the relationship between the CPC and the GMD and their war against Japan. This was because the decision to form broad popular fronts in order to isolate the most reactionary imperialist forces was not a strategy specific to China. It was adopted in all countries seeking national liberation or fighting against German fascism. Japan, who took over almost the whole of China at this time was also on the side of Germany, while England, and France were not. So the United Front formed for the Second time in China, was directed against Japan.

While discussing the various aspects of the Chinese revolutionary struggle, this Unit emphasizes that the interests of all those fighting against oppression the world over are linked and inseparable. Similarly the unity of purpose and action leads to greater success in a struggle for better life. After reading this Unit you will be able to appreciate how participation in the worldwide struggle against Fascism advanced the interests of the Chinese revolutionary movement, and also that of the workers and peasants of China who formed the main component in this revolutionary movement.

14.2 THE BACKGROUND: THE LONG MARCH

The Long March mentioned earlier in Unit 13 began as the Communists were forced to abandon their Jiangsi base. Thousands of peasants had been killed by the GMD forces in the daily bombing and machine gunning from the air. Whole areas were depopulated by forced mass migrations or mass executions. The Red Army itself suffered over 60,000 casualties. However, thousands of peasant supporters fought till their last to enable the main section of the army to get away. The heroism of these Red supporters has been commemorated by the CPC.

The retreating/members of the Long March not only had the main army but thousands of poor peasants also went along. In fact, it had old and young men, women, children, communists and non-communists. Their meagre weapons and ammunitions that they could not carry with them in this long distance had to be buried along the way. This was done with a hope that someday, in better circumstances, they might be used in the continuing struggle. Almost half the men and material belongings were lost on the way.

The March was a remarkable feat for the defeated and bedraggled army. They had to fight all long the way against the vagaries of nature as well as armed

adversaries of the GMD and the warlords. In the mammoth undertaking they trudged through eleven provinces, over remote regions, crossing eighteen mountain chains and twenty-four large rivers. This great March began on October 16, 1934 and ended only in 1937 in the arid, steep slopes of Yan'an, covering a distance of around 8,000 miles. Fewer than 30,000 completed the entire journey. Of the women no more than thirty survived. Among those who perished was Mao's wife. But those who reached Shensi in the Yan'an region constituted the hardcore of reliable and disciplined force that was supposed to build the future Chinese Soviet Republic. Among them were also Mao, Zhu De, Lin Biao and Chou Enlai.

The Long March forms one of the great and most heroic tasks in Chinese history. It may not seem much of a feat when written about in a few pages. But you will recognize its immense achievement if you let yourself imagine the sight of thousands of people marching together, without much ammunition to defend themselves, with even less food and medicines except those procured through supporters in the remote areas they passed through. As you may visualize, it may not have been at all easy to look after the needs of thousands of people, hundreds old and sick, through the tough, relentless terrain. Along with Mao, many others lost their near and dear ones. The only thing that carried them through was an indomitable political will and strength derived from the Tightness of the cause they were fighting for. They knew, they were fighting for a new China — a China which would ensure a better quality of life for the millions of poor and deprived.

Almost everyone — historian or journalist — who has written anything on China has done so with great respect for those who attempted this remarkable journey. Some journalists, who accompanied the March for some distances, in order to cover it for their papers, became lifelong supporters.

Agnes Smedley, Edgar Snow, Dr. Norman Bethune have described the long March very graphically and brought to life before us those who would otherwise have remained unknown. If you ever have an opportunity to read any of their works, you must do so.

When the Long March began Jiang Jieshi seemed to be in control of China. Yet this retreat of the Communists from Kiangsi and other Red bases in southern China proved to be a crucial event in the Communists path to eventual victory. At the end of their long and difficult journey they were at last able to establish a really firm base against the GMD military forces. The basic aim to save the revolution was thus achieved, though at a heavy price for the loss of thousands of their cadres.

