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THE NEW REVOLUTIONARIES

During the years of warlord rule after 1916, many young Chinese joined revolutionary groups and parties, hoping to improve their country.

The May Fourth movement

The first was a protest movement against the peace treaties which ended the Great War of 1914–18. It began on 4 May 1919 and is therefore known as the May Fourth movement.

China had joined the Great War in 1917 on the side of the Western Allies. Nine hundred thousand Chinese labourers went to France, Turkey and Africa to work for the Allied armies in 'Labour Battalions'. German ships at anchor in Chinese ports were seized, and German businesses were closed and confiscated.

At the end of the war Chinese representatives took part in the Paris Peace Conference. One of the issues under discussion was the future of Germany's possessions in China, for, until 1914, Germany had enjoyed special rights in the port of Kiaochow (see map on page 16). At the start of the war the Japanese had seized Kiaochow from the Germans. And in 1915 they had tried to increase their influence in China by presenting Yuan Shikai with Twenty-One Demands (see page 6).

At the Paris Peace Conference the Chinese expected Kiaochow to be returned to them. They expected Japan to withdraw the Twenty-One Demands, and they also wanted an end to the 'unequal treaties' (see page 2). In the event, China gained none of these things. The peacemakers decided that Japan could keep Kiaochow, and it did nothing to end the 'unequal treaties'.

When news of the Paris Peace Conference reached China, protests and demonstrations began. On 4 May 1919 around 10,000 Beijing students and school pupils organised a massive demonstration. This student rebellion quickly spread throughout the country. Strikes, demonstrations and a boycott of Japanese goods kept China in a state of unrest for the whole of May 1919.

The May Fourth movement added strength to a revolution in ideas known as the **New Tide** which had already begun in 1916. Led by a group of teachers at Beijing University, the New Tide aimed to get rid of old-fashioned ideas and to introduce modern ideas of freedom, equal rights and scientific progress. The New Tide also aimed to simplify China's complex language so that poor and uneducated people could read about the new ideas in magazines and newspapers. And although the thinkers of the New Tide wanted an end to foreign

control in China, they were perfectly willing to use foreign ideas to achieve their aims.

The Communists and the Guomindang

One set of foreign ideas that found its way into China was Communism – a movement begun by Karl Marx and his followers in the nineteenth century, which aims to create a classless society in which most property is commonly owned. In 1918 an assistant librarian at Beijing University named Mao Zedong helped set up a 'Society for the Study of Marxism'. The Society's meetings were well-attended and, in 1921, its members set up a **Chinese Communist Party**.

Meanwhile, in Guangzhou, Sun Yatsen was reorganising his party, the Guomindang. Since 1917 Sun and the Guomindang had been in control of Guangdong province in the south. In 1924 he announced that the policy of the Guomindang was based on **Three Principles**: national freedom; democratic government; and the people's livelihood. His aim was to unite China under his leadership and make it into a republic free from foreign interference.

To achieve his aims, Sun Yatsen needed foreign help against the warlords who controlled so much of China. However, the Western powers such as Britain refused to support him. Sun therefore turned to the USSR where a Communist government had come to power in 1917. The Russian government gave support to Sun in 1922 by sending one of its most able diplomats, Abram Joffe, to help him reorganise the Guomindang.

With Abram Joffe's help, Sun Yatsen reorganised the Guomindang on Russian Communist lines. It became a mass party, run with strict discipline, with individual members having to show total obedience to party decisions. In addition, Sun agreed that members of the Chinese Communist Party could also belong to the Guomindang. For although the aims of the two parties were different, they both wanted a revolution, and joint membership would allow them to work together to achieve this. There followed several years of active cooperation between the two parties.

In 1923 the Russian government sent two more agents, Michael Borodin and General Galen, to help Sun improve the Guomindang. General Galen's job was to help create a Guomindang army strong enough to beat the warlords and conquer the rest of China. He sold Sun Russian rifles and he set up a military

A Guomindang poster of 1926 shows the recently deceased Sun Yatsen (top) and Chiang Kaishek (below, on horseback) leading the Guomindang armies in the Northern Campaign of 1926-7



academy at Huangpu to train the officers who would lead the army. In charge of the Huangpu academy was Sun's brother-in-law, Chiang Kaishek.

Chiang Kaishek and the Northern Campaign

In March 1925 Sun Yatsen died of cancer. While the other Guomindang leaders argued with each other about who should take his place, Chiang Kaishek became Commander-in-Chief of the new Guomindang army. By this time, his military academy at Huangpu had turned out 500 trained officers, so he could now begin the enormous task of conquering and unifying China.

In July 1926 Chiang Kaishek began a **March to the North** at the head of the Guomindang armies. Ahead of him he sent political agents to whip up support among ordinary people by promising a 'national revolution' and a 'new order' in China. Millions of Chinese, sick of warlord rule, gladly supported him.

One of the Guomindang armies, led by Communist officers, quickly captured Hankow and set up a government there in September 1926. Another Guomindang army captured Nanjing early in 1927 and set up a Nationalist government. There was little actual fighting and the March to the North was easier than Chiang had expected. In some cases, warlords had to surrender to him because their armies mutinied and joined the Guomindang. In many areas,

poor peasants and workers welcomed Chiang's armies because they believed the propaganda which promised better times ahead. And in areas where there was no enthusiasm for the Guomindang, Chiang did not hesitate to use cash to win support through bribery.

The Communist-Guomindang split

Now that the Communists and the Guomindang had extended their influence north and conquered all of southern China, the alliance between them broke down.

As the Guomindang armies approached Shanghai and prepared to attack it, the workers of Shanghai rebelled against the warlord who ruled the area. The rebellion was led by Communists under Zhou Enlai, who set up a Communist council to run the city. When Chiang Kaishek's army arrived several days later, it took over the streets of Shanghai, rounded up all the Communists it could find, and killed them. Later in the year, Chiang's men also crushed the Communists in Guangzhou, executing hundreds of them in the streets and forcing thousands more to flee for their lives.

After being expelled from the cities, the Communists retreated to the countryside in Jiangxi and Hunan provinces (see map on page 13). Chiang Kaishek, in control of the cities and at the head of the government in Nanjing, now got ready to conquer the rest of China.

Work section

- A. Test your understanding of this chapter by explaining what the following mean: the May Fourth movement; the New Tide; the Three Principles of the Guomindang; the March to the North.
- B. Study the poster above, then answer these questions:
 1. What impression does the artist give of the Guomindang armies?
 2. What do you think were the aims of the artist in drawing this poster?
 3. Judging by the information in this chapter, how accurate do you think this picture of the Guomindang is? Explain your answer.