Three factors connected with the Long March helped in keeping the Communist revolution alive:

- i) The Long March itself contributed to the “growing reputation of the Communists and the Peoples' Liberation Army as just, courageous, and truly nationalist.” The GMD continued to claim that the Communists had been defeated for good, and their control over the press and public opinion prevented most people from knowing what was really happening in the remote regions of China. Yet, the journalistic pieces of Snow and Smedley got through to the Western world and democratic forces all over the world contributed with medicines and money for setting up of medical units in

the remote regions. Although this help was but a small drop in the ocean, more significant was their enhanced prestige in China itself. The Long March became the theme for songs and legends, and Communists, the accepted leaders of the new awakening in China.

- ii) The Long March also led to a new cohesion within the Communist movement in China. Mao's leadership of the Party was consolidated. All along the March, when it was not possible to move further due to enemy areas, the frequent waits were utilized for political education and political meetings of the leadership. The existing differences among them were thoroughly ironed out in the light of the experience of the immediate realities.
- iii) The most important gain for the Communists was, however, the human and physical experience that the Long March gave to the thousands of cadres. It was in itself a training ground for hard physical training and political education. It brought them into contact with new regions and the different people of China.

Thus when the Communists established their firm base in North Shensi, Yan'an, they had already disseminated their ideas among a very large section of people on the way, learnt an equal amount about the Chinese peasantry, its attitudes and habits, and were politically far wiser and experienced than at the Hunan or Jiangsi stage. In short, the Long March experience prepared them for their final assault against the enemies, and their eventual victory. On the other hand, the very different behaviour of the Peoples Liberation Army as compared to the GMD military forces, and their experience of this army as their own, meant eventually the acceptance of the Communists as their leaders by the Chinese people as a whole. Along the way they were, therefore, able to enlist a lot of Red supporters and partisans — even new recruits for their main army. After all the poor people of all the areas of China were oppressed by the warlords and the GMD.

14.3 THE YAN'AN STRATEGY

Yan'an was chosen as the new base by the Communists for reasons very similar to why Kiangsi had earlier been chosen by them. As Edgar Snow pointed out: "Yan'an was ideally suited for defence. Cradle in bound of high, rock-ribbed hills, its stout walls crawl up to the very tops."

As earlier, the liberated zones were founded on armed struggle, changes in landownership based on peasant interests, guerilla warfare at local levels, and location of bases in areas inaccessible to government troops. But the chief enemy for the Communists at this stage was no longer the GMD. The main enemies were now the Japanese. You have read in Unit 13 how Japanese imperialists attacked China. In practical terms this meant that many more people from the previously considered hostile sections could now be brought into the field of the anti-Japanese struggle. In contrast to the earlier Chinese Soviet Republics therefore, the social base of their new areas of control was now greatly expanded.

A strategy of social transformation that would ensure an enlarged social base was absolutely necessary at this stage. This was in view of the fact that the CPC no longer faced a divided, corrupt adversary. The disciplined, armed might

of Japanese imperialism was a different thing altogether from the GMD dependent on various warlords at odds with each other. The civil war in China was no longer between a GMD — trying to unify if not social transformation—and some warlords equally interested in independent means of control. The complexity of their conflicts lending a special dimension to the war between the GMD and the workers and peasants of China no longer held true in the changed political context.

The Yan'an strategy was, therefore at once a strategy of United Front against Japanese imperialism, as well as of social transformation that would give the CPC a far wider social base than during the Jiangsi period. In fact, these two aspects of their strategy were interlinked and integral to each other.

14.3.1 Japanese Aggression

The Capitalist world, in spite of the international settlements made at the end of World War-I was in an unprecedented economic crisis by 1929. This worsened in the next three years. These countries, particularly Japan and Germany who had not gained then, were very badly hit. There was an urge for a “new” division of the world. Japanese imperialism saw an aggressive war as the only way out. Against the clauses of the Nine-Power Treaty, the Japanese sought to drive the European powers and the U.S. out of China, and to turn China into their own colony in much the same way as India was a British colony. They had already launched their first attack on September 18, 1931. By January 1933 they had penetrated into the whole of the North China plain, by 1935 they had occupied Inner Mongolia, and by 1937 they were the paramount power in China. Using a minor incident at the Marco Polo Bridge (to the south of Peking) at this time, Japan invaded all of China without actually declaring war.

The devastation caused by Japanese brutality was shattering. For example, when the Nanking government fell 300,000 people were massacred. In the Yangtse region, refugees were subjected to a rain of machine-gun firing. The massive loss of life and economy was similar in other parts of China.

Too preoccupied with their own war with Germany, more of an immediate threat to them, the European powers did not intervene. The U.S. remained neutral until the attack on Pearl Harbour by Japan in 1941. The Chinese government too, on its part, in keeping with its compromising policy towards the Western powers, did not declare war on Japan till the 1941 attack on Pearl Harbour and the fall of Hong Kong and Singapore. The Japanese had, therefore, almost a free run of the place. Incompetence on the part of Chinese authorities led to irrational loss of additional lives. A panic led them to set fire to Changsha, the capital of Hunan, where 800,000 refugees died in addition to inhabitants. Attempting to check the Japanese advance, they burst the dams of the Yellow River, killing thousands. The fight against Japanese aggression, therefore, became a matter of survival for China, and for this reason, the primary task for the Communists at this political juncture in China's history.

14.3.2 International Situation

For this task the broadest possible front had to be forged not only within China, but also with the other countries fighting Japan. The outbreak of the Second World War in 1939 led to the formation of abroad international front against Germany, Italy and Japan—the fascist powers. This broad front consisted of

England, France, Soviet Union and after 1941, the U.S. They called themselves the Allied forces. The social forces of national liberation too joined this broad front. For India the choice was not so simple, as she was ruled by Britain. But for China the choice was simple and straightforward because the Allies fought Japan. Yet, for the CPC a larger question was at stake. The popular fronts against Germany, Italy and Japan also represented a fight for the survival of democracy and the first socialist state, the Soviet Union, both of which the CPC considered as necessary conditions for their own success. Thus the victory of Fascism would mean a setback and defeat for China at the hands of Japan, while their defeat would mean an independent China. In short, they perceived the world political situation and their role and place in it in very much the same way as Indian leaders did. It is not a coincidence that the process of decolonization, the Indian independence and the Chinese Revolution followed the defeat of the Fascist powers in the Second World War.

The formation of this International United Front of which CPC and the GMD in China became a part, was a long and painful process. The Japanese aggression in China began in 1931, assuming serious proportions by 1934. The Western powers till this time saw their interests as primarily opposed to the Soviet Union. Within China too they had their own economic investments and areas of control. Therefore, it was only when Japan began easing them out in China, and Germany in Europe and other parts of the world that they actually began to seriously oppose Germany and Japan. U.S., as mentioned earlier, joined the war only in 1941. By then a united resistance movement against Japan had already developed in China.

14.3.3 Economic Factors

The emerging conflicts between Japan and the European powers and the U.S. had their basis in their economic rivalries in China. Imperialist control over Chinese economy was complete in all sectors of economy. In 1937, 90.7 per cent of China's railway investment was foreign. 55.7 per cent of China's coal output, 18.9 per cent of the total tonnage of the vessels plying the Yangtse River and 55 per cent of the electricity production were in foreign hands. All the iron production was with the Japanese. In 1936, 46.2 per cent of China's spindles and 56.4 per cent of her looms were owned by foreign capital. The foreign banks also enjoyed the privileges of issuing bank notes controlling the customs duty and salt tax. These imperialist investments were squeezed from China itself, as was the case in India.

But as compared with the 1930 figure, the British total investments in 1936 remained stagnant, the American increased by 20 per cent although its entire amount was not much. The Japanese investment in this period increased by 48 per cent accounting for half of the gross sum of foreign investments in China. In the North East particularly, Japan monopolized the market and the land, the factories, mines, industrial raw materials, communications and transport. As a result China's industrialists and merchants had great losses in foreign trade and in the international market, as well as industrial profits within China.

The three biggest textile centres in China were controlled by Japan.

All these figures tell the very plain story of how the possibilities of enlarging the social base of the national revolutionary movement were created during this period, and also why it became logical and necessary to make Japan its primary target.

14.3.4 Social and Political Resistance to Japan

The resistance to Japanese aggression began immediately. The Jiangsi Soviets declared war on Japan in 1932 as a protest against the invasion of Manchuria, although this was nothing more than a token resistance. But in the cities there was overwhelming assertion of public opinion against the Japanese. The intelligentsia played a leading role in activating public opinion and organizing boycott of Japanese goods. The student movement came to be identified with the national resistance movement. In the autumn of 1931, some 15,000 high school and university students held military exercises in the streets of the capital and staged daily demonstrations to stop negotiations and force the government to declare war on Japan. The CPC, recognizing the great potential of these movements sent out an appeal to the whole country to join the Communists in fighting Japan. This was in August 1935 even before the Long March had been completed and before they reached their base in Yan'an. The strategy of the Chinese United Front, similar to the anti-Fascist United Fronts in Europe, was already born. However, it took some more time to formulate, and even more time to implement.

Although the GMD government did not officially declare war on Japan till 1941, and continued to regard the Communists as their main enemy, yet it was forced to recognize even in 1935 the growing anti-Japanese sentiment among the Chinese people. Students, intellectuals, professionals, as well as the working people — particularly in the East, were very vocal. The Japanese offensive in North China provoked a mass students' uprising, known today as the December Ninth Movement (1935). The largest demonstrations that Peking had ever seen were organized. They played an important role in preventing the Japanese from carrying out their plan to detach the five northern provinces from the rest of China. A boycott movement against Japanese goods was launched by the merchants and coolies in many towns.

Finally, in May 1936, at the initiative of the students, was formed the Pan-China Federation of Association for National Salvation. It soon became the organizing centre for a powerful nationalist movement. This prestigious association, with various well-known lawyers, journalists and professors as its directors, called for an end to civil war and united resistance to Japan. In effect, this meant the endorsement of the CPC and Comintern appeal for a new United Front. In the cities of the East the Federation cooperated with the Communists.

These organizations and movements were as much a protest against the Chinese government's policies of compromise and lack of resistance, as against the Japanese. It was in this political context that the much celebrated and significant 'Sian Incident' took place. On December 12, 1936, Jiang Jieshi was kidnapped by one of his generals while on a visit to Sian. Chinese troops were not happy fighting with the Chinese people, even if they happened to be Communists. They presented him with 'Eight Demands':

- 1) Reorganize the Nanking Government and admit all parties to share the joint responsibility of national salvation.
- 2) End all civil war immediately and adopt the policy of armed resistance against Japan.
- 3) Release the leaders of the resistance movement in Shanghai.
- 4) Pardon all political prisoners.

- 5) Guarantee the people liberty of assembly.
- 6) Safeguard the people's rights of patriotic organization and political liberty.
- 7) Put into effect the will of Dr. Sun Yatsen.
- 8) Immediately convene a National Salvation Conference.

This programme implied in practice :

- a united front of all the Chinese against Japan,
- an end to the persecution of the Communists, and
- drastic political reforms.

The compromising policy of the GMD had made the people realize the necessity of democracy and a political system responsive to their aspirations. The link between nationalism and revolution had been forged in the minds of the Chinese people. It was realized that without political reform and the liberty to express and organize the political will of the people there could be no united resistance to Japan. The Chinese nation was inseparable from an assertion of independent political will and social transformation.

The expression of public opinion from 1931 to 1937 played a very significant role in establishing this link in the minds and political practices of the Chinese people. The cities, which, during the Jiangsi period had not seen political activity of the masses, became once more linked with the Chinese revolutionary movement. The centre of gravity of the struggle shifted from the South, where the Kiangsi and other Red areas had been during that period, to the North, the area of Japanese aggression and occupation.

The programme represented by the 'Eight Demands' as well as the Federation of Association of National Salvation were in keeping with the immediate demands of the CPC. The Chinese Red Army, the Soviet Government and the CPC immediately offered their support to this programme. The CPC once again made a formal appeal to the GMD on July 15, 1937, to join the United Front of the people against Japan. Jiang Jieshi was released. He, on his part, under pressure from the political developments of the preceding six years, was forced to:

- accept the legality of the CPC,
- agree to end the persecution of the Communists, and
- work in co-operation with them.

He also promised some political reforms. In this way, the formation of the Second. United Front brought about a re-alignment of social and political forces in China. However this was very different from the First United Front.

Check Your Progress 1

- 1) Discuss in about ten lines the significance of the Long March.

.....

.....

.....

.....

2) Why did the CPC forge the second United Front? Answer in ten lines.

.....

.....

.....

.....

14.4 THE UNITED FRONT IN PRACTICE

The United Front of the CPC and the GMD against Japan did not function smoothly at all times. In practical terms it also meant that the Communists had to give up their idea of overthrowing the GMD by force as long as the Japanese remained on China's soil. This was an issue beset with many practical difficulties and social tensions because the GMD's social policies had not been modified during the United Front, even as the CPC modified its own. Secondly, even as the Communists retained their own armed forces, they were also counted as part of the National Army. They became part of the "Eight Marching Army" and the "New Fourth Army" which also had GMD commanding officers.

To begin with, Jiang Jieshi did take a stand against the Japanese. On August 13, 1937, he put his best troops into action against the Japanese marine garrison in Shanghai. The Japanese realized that they were confronted by the might of the entire Chinese people, and went in for full mobilization of their own resources. As a result "Chinese casualties mounted to thousands. The Chinese just did not have the same kind of equipment. But every inch of the soil was fought over by the Chinese. This resistance at Shanghai was futile in a military sense, but in a political sense the demonstration of courage and heroism was significant. The tales of the battle, carried to other areas, kindled a spreading bonfire of patriotic feelings.

As pointed out by those who reported on this battle, "the winter of 1937-38 worked a miracle in China." The seat of government, after the defeat of Nanking, was shifted to Hankow. There was complete unity of purpose. All of China was on the move. Warlord armies from the South and South-west marched to join the battle. The Communist partisans fought bravely against the Japanese. In Hankow the government and the Communists sat together to formulate the plans for the prosecution of the war. Another unit of the Communist Army was created. In April 1938, for the first time in the history of Japan, her armies suffered a defeat in China.

This was, however, just one battle. Thereafter, one place after another in China fell before the economic and military superiority of the Japanese. Everything that counted for them came into their lap: the great ports, the industrial and commercial centres, the mouths of the three main rivers and the capital.

The GMD and the Communists responded to this differently. As a result, by 1938 there emerged two differing perceptions of the strategy for fighting Japan—immobility and peoples' war. As Jiang Jieshi now saw it, there was nothing else to do but hold out till international assistance came. But this was not to come from the Western powers till 1941, as pointed out earlier. For all practical purposes this meant a suspension of struggle. The Communists, on the other hand, resolved to continue the struggle from their Red bases in Yan'an.

By 1938 it also became obvious to Jiang Jieshi that because the Communists were more effectively organizing the people for guerilla warfare against the Japanese they were winning the loyalty of the people. The strains within the United Front became more acute and Chiang again resorted to his earlier policy of blockage of Red areas. In spring 1939 his troops moved against the Communists in Hunan, then Hubei and Hebei. In November, they partially dismantled the southern part of the Yan'an base. In January 1941 the Communist headquarters were attacked, and many of their leaders captured or killed.

The financial aid to China in the form of 500 million US dollars came to the GMD in 1941. Jiang Jieshi was by now, however, more concerned with fighting the Communists. Meanwhile, in early 1944 the Japanese began another offensive. In Hunan they defeated the GMD forces within a matter of weeks. In their further victories to the southwest, they also destroyed the remaining American bases. Even at this stage he failed to adopt the Communist policy of peoples guerilla warfare. In fact the GMD resistance to the Japanese had collapsed in 1938 itself.

14.5 THE YAN'AN BASE: A FORM OF RESISTANCE

The Communist programme for resisting Japan was put forward in Mao's article published on July 23, 1937. It was entitled "The Policies, Measures and Perspectives of Combating Japanese Invasion." In this he pointed out that the Communists' policy was one of the absolute resistances and its special feature was a reliance on the masses for this resistance. The mobilization of the people was of utmost importance for, as the Communists understood it, war was not an end in itself. It was a means towards building up a new China of freedom and equality. Therefore, apart from carrying on independent guerilla warfare, it was seen as necessary to establish anti-Japanese bases behind the enemy's lines.

In the first stage of the war, the Eighth Route Army and the New Fourth Army of the Communists waged extensive warfare and established a number of anti-Japanese bases in North and Central China. From the winter of 1938 to the end of 1940 these bases kept growing. Anti-Japanese democratic governments were set up in these bases. The Communists' decision to send their forces behind the enemy lines was not the only way that these bases originated. Other fighting groups appeared spontaneously behind the Japanese lines like the peasant self-defence groups, autonomous guerillas, groups of students, and even GMD dissidents. The two kinds of efforts complemented each other. This kind of warfare, culminating in the establishment of various Red bases, meant that the distinction between the military and the civilians was eliminated. The military organizations ranged from the regular army to the regional militants and village defence groups, – and even peasants who occasionally participated in military action without giving up agricultural work. The support of the peasant population was crucial in providing new recruits, giving information, and providing transportation, provisions and other help during emergencies.

The distinction between the military and political spheres was also eliminated because these Red areas, even as they became areas controlled by the Chinese as opposed to the Japanese, were also areas where a new and free China was being built at the initiative of the Chinese people. This had become possible because the people themselves were waging a war.

Once Jiang Jieshi suspended the GMD struggle, the pressure of the Japanese aggression fell entirely on the Communists and the Red bases. The Japanese pursued a relentless policy of destroying harvests and homes. But the severity of the Japanese atrocities further increased the support for the communists, as the Red bases became their only refuge against the Japanese. The governments of the nations opposed to Japan favoured the GMD in China. Therefore, the American aid or international pressure on Japan towards the end of the war worked towards the advantage of the GMD. Communists were regarded by them as enemies. The Red bases, in this context of complete isolation, survived solely on the strength of the working people of China. Without these Red bases there would have been no uncompromising struggle against the Japanese and no free and united China.

14.6 THE RED BASES: A NEW TYPE OF SOCIETY

Although spread out over about eighteen bases, the entire experiment with social transformation in these Red areas has come to be known as the Yan'an strategy or the Yan'an model. The whole idea behind the Yan'an strategy — put very simply — was that “If you take a peasant who has been swindled, beaten and kicked about for all his working days, and you treat him like a man, ask his opinion, let him vote for a local government, let him constitute a part of the police force in his own area, decide on his own taxes, the peasant becomes a man who has something to fight for. He will fight to preserve it against any enemy, Japanese or Chinese.”

This is precisely what the Communists did in the Red areas. The blueprint for these new bases can be seen in Mao Zedong's pamphlet **‘On New Democracy’**, written in 1940, even as the first experiments were already underway. To begin with, in keeping with the policy of the United Front of the entire Chinese people against the Japanese and their landlord collaborators- in China, the land policy was correspondingly modified. The land confiscation policy was substituted by a more moderate programme of rent reduction. Land rents were reduced by 25 per cent. By this the Communists won over the majority of the peasants — rich, middle and poor — who were tenants on the land they cultivated. The second aspect of their policy, a decrease in usury or interest rate which was fixed at 10 per cent a year, won them further support. The third aspect, a progressive taxation policy, which meant that the richer landlords paid more taxes, the poorer less, was also a welcome change for the peasantry burdened until then with high taxes totally disproportionate to their income. Since there were fewer large landowners in North China, i.e. in the Yan'an region, than in South or Central China, their giving up of land confiscation did not entail letting the landlords remain strong and powerful.

Related to these reforms were measures to increase production. It was felt that if peoples' living standards are to improve then production must also be made to increase. The Party, government and army directed their best efforts towards helping the people raise their production. During the anti-Japanese war, two production campaigns were undertaken by the troops and government bodies in the Shensi-Kansu-border region. The first (in 1938) aimed chiefly at the improvement of living conditions, the second (in 1941) at self support. The extensive production campaign in the base areas behind the enemy lines was started in 1942. By 1943 it had become a widespread movement. In the liberated areas this campaign was extremely successful. The area under production and the grain output increased tremendously.

As a way of increasing production and improving the method of production organization, as well as introducing new forms of political education, peasants were organized into mutual aid teams and co-operatives. The principle involved in this co-operation was voluntary work and mutual benefit. Thus peasants began to experience new forms of interaction with each other through common labour and rotation of equipment. The methods followed were flexible and in keeping with local condition. The size of co-operative units varied widely and the production unit was formed at the level of a village, or part of a village as convenient and desired by the local population rather than on the basis of an administrative unit. The income, a very crucial matter naturally, was worked out on the basis of labour put in and the amount of investment in land. Thus the more a peasant put in, the more he got. In this way, the system of co-operative avoided the pitfalls of heartburning or conflict within the peasantry at this crucial political juncture, while having the merit of introducing collective effort even on the basis of individual peasant economy. It gave sufficient incentive to the peasant to co-operate without however, challenging his rights over his land. These experiments represented therefore new forms of popular co-operation and new organizational structures in the economic life of the peasantry at the village level.

In the area of crafts also, efforts were made to develop industrial co-operatives at the village level itself. They produced their own agricultural equipment, textiles, paper etc.

Oil refining, iron smelting, machine building and repairing war materials, textiles, apart from breeding of livestock, etc. continued to be carried out throughout the war.

To fight the enemy on the economic front controls were imposed on trade with the enemy-occupied areas. The export of grain, cotton, iron and leather was prohibited, while the import of salt, matches, cloth, electric appliances, military equipment and other things needed was encouraged.

These efforts on the economic front successfully counteracted the devastation, plunder and blockade by the Japanese. It helped to protect the resources of the base areas, promoted a degree of economic self-reliance, considerably enabled the reduction of grain taken from the local population as levy and helped create a strong basis for the new experiments later followed by the Communist regime.

These changes in economic organization also served as a sound foundation for creating the framework of a new democracy. In the Red Areas, political power; at the local level was shared by the state, the party, the mass organizations of the people and the Peoples' Liberation Army. The state was in charge of the principal public services such as finance, production, education and general administration. The state itself was a decentralized one. The officials of the state were actively associated with production. Mao Zedong himself raised tomatoes and tobacco leaves around his cave between the work sessions of the leadership organizations. The party's work was that of co-ordination and political mobilization of the people for building the new democratic structure. The mass organizations of the youth, the women, and peasants and workers played a significant role in raising the political consciousness of the people, apart from supervising production. The army, as we have already mentioned, did a large number of other political tasks apart from fighting. This whole experiment was known as one of "mass line", because of the policies followed as well as the initiative of the people involved in various activities.

The basis of the new democratic political structure was universal, with free elections at all levels – village, district, and region. Everyone over eighteen years could participate in the elections to all the bodies. But it was ensured that of those elected 1/3 should be Communists, 1/3 independent left members, and 1/3 liberals and democrats — sometimes even GMD members. In this way, the United Front was given a political participatory dimension, giving representation to an alliance of the working poor and middle peasants, the petty bourgeoisie intellectuals and also the “national capitalists”. In short, all those opposed to Japanese imperialism and feudalism were welcomed in the Second United Front against Japan.

Apart from the electoral procedure and representation, democracy was given a far deeper dimension by ensuring the participation of all the members in the economic decisions of the co-operatives, in the village self-defence militias and in the implementation of the new land policy. Democracy itself began to acquire a higher connection than simple individual self-expression. It became the means for organizing the most effective forms for the common struggle against the Japanese. Almost the entire population of the base areas backed the new democratic regime though it was involved in the anti-Japanese war in various ways. Since these bases were in rural areas, the peasants naturally constituted the primary social base of the new regime, although representation of workers, intellectuals and national capitalists ensured a policy framework for broader themes than only land reform.

Special effort was made to mobilize women. The women’s associations in keeping with the new policy framework and the demands of their times, did not merely confine themselves to issues such as forced marriages, subordination to parents, in-laws and husband, or demands for political and social equality. They played a significant role in mobilizing women for agricultural work and participation in co-operatives. Although only 8 per cent of those elected to the local committees for political leadership were women, yet a beginning had been made.

14.7 THE FINAL PHASE

In 1941 a critical point was reached. In the liberated Red areas, a new kind of social and political life had been created and support of the entire population gained. But at this time the Japanese offensive also became harsher and the blockade against the Red areas became complete. The break with the GMD was equally complete. The Japanese followed a policy of “Kill all, plunder all.” This was an extremely hard year for the Communists. After the bombing of the Pearl Harbour in 1941, the Americans and the British increased their pressure on Japan in China. But they pushed for their own interests. The Communists were, however, not in favour of replacing the Japanese with Americans and the British. The GMD, on the other hand, had not opposed them. Therefore, the entry of the Americans and the British into the war situation in China helped only the GMD which was equally opposed to the Communists by 1941. The pressure on liberated zones therefore, only increased after 1941.

From 1941 to 1943, the Japanese built enormous structure around their occupied zones and fit the edge of the liberated Red areas. As a result of this renewed offensive thousands of people were massacred; harvests and villages destroyed. The population in the liberated areas was severely decimated with the regular army, reduced to merely 300,000 men in 1942.

The tide could be made to turn only in 1944. The peasant militia was expanded. A final, desperate struggle ensued. In 1944, and especially in 1945 the struggle was expanded. Communist bases were enlarged in Shantung and Shensi, Jiangsu, the borders of Hunan, Hubei and Henan. The anti-Japanese movement in the enemy-occupied cities and villages became more widespread and intensive. The puppet governments set up in the enemy territories in North, Central and South China, where also the worst plunder had taken place, were overthrown in many areas. By April 1945, the Peoples' Army had expanded to 910,000 men, the militia to 2,200,000, and the self-defence corps to 10,000,000 men. Nineteen liberated areas had been established covering an area of 950,000 square kilometers, inhabited by a population of 95,500,000. The liberated areas occupied very important strategic positions. Most of the Japanese occupied major cities, communication lines and coastal lines were surrounded by the peoples' troops.

Meanwhile the protocol for Germany's surrender was signed on May 7, 1945. The complete defeat of Germany and her unconditional surrender placed Japan in a position of utter political and military isolation. Japan, however, continued with her aggression in China. On August 14, 1945, the Sino-Soviet Treaty of Friendship and Alliance was signed. This treaty meant that both countries should co-operate with the other allied countries in fighting Japan until her final defeat. On August 8, 1945, Soviet Union had declared war on Japan.

Following this, the Red army also launched a new counter offensive against Japan. Within two months from August 11, 1945 to October 10, 1945, the Peoples' Liberation Army liberated 315,000 square kilometers of territory with a population of 18,712,000, and recovered 190 cities. The liberated areas were thus further expanded.

The atomic bomb dropped by the U.S. at Hiroshima forced Japan to surrender on September 2, 1945.

The long-drawn, heroic struggle of the Chinese people against Japan ended with this. So many thousands had sacrificed their lives, their livelihood and their customary way of life for their country's liberation on new lines. The liberation from the external enemy was achieved. The new life created in the liberated zones which had enabled them to win the war had however, yet to be defended against the GMD and their allies. This was to be dealt with their next phase of struggle i.e. the successful Chinese revolution.

Check Your Progress 2

- 1) Mention in about five lines the efforts made by the Communists to mobilize women.

.....

.....

.....

- 2) Mention in five lines the impact of U.S. entry in the war on China.

.....

.....

.....

- 3) Discuss in about ten lines the functioning of the Red bases.

.....

.....

.....

14.8 LET US SUM UP

The Long March was a great experience for the Communists. In spite of a retreat they were able to ultimately consolidate their position and increase support among the people. Once the Japanese aggression of China started, the Communists offered immediate resistance. Though a United Front was forged with the GMD, this time the Communists continued to carry their revolutionary policies and reforms in their areas of influence. A new society was created in the Red bases which practically transformed all spheres of life. The Peoples' Liberation Army and other Communist organizations played a vital role in opposing the Japanese.

14.9 KEY WORDS

- Blueprint** : A plan; framework
- National capitalists** : Those capitalists who supported war against Japan.
- Protocol** : A diplomatic draft of a treaty signed between the nations.

14.10 ANSWERS TO CHECK YOUR PROGRESS EXERCISES

Check Your Progress 1

- 1) Base your Answer on Section 14.2
- 2) Base your answer on Sub-section 14.3.4.

Check Your Progress 2

- 1) Consult Section 14.6 for your answer which should include social reform measures, political education and participation etc.
- 2) The U.S. was opposed to Communists and gave a supporting hand to GMD. Hence the entry in war though helped China in resisting Japan, it strengthened the GMD against the Communists. See Section 14.7.
- 4) Base your answer on Section 14.6